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**SELF ESTEEM OF LEARNING HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN  
RESOURCE SPECIALIST PROGRAMS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino**

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**In partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Education  
(Learning Handicaps)**

---

**by  
Ned H. Hocking  
May, 1992**

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Approval

  
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Date

6/2/92

  
Dr. Jeff McNair

Date

6/2/92

**SELF-ESTEEM OF LEARNING HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN  
RESOURCE SPECIALIST PROGRAMS AT THE SECONDARY  
LEVEL.**

Ned H. Hocking

**California State University, San Bernardino**

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine the self-reported self-esteem of special education students at the secondary level. Through an availability sampling, the participants of this study consisted of fifty high school students. Investigated was the relationship between special education services for students with moderate exceptionality and the resulting incidence of low self-esteem development. The results were evaluated with regard to gender grade/age and placement criteria.

The results suggest that numerous students receiving resource specialist services experience impeded self-esteem development. Nearly half of the sample indicated that their self-esteem had diminished since initial placement in special education services. In addition, over half of the respondents indicated that they would feel more confident about themselves if not enrolled in the resource program. The implications of the study for educators are expressed herein.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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LEVEL.**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Previous research has stemmed from the differentiation of self-esteem development in special education students and that of non-disabled children. Much of this research however, neglects to examine the rate frequency of low self-esteem in individuals with moderate exceptionalities. This research stems from this omission, in an attempt to determine the rate of low self-esteem in students receiving special education services. Through a direct questioning inventory, this study was designed to provide insight into the self-reported levels of self-esteem in individuals with learning disabilities.



### **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

This study examines a paradigm existing in special education, namely that these services are designed in part, to assist special students in developing a positive self-concept as well as to provide successful experiences in the least restrictive environment. The developing anomaly, that resource specialist placement at the secondary level actually may hinder self-esteem development is the purpose for this research. Moreover, the relationship between self-esteem and participation in a special education program is examined in order to determine the self-reported levels of self-esteem.

### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The null hypothesis ascertains that there is no reported relationship between resource class placement and low self-esteem in individuals with a learning disability. The alternative hypothesis would suggest that over twenty-five percent of individuals participating in a resource program have self-reported low self-esteem.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In determining the implications of this current research, it is important to evaluate previous studies relevant to this research. The literature review will first define self-esteem, specific learning disability, and the resource program approach to special education services. Characteristics of positive and negative self-esteem, and the attributions for academic success and failure in students with learning disabilities will then be examined. Likewise, the importance of educational programs on self-esteem will be evaluated. Finally, previous studies examining the self-esteem of individuals with learning disabilities will help evaluate the importance of this current research.

### **Definitions**

Before examining many of the implications associated with the self-esteem of individuals with a learning disability, it is important to define aspects of this study. The differentiation of self-concept and self-esteem, the placement guidelines for specific learning disability, and the resource specialist program will be delineated.

Self-esteem and self-concept have often been confused as having the same meaning. Self-concept correlates to how an individual perceives themselves, and self-esteem refers to the degree to which one likes oneself (Avazian,1987). The self-concept can be further defined as, "A complex system of conscious beliefs

which an individual holds true about himself, each belief with a corresponding value." (Dobson, p.100.) Self-esteem refers to evaluating ones self-value (Avazian, 1987). Self-esteem is the term which is utilized for the purposes of this study. Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as,

"The evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself." (pg. 5)

There are few clear definitions of learning disability. The most widely accepted definition of learning disability however is derived from the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children. (1968) This definition has been integrated into state and federal legislative statutes regulating special education services. Learning disability is therefore defined as,

" a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest

itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. "

(pg. 34)

Most placement guidelines stipulate that the following criteria must be determined to ascertain whether a learning disability exists. First, a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement, based on assesment, in one or more of the following: reading, mathematics, written expression, oral expression, listening comprehension. Finally, a student may have significantly below average general intellectual functioning with defecits in adaptive behavior (Federal Register, 1977).

Resource programs are designed to supplement the regular education program by giving assistance to exceptional students as well as classroom teachers. Aside from the regular class placement, or mainstream, this is the least restrictive placement for students with moderate learning disabilities. Resource placement often integrates

other special students in addition to those with a specific learning disability. Resource programs, "serve the majority of the special students receiving special education services today." (Lewis, 1987)

### **Self-Esteem Characteristics**

In evaluating self-esteem, it is important to examine what constitutes positive as well as negative self-esteem. Previous studies have examined many of the characteristics which foster self-esteem development.

A lengthy study involving several aspects of self-esteem studied the preconditions or antecedent conditions which underly either positive or negative self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967) suggested that, "self-esteem is significantly associated with personal satisfaction and effective functioning." (pg. 3) Negative self-esteem was found to be inclusive of feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, inferiority, unworthiness, anxiety, guilt, shame or depression. The study also stated that, "Person's whose performance does not match their personal aspirations evaluate themselves as inferior, no matter how high their attainments." (pg. 3)

One report (Ness,1990) suggested that a low self-esteem can foster other problematic behaviors such as dysfunctional familial

relationships, vocational difficulties, and inappropriate social skills. In addition, self-advocacy, social cue interpretation as well as self disability awareness may stem from a low self-esteem. In addition, one investigation of the psychosocial development of individuals with a learning disability, showed these students experience adverse psychosocial development. This included inappropriate social skills as well as a pervading sense of low self-esteem. Ness (1990) suggested that one method for improving these boundaries is to increase students' awareness of their disability.

Persons with high self-esteem are usually more active socially, communicate effectively, and generally are more confident in their capabilities. In addition, Children experiencing hindered love and success, in turn develop low self-esteem and usually become withdrawn. Coopersmith added, " children reared under such crippling circumstances are unlikely to be realistic and effective in their everyday functioning and are more likely to manifest deviant behavior patterns." (pg. 4)

The Coopersmith (1967) study suggested two theories, first, that at approximately middle childhood, an individual derives their self-worth, which may in turn remain constant for a number of years. This can be effected by both changes in the individuals' environment as well as specific incidences. The second theory is that self-esteem varies due to sex, age, as well as other multiple roles. An

area which this present research will address. Attributes for success and failure are derived, therefore, through a valuation of ability or worthiness.

Coopersmith (1967) also found that the preconditions of positive self-esteem followed primarily three provisions of the familial and scholastic setting. First, individuals exhibiting positive self-esteem had nearly total acceptance by their elders. Secondly, these individuals had behavioral limitations which were clearly defined and enforced. Finally, individuals with a high self-esteem were given continued support, and were treated with respect regardless of their actions.

Coopersmith (1967) held that when these criteria are satisfied, the formation of a positive self-esteem becomes evident. The importance of modeling self-assurance, coupled with the child's ability to judge for themselves whether goals, and progress have been made, are also important to the development of positive self-regard. Coopersmith also states that, "the self is an abstraction that an individual develops about the attributes, capacities, objects, and activities which he possesses and pursues. This abstraction is represented by the symbol 'me,' which is a person's idea of himself to himself." (pg. 20)

These studies have examined the precipitants and behaviors which underly either positive or negative self-esteem development.

Ness (1990) suggested that low self-esteem effects an individual's psychosocial development. Coopersmith (1967) suggested that the self is multidimensional, based upon multiple roles, diverse experiences and attributes. These attributes should be examined in order to understand the assimilation patterns of individuals with learning disabilities.

### **Attributions of individual with a learning disability**

Much of Coopersmith's (1967) research attempted to understand how an individual with a disability assimilated many of the difficulties associated with low self-esteem. Other studies have stemmed from his query, and began to examine how an individual with disabilities attributed their successes and failures.

The Coopersmith (1967) study was supported by Cooley (1988) who determined that children with a learning disability had significantly lower self-concepts than children without a learning disability. In particular, attributions made by these students concerning academic successes and failures were directly related to self-esteem. Successes were linked to external factors, such as luck, and failures due to a lack of ability, as opposed to a lack of effort. These attributions of intellectual inhibitions contributed to low self-esteem.

In a joint research project by the University of



Pennsylvania and Temple University, Jacobsen, (1986) studied attribution patterns of both individuals with learning disabilities as well as normally-achieving students by asking children to express their ratings of success. Normally achieving students were found to attribute success to internal locus of control factors, and failures to external factors. Children with learning disabilities however, attributed success to external factors at a higher rate than children without a learning disability. The study surmised that these attributional differences may reflect differences in both expectational perspective and self-concept. Jacobsen further suggested that individuals with learning disabilities may feel less individual responsibility for academic success or failures. Jacobsen's study followed earlier findings (Pearl, 1980) that children with exceptionality exhibited negative internal locus of control characteristics. The Pearl study suggested that individuals with learning disabilities reflect "learned helplessness," and as a result, were less likely to attribute failure to lack of effort.

A longitudinal study in New Zealand (Chapman, 1988) focused on three aspects of self-esteem. First, academic self-concept, second, locus of control attributions, and finally, expectations for achievement. This two year study, of both children with and without learning disabilities showed that on all three variables, children with a

learning disability scored significantly lower than normally achieving children. Further, the study stated that although students with learning disabilities may not necessarily develop adverse affective self-concept characteristics over time, academic self-concept attributions were the most important predictor of achievement.

Chapman (1988) concluded by suggesting that low self-esteem characteristics are fostered in primary grades and remain constant throughout secondary grades. This study also found that across group comparisons, males with a learning disability exhibited lower academic self-esteem, than did their female peers. In line with previous research, this study surmised that, coupled with low self-concept, children with learning disabilities were found to have lower expectations for achievement, and successes and failures were attributed to external locus of control factors.

The Jacobsen, Cooley, and Chapman studies all suggested that children with a learning disability attribute their successes to external factors, that is factors which the child cannot control. Moreover, these authors found that these students also internalized failures to a greater extent than their non-handicapped peers. Pearl surmised that these conditions may in turn foster a "learned helplessness."

### Programming on self-esteem

Recently, the regular education initiative (REI) has fostered debate over placement and related services for individuals with mild exceptionalities. Special education placement is devised to insure the students participate in a program which reflects the least restrictive environment, (LRE) with as much participation in regular classes as possible. Studies comparing the programs of students with learning disabilities have been conducted with regard to the self-esteem development of these individuals.

Research on the effects of three instructional programs were examined (Madden, 1983) by placing individuals with moderate learning disabilities in, 1) full-time special day classes, 2) regular-classes with resource support and, 3) full-time regular courses. The study found that for meeting behavior, self-esteem and achievement goals, the regular class with resource support was more beneficial. Additionally, cooperative learning programs, coupled with individualized instructional programs improved self-esteem, behavior, and fostered positive integration by the nonhandicapped students.

Strang (1978) compared self-concepts of students with mild exceptionality before and after educational mainstreaming. It was found that prior to mainstreaming, the self-concepts of this group was poor. It was surmised that this low self-concept was due in part to the lack of diverse reference groups, that is, individuals both with and

without learning disabilities. Following mainstreaming, improved self-concepts were noted. It was concluded, that the results supported the research hypothesis that mainstreamed students exhibit better self-concepts. The study concluded by questioning the significance of "comparative reference group" restrictions as a precondition of determining levels of self-concept development.

Another study which lends credence to Strang's (1978) research, compared a full-time mainstreaming program, to resource placement (Wang, 1984). Using the Adaptive Learning Environments Model, the results suggested that pupil's with learning disabilities attitude, achievement, and self-concept were improved in the mainstreaming program. As a result it was surmised that the most effective program for meeting the self-esteem development needs of individuals with learning disabilities was the mainstream.

Research in the area of instructional programming suggested that for instilling self-esteem, the most appropriate placement of individuals with disabilities was the regular classroom or the "mainstream." (Madden, 1983) Moreover, other studies suggest that self-esteem may actually improve once a student with a learning disability enters the mainstream. (Strang, 1978, Wang, 184)

### **Self-esteem of individuals with a learning disability**

Most of the literature and empirical research suggested that

self-concepts of individuals with a learning disability was significantly lower than that of their regular education peers.

Academic performance expectations as well as the locus of control in students with a learning disability were studied by Rogers (1985). Forty-five students with learning disabilities were examined in terms of affective variables and self-concept guidelines. This research again showed that these children's general and academic self-concepts were significantly lower than the normally-achieving (NA) students. The sample consisting of the individuals with learning disabilities attributed external locus of control factors to both success and failure, and also expressed lower performance expectations. The study also found that these children's duration of placement impacted their self-evaluations as well, indicating that those individuals newly enrolled in a placement had higher expectations for success than did those enrolled for a longer duration of time.

Rosenberg (1977) found that the number of years of placement was not related to the degree of self-esteem in children with a learning disability. This research also showed significant differences between the self-esteem of these individuals and students without a disability, suggesting that these children experience hindered development in academic, social and general self-concepts.

In a study conducted at the University of Texas, researchers contributed to a general hypothesis that children with a learning disability had significant differences in self-concept than did students without a disability (Larsen, 1973). Krutella (1990), in an ethnographic study, ascertained that several adolescents with learning disabilities had low self-esteem, derived primarily from peers and adults. Through the use of direct interviews, a self-report, and direct observation, the data indicated that the stigmatization and resulting devaluation associated with a learning disability, contributed to low self-concept.

In a study specifically examining the stigmatization of special education, Jones (1972) found that children with learning disabilities often reject labels associated with placement. Jones felt that acceptance of these labels is attributed to lowered scholastic ability and competence. The study revealed, however, that these children felt as though special education teachers had lower performance expectations.

A contrasting study investigated the effects of placement and level of social support for individuals with moderate learning disabilities (Forman, 1988). The results suggested that students who received higher levels of social support from the home and school setting had higher levels of self-worth, as opposed to individuals with fewer support systems. In short, the study determined that

the self-esteem of individuals with learning disabilities was often related to their perception of social support from external sources.

Forman (1988) found that the most critical predictor of self-esteem is classmate support. However, support from friends and teachers appeared to have little effect on self-esteem. Likewise, scholastic competence and conduct differed as did the amount of social support. Forman (1988) suggests that as the level of parental and scholastic support increases, so does the students' perception of their abilities. In addition, the study suggested that placement was not directly related to the self-esteem of students with exceptionalities.

Salient contributions in the area of self-esteem development for children with learning disabilities have been yielded from investigations of both primary and secondary aged children. One such study showed that although children with learning disabilities in the primary grades were particularly at risk, low self-esteem transcended age, also affecting students at the secondary level. Avazian (1987) determined that collectively, students with exceptionality had a lower self-concept than students without a learning disability. Moreover, this research suggested that there was a direct relationship between academic achievement and low self-esteem. The research concluded that the most appropriate placement for those with moderate disabilities was the regular classroom, with frequent resource support.

Bruininks (1978) suggested that students with learning

disabilities were not as popular, and had lower self-esteem than non-disabled students, but that individuals with learning disabilities exhibited many of the same characteristics as non-handicapped peers in friend selection, and had diverse interpersonal needs. These included the interpersonal needs of inclusion, control and affection. However, the students with exceptionality were found to overestimate their social status. This study questioned the social perceptiveness of students with exceptionalities in association with self-esteem, and further suggests that their overestimation of their social status stem from a coping mechanism of ego defensiveness.

Another study, (Silverman, 1983) showed that mean self-esteem scores of children with a learning disability were similar to the scores of other individuals without exceptionality. This rival study suggested that individuals with learning disabilities did not have lower self-esteem than normally achieving students. The research suggested that their results may be reflective of the fact that this sample, 1) receives only minimal RSP support per day with most of the school day in regular classes, and 2) these students may identify with multiple reference groups, typical of the mainstream. They, suggested that students with a learning disability have learned to remediate their deficiencies by finding other successful experiences.

Other studies found that younger children had higher regard for



special class placement than older students. One study (Warner, 1973) showed that students with a learning disability are fully capable of communicating their feelings about their educational placement. Leviton (1975) suggested that self-esteem is significantly related to academic performance. He suggested that the perception that one holds of their abilities is reflective of the academic successes and failures. Therefore, an individual who holds high expectations for achievement will achieve at a greater level than individuals with low perceptions of ability.

Self-esteem was measured in gifted, normally-achieving students as well as students with learning disabilities (Winne, 1982). It was found that derived scores on self-esteem inventories showed a correlation between gifted and normally-achieving students. The children with learning disabilities showed lower self-esteem scores. The study lended credence to others suggesting the polarization between the gifted, normally achieving students and individuals with learning disabilities.

Margalit (1984) found that children with a learning disability had a higher incidence of general anxiety coupled with lower self-esteem. This pervaded into a general dissatisfaction of self, and feelings of inadequacy. The study additionally found that individuals with learning disabilities were similar to non-handicapped individuals, in that both of these groups attributed positive self-esteem to internal

factors, and anxiety to academic competence. The study expresses that students with a learning disability feel that most events are beyond their control.

As part of a national study, Gregory (1986) found that twelfth grade children with a learning disability attained lower scores in areas of academic achievement, self-esteem and motivation. It was surmised that this population also indicated higher incidences of other handicapping conditions, which may be attributed to said academic deficits, such as lowered self-esteem perceptions and hindered motivation. Again, the rate of low self-esteem for individuals with learning disabilities was not delineated.

Kronick (1978) suggests that adolescents with a learning disability experience psychosocial deficits without relation to academic failure. She suggests that "Interactional Dysfunction" is the precipitant to many self-esteem deficits. These can manifest in several ways, 1) lack of schematic and organizational judgment, 2) affective processing deficits, 3) socialization problems as well as 4) linguistic and conceptual deficits. The data suggested that these four deficits may contribute to the problems associated with a specific learning disability.

Finally, in another study, standardized assessment devices measuring self-esteem found that self-esteem scores of individuals

with learning disabilities were lower than those of the normally-achieving sample (Black, 1974). The performance of students with learning disabilities was negatively related to grade level, age and achievement. This in turn may suggest positions of individuals deriving a negative view toward themselves as well as their capabilities, personal worth and adequacy of scholastic competence.

In short, the bulk of the research suggested that individuals with learning disabilities in general have lower self-esteem than do normally achieving students. (Black, 1974, Rogers, 1985, Rosenberg, 1977, Krutella, 1990, Avazian, 1987, Winne, 1982, Margalit, 1984) There is however, a conflicting study which surmised that self-esteem remained constant between individuals with a disability and their normally-achieving peers (Silverman, 1983). This lowered self-esteem may manifest psychosocial deficits thus contributing to the debilitation associated with a learning disability (Kronick, 1978).

### **Summary**

The majority of research concerning the self-esteem of children with exceptionalities suggested that these students have lower self-esteem than that of their non-disabled peers. Coopersmith (1967) suggested that low self-esteem may lend itself to other problematic behaviors such as guilt, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. The

research also suggested that the attribution patterns of individuals with learning disabilities compounded the problem of low self-esteem. Cooley (1988) found that individuals with learning disabilities attributed academic successes to external factors, such as luck, and that academic failures were attributed to a lack of ability.

With regard to educational programming, it has been suggested that the self-esteem of students with exceptionalities actually improves with a less restrictive placement. (Wang, 1984, Strang, 1978) Most of the research examining the self-esteem of individuals with exceptionality, suggested that these individuals have lower self-esteem than normally-achieving students. (Black, 1974, Rogers, 1985, Rosenberg, 1977, Krutella, 1990, Avazian, 1987, Winne, 1982, Margalit, 1984) In addition, it has been suggested that this low self-esteem effects the psychosocial development of an individual with a learning disability (Kronick, 1978).

Previous studies have stated that students with learning disabilities have lower self-esteem than normally-achieving students. That research, however, neglects to examine the self-reported level of self-esteem in individuals with learning disabilities. Thus, the need for the present study, which stems from this omission. It is the goal of this present research to investigate the self-reported levels of self-esteem among students with learning disabilities.

## METHODOLOGY

### Subjects

The survey consisted of fifty participants classified as Learning Handicapped receiving resource services at the high school level. The sample (Table 1) was derived from a high school in Colton, CA. There were twenty-two (22) subjects in the ninth grade, sixteen (16) in the tenth grade, ten (10) in the eleventh grade and two (2) in the twelfth grade. The participants included twenty-seven (27) males and twenty-three (23) females. With regard to ethnicity there were twenty-seven (27) caucasian, nine (9) afro-americans, eleven (11) hispanics, one (1) Asian and two (2) that indicated as other.

Subjects were asked to indicate the amount of special education services received per day. Ninety percent indicated that they received three hours or less of resource services. Respondents likewise, were questioned as to the duration of their special education programs since the time of placement. twenty-eight percent had received special education services ranging from two to four years, fifty-two percent between five and seven years, and twenty percent indicated that they had been in placement for eight to ten years.

### Instrument

A self-esteem inventory was utilized consisting of twenty

questions (See Appendi). This survey was devised as a quantitative technique, in order to assess the frequency of low self-esteem in children with learning disabilities. Response items were based upon a Likert scale format. This was utilized in order for the respondents to indicate the degree to which they either agreed or disagreed. This format allowed for both diversity of responses, and likewise allowed for concise and accurate data collection. A disadvantage to this format however, is the probability for subjects to regress to the mean. The assessment device itself is designed to measure the self-reported level of self-esteem based on three aspects of self-esteem: 1) How individuals perceive themselves, 2) Their perception of others, and 3) How they feel that others perceive them.

An involuntary availability sample was utilized. The advantage of this technique was the accessibility of the subjects, although the external validity may be suspect. The study was devised to provide percentages representing the self-reported levels of self-esteem.

The instrument was administered to approximately twenty students in mid February 1992. The survey was administered and collected by resource specialist teachers. The testing procedure took place in the resource classes themselves, so as to foster

a comfortable atmosphere which was familiar to students. The assessment was evaluated between gender, grade, and placement criteria to examine percentages within said reference groups.

### **Procedure**

The direct questioning inventory was administered in two special education classes by resource specialist instructors. The subjects were provided with a definition and examples of self-esteem prior to administration of the instrument.

Subjects were told to avoid answering the "neutral" response as much as possible. The inventory questions were simultaneously presented orally, in order to facilitate subject understanding as well as foster accurate responses.

### **RESULTS**

Over three-quarters of the sample indicated that their self-esteem prior to enrollment in special education was good, in that eighty percent of those surveyed, (Table 2) reported a positive self-concept prior to special education placement. Fourteen percent of the sample indicated that they felt that they had a low self-esteem prior to enrollment, with only six percent abstaining from this question. This data establishes a structural basis for understanding both the relationship between placement and resulting etiology of

self-concept as well as providing a contextual understanding of subject responses. Nearly half of the sample, Forty-eight percent, indicated that their self-esteem had diminished since initial placement. Forty-six percent responded that their self-esteem development had not been hindered, with six percent undecided. These statistics are supported through subject responses of two other questions on the inventory. Fifty-four percent of the respondents indicated that they would have a better self-esteem if they were not enrolled in special education services. Thirty-seven percent of the sample responded that their self-esteem is better in receiving resource services, with nine percent of the sample remaining neutral.

When questioned whether the students would feel more self-confident if not enrolled in special education, fifty-two percent responded to the affirmative. Thirty-eight percent of the student sample determined that they would feel more self-confident with Resource specialist support, with ten percent of the sample undecided.

The subjects were asked as to whether or not they would like to be enrolled in special education. Fifty-six percent indicated that they would prefer to be enrolled in special education services. However, forty-four percent of those surveyed indicated that they would prefer not to be enrolled in special education programs.

Participants of this study were asked if they could do well, if enrolled in all regular education courses. Thirty-eight percent



answered that they felt as though they would be successful in all regular education courses. Over half of the students, fifty-six percent, indicated that they felt that they would be unsuccessful if enrolled in all regular education courses, with six percent unable to differentiate as to their decision.

The participants were questioned as to their preferences regarding academic achievement. Seventy-six percent of the sample indicated that they would rather attain high grades in special education courses, as opposed to average grades in the mainstream. Twenty-four percent of the subjects indicated that they would prefer lower grades in regular education courses than to attain high grades in special education courses.

Subjects responded overwhelmingly that regular education students perceived themselves as more intelligent than special education students. Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed thought that regular education students perceived themselves as more intelligent than special education students. Twenty percent indicated that this may not be an accurate statement, and two percent refused to indicate.

When asked whether special education students were as intelligent as regular education students, forty-six percent indicated that special education students were not as intelligent as students in the mainstream. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that

special education as well as regular education students functioned at approximately the same intellectual level. Four percent of the sample neglected to discriminate.

Finally, when questioned as to whether special education students would have the same opportunities for employment and college after graduation from high school, eighty percent indicated to the affirmative. Twelve percent indicated that they would not have the same opportunities for advancement, and eight percent remained undecided.

Table three shows that results were fairly similar across the grade/age criteria. When asked whether their self-esteem was good prior to placement in special education, seventy-nine percent of the 9-10 grade sample and eighty-four percent of the 11-12 grade sample agreed. The most prominent difference between the results tabulated is that in general, younger students attribute low self-esteem to special education placement at a greater incidence than that of elder pupils. A differential of 8% (question #9) to 16% (questions 16 and 18) This statistic is supported in that forty-two percent of the 11-12 grade sample indicated that they would rather not participate in special education services, opposed to forty-five percent of the 9-10 grade sample. Generally, this data contrasts the Warner (1973) research which suggested that younger students have a higher regard for special education services.

In line with the above results, are the results that show that fifty-eight percent of the 9-10 grade sample indicated that they would have a better self-esteem without special education services, compared to forty-two percent of the 11-12 grade sample. When asked whether students would feel more confident without related services fifty-five percent of the 9-10 grade individuals agreed to this premise, whereas only forty-two percent of the 11-12 grade sample agreed to this question. However, forty-five percent of the 9-10 graders surveyed, felt that they could do well in all regular education courses, compared to only thirty-three percent of the 11-12 grade sample.

Fifty-four percent of the 11-12 grade sample indicated that special education students were as intelligent as regular education students, in contrast to forty-nine percent of the 9-10 grade sample. eighty-two percent of the 9-10 grade sample indicated that regular education students perceived themselves as more intelligent, opposed to seventy-five percent of the 11-12 grade sample. When asked whether these students preferred higher grades in special education courses or lower grades in the mainstream, twenty-six percent of the 9-10 grade sample indicated they would rather have lower grades in the mainstream, and only seventeen percent of the 11-12 grade sample.

The most notable difference across the grade/age groups, however, was that older students responded overwhelmingly that they have the same opportunities after graduation as their non-disabled peers. All of the 11-12 grade sample agreed to this statement, and seventy-four percent of the 9-10 grade sample.

Results tabulated across sex criterion, again are well distributed, yielding an apparent high correlation between respondent groups. (See Table 4) Eighty-seven percent of the female sample indicated that their self-esteem was good prior to special education placement, in contrast to only seventy-four percent of the male sample. Forty-eight percent of both males and females indicated that their self-esteem has diminished since the time of their placement. Similarly, forty-three percent of the female sample, and forty-four percent of the males indicated that they would rather not be in special education. This high correlation lies in contrast to Chapman's (1988) study which suggested that males have a lower self-esteem than females.

Again there was similarity between the female and male sample in that fifty-two and fifty-six percent of the respondents, respectively, affirmed that they would have a better self-esteem without special education services. The most salient divergence between these response groups was that the females participating in the sample felt as though they would be more confident about

themselves without special education services at a sixty-one percent margin, than that of males at forty-five percent.

Forty-four percent of females and forty-one percent of males indicated that they could do well in all regular education courses. When questioned whether students would rather attain higher grades in special education or lower grades in the mainstream, only twenty-two percent of the females agreed to this statement as opposed to twenty-seven percent of the males. Fifty-seven percent of the female sample and fifty-two percent of the male sample indicated that special education students were as intelligent as regular education students. Seventy-four percent of the female sample indicated that regular education students perceive themselves as more intelligent, compared to eighty-two percent of the male sample. When questioned as to the opportunities available to special education students after graduating from high school, eighty-two percent of the male sample indicated that they would have similar opportunities as regular education students as opposed to seventy-eight percent of the female sample.

Most of the data yielded from the hour/placement criterion did not show prominent differences between the two groups (Table 5). The results which had the highest differentials showed divergent and contrasting statistics. On one account, the one to two hour sample agreed that they would rather not participate in special education

with an 11 % differential, over the 3-4 hour placement sample. This contrasts with the results showing fewer of those in placement 1-2 hours felt as though they would have a better self-esteem than those receiving more hours of RSP services. The differentiation between these two variables appears to counteract one another.

Eighty-six percent of the 1-2 hour sample indicated that their self-esteem was good prior to placement in special education, compared to only seventy-five percent of the 3-4 hour sample. When questioned if students self-esteem had diminished since placement, forty-five percent of the 1-2 hour sample agreed, as did fifty percent of the 3-4 hour sample. fifty percent of the 1-2 hour sample indicated that they would feel more confident without special education services, with fifty-four percent of the 3-4 hour sample in agreement.

Forty-three percent of the 1-2 hour sample, and forty-one percent of the 3-4 hour sample indicated that they could do well in the mainstream. Twenty-three percent of the 1-2 hour group and twenty-five percent of the 3-4 hour sample responded that they would rather have lower grades in the mainstream than good grades in special education courses. Fifty percent of both the 1-2 hour and 3-4 hour sample answered that students in special education are as intelligent as students in regular education. When asked whether regular education students perceive themselves as more intelligent, sixty-eight percent of the 1-2 hour sample and eighty-six percent of

the 3-4 hour sample agreed to the statement. Finally, ninety-one percent of the 1-2 hour sample, and seventy-one percent of the 3-4 hour sample indicated that they have similar opportunities upon graduation as non-disabled graduates.

Pertinant data was also yielded from the years of placement criterion (Table 6). The sample that had spent the greater number of years in special education responded that their self-esteem had diminished since placement at an incidence greater than that of individuals with fewer years of placement with a twenty-six percent differential, (sixty-one percent, 1-5 years and thirty-two percent, 6-10 years). Moreover, respondents in placement between 6-10 years answered at a greater rate that they would rather not participate in special education services with a differential of twenty-two percent, fifty-four percent compared to thirty-two percent.

Seventy-seven percent of the 1-5 year placement and eighty-two percent of the 6-10 year placement indicated that their self-esteem prior to placement in special education was good. When questioned whether the sample would have a better self concept without these services, fifty-two percent of the 1-5 year sample and fifty-five percent of the 6-10 year sample answered to the affirmative. Fifty percent of the 1-5 year sample and fifty-four percent of the 6-10 year sample responded that they would feel more confident in their abilities if not enrolled in special education.

Forty-eight percent of the 1-5 year sample and thirty-eight percent of the 6-10 year sample indicated that they could do well in all regular education courses. Other salient information yielded by this comparison included the perception special education students had of themselves in relation to regular education peers. Those enrolled for the greater duration of years test that they were less intelligent than non-disabled peers at a greater incidence than those in placement fewer years, forty-one percent and sixty-one percent respectively (20% differential).

Fourteen percent of the 1-5 year group and thirty-two percent of the 6-10 year group would prefer lower grades in regular education classes than higher grades in special education classes. When questioned if regular education students perceived themselves as more intelligent than special education students, ninety-one percent of the 1-5 hour sample, and sixty-eight percent of the 6-10 hour sample agreed to this statement. Finally, seventy-eight percent of the 1-5 hour group and eighty-two percent of the 6-10 hour group affirmed that they would have the same opportunities after graduation as non-disabled students.



## DISCUSSION

It was the design of this research to provide insight into the self-reported self-esteem of students with moderate exceptionality. The data indicates that nearly half of the students receiving resource specialist assistance, have a self-described low self-concept which may be related to their special education placement.

The grade/age statistics from this study imply that elder students have developed a better self-concept than that of younger peers (See Table 3). Moreover, the data regarding post secondary opportunities indicate that older students feel they are aware of their social, academic and working potential, apart from the stigmatization associated with a learning disability.

Both the gender and hour/placement criterion did not show divergant responses. The year/placement criterion data, however, are noteworthy. These statistics imply that the longer a student is enrolled in special education, the higher the probability of low self-esteem development (See Table 6). Although this contrasts Rosenberg's (1977) study, who suggested that the years of placement did not affect self-esteem.

Aside from the question of placement, this current data supports other studies which suggest that individuals with a learning disability have low self-esteem (Black, 1974, Rogers, 1975, Krutella, 1990, Avazian, 1987, Winne, 1982, Margalit, 1984).

In addition, this same group of respondents indicated at a higher degree, that they would prefer not to be enrolled in special education. Aside from other possible explanations of low self-esteem, this may cause one to question current special education practices as they impact the goal of instilling positive self-esteem.

This in turn supports the final important statistic derived from this criterion, that a greater percentage of this same population, (more years of placement) would rather receive lower grades in regular education courses than better grades in special education courses. This again implies that individuals who have been in placement for a longer duration of time, would prefer less of an association with special education.

### **Conclusions**

The implications of this data for special educators are noteworthy. Approximately half of the respondents indicated that they would have a better self-concept if they were not enrolled in special education. Coupled with the data that nearly half of the sample indicated that they would prefer not to be enrolled in special education, this brings into focus a new direction for the question of least restrictive environment, and whether the stigmatization of placement contributes to an adverse development of self-concept.

Fostered from the least restrictive environment is a conceptual base for related services. The goal being to provide resource students with support services, so as to facilitate success in the mainstream. As a result, in determining the success of the program, we must consider the degree to which student self-confidence is instilled. Aside from placement guidelines delineating a discrepancy between ability and achievement, the data suggests that many of the respondents felt as though they could be successful if participating in all regular education courses. Here again, either students need to be more realistic about placement, or we question the relevancy of resource placement, when nearly half of the subjects indicated, that they could be successful in all regular education courses.

Additionally, one-quarter of the sample indicated that they would rather have a rate of lower achievement in regular education courses, than to achieve at a higher level in special education courses. It is important to realize that much of students' self-concept is either directly or indirectly correlated to their achievement. Moreover, to state that one-quarter of the students enrolled in special education would rather struggle in regular education courses, than to excel in special education courses, suggests that the stigmatization of special education and low self-esteem affects a minimum of twenty-five percent of the students in the sample.

Half of the sample indicated that they perceived themselves as intelligent as students enrolled in all regular education courses. The alarming statistic is the other half, that is, the half which responded affirming that they were not as intelligent as regular education students. This statistic is punctuated by the fact that ninety percent of the sample participates in three hours of regular education courses or more, with minimal resource specialist services.

In short, the most salient findings of this research indicate that, 1) over half of the participants reported that they would have a better self-esteem if not enrolled in special education, 2) over half of those surveyed would feel more confident in their abilities if not enrolled in special education, and 3) nearly half of the sample expressed that their self-esteem had diminished since placement in special education services.

This research raises many questions as to the current educational practices of both special educators as well as teachers in general. Questions of least restrictive environment, questions as to the appropriate placement of many students receiving resource services, and questions as to the importance of acculturating all children with a positive self-concept. Self-esteem is not all inclusive, it is, however, a crucial aspect to the services that special education provides such as socialization, and other developmental skills. It is only when we begin to understand the limitations of special education

placement, that we begin to procure services which are truly beneficial to each student individually.

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**Tables**

CHARACTERISTICS		N	%
<b>SEX</b>			
Female		23	46
Male		27	54
<b>AGE</b>			
14		9	18
15		18	36
16		8	16
17		12	24
18		3	6
<b>ETHNICITY</b>			
Caucasian		27	54
Afro-American		9	18
Hispanic		11	22
Asian		1	2
Other		2	4
<b>GRADE</b>			
09		22	44
10		16	32
11		10	20
12		2	4
<b>HOURS OF SPECIAL ED. SERVICES (DAILY)</b>			
1		7	14
2		16	32
3		22	44
<b>YEARS OF PLACEMENT</b>			
4		5	10
2		3	6
3		5	10
4		6	12
5		8	16
6		9	18
7		9	18
8		5	10
9		4	8
10		1	2

TABLE 1

TABLE 2

STATEMENT (QUESTION NUMBER) TOTAL SAMPLE (50)	AGREE		DISAGREE		NEUTRAL	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Self esteem prior to Special Ed. was good (8)	40	80	7	14	3	6
Self esteem has diminished since placement (9)	24	48	23	46	3	6
Rather not be in Special Ed. (15)	22	44	28	56	0	0
Better self concept Without Special Ed.						
Item (16)	34	68	14	28	2	4
Item (18)	20	40	23	46	7	14
More confident without Special Ed. (19)	26	52	19	38	5	10
Could do well in all Regular Ed classes.						
Item (13)	16	32	30	60	4	8
Item (17)	22	44	26	52	2	4
Students in Spec. Ed. as intelligent as Reg. Ed. students.						
Item (10)	23	46	25	50	2	4
Item (12)	27	54	21	42	2	4
Prefer lower grades in Regular Ed. than Higher grades in Special Ed. (14)	12	24	38	76	0	0
Regular Ed. perceives themselves as more intelligent. (11)	39	78	10	20	1	2
Similar opportunities upon graduation as Non-disabled peers. (20)	40	80	6	12	4	8

TABLE 3

STATEMENT (QUESTION NUMBER) AGE/GRADE QUALIFIED	(9-10) AGREE (38)		(11-12) AGREE (12)	
	N.	%	N.	%
Self esteem prior to Special Ed. was good (8)	30	79	10	84
Self esteem has diminished since placement (9)	19	50	5	42
Rather not be in Special Ed. (15)	17	45	5	42
Better self concept Without Special Ed.				
Item (16)	27	71	7	59
Item (18)	17	45	3	25
More confident without Special Ed. (19)	21	55	5	42
Could do well in all Regular Ed classes.				
Item (13)	12	32	4	33
Item (17)	15	39	7	59
Students in Spec. Ed. as intelligent as Reg. Ed. students.				
Item (10)	17	45	5	42
Item (12)	20	53	8	67
Prefer lower grades in Regular Ed. than Higher grades in Special Ed. (14)	10	26	2	17
Regular Ed. perceives themselves as more intelligent. (11)	31	82	9	75
Similar opportunities upon graduation as Non-disabled peers. (20)	28	74	12	100

TABLE 4

STATEMENT (QUESTION NUMBER) SEX QUALIFIED	(F) AGREE (23)		(M) AGREE (27)	
	N.	%	N.	%
Self esteem prior to Special Ed. was good (8)	20	87	20	74
Self esteem has diminished since placement (9)	11	48	13	48
Rather not be in Special Ed. (15)	10	43	12	44
Better self concept Without Special Ed.				
Item (16)	16	70	18	66
Item (18)	8	35	12	44
More confident without Special Ed. (19)	14	61	12	45
Could do well in all Regular Ed classes.				
Item (13)	9	39	7	26
Item (17)	11	48	11	48
Students in Spec. Ed. as intelligent as Reg. Ed. students.				
Item (10)	9	39	14	52
Item (12)	13	57	14	52
Prefer lower grades in Regular Ed. than Higher grades in Special Ed. (14)	5	22	7	26
Regular Ed. perceives themselves as more intelligent. (11)	17	74	22	82
Similar opportunities upon graduation as Non-disabled peers. (20)	18	78	22	82



TABLE 5

STATEMENT (QUESTION NUMBER) HOUR QUALIFIED	(1-2 HRS) AGREE (22)		(3-4) AGREE (28)	
	N.	%	N.	%
Self esteem prior to Special Ed. was good (8)	19	86	21	75
Self esteem has diminished since placement (9)	10	45	14	50
Rather not be in Special Ed. (15)	11	50	11	39
Better self concept Without Special Ed.				
Item (16)	13	59	21	75
Item (18)	6	27	14	50
More confident without Special Ed. (19)	11	50	15	54
Could do well in all Regular Ed classes.				
Item (13)	7	32	9	32
Item (17)	9	41	13	46
Students in Spec. Ed. as intelligent as Reg. Ed. students.				
Item (10)	10	45	13	46
Item (12)	12	54	15	54
Prefer lower grades in Regular Ed. than Higher grades in Special Ed. (14)	5	23	7	25
Regular Ed. perceives themselves as more intelligent. (11)	15	68	24	86
Similar opportunities upon graduation as Non-disabled peers. (20)	20	91	20	71

TABLE 6

STATEMENT (QUESTION NUMBER) YEAR QUALIFIED	(1-5 YRS) AGREE (22)		(6-10 YRS) AGREE (28)	
	N.	%	N.	%
Self esteem prior to Special Ed. was good (8)	17	77	23	82
Self esteem has diminished since placement (9)	7	32	17	61
Rather not be in Special Ed. (15)	7	32	15	54
Better self concept Without Special Ed.				
Item (16)	14	64	20	71
Item (18)	9	41	11	39
More confident without Special Ed. (19)	11	50	15	54
Could do well in all Regular Ed classes.				
Item (13)	8	36	8	29
Item (17)	8	36	14	50
Students in Spec. Ed. as intelligent as Reg. Ed. students.				
Item (10)	12	55	11	39
Item (12)	15	68	12	43
Prefer lower grades in Regular Ed. than Higher grades in Special Ed. (14)	3	14	9	32
Regular Ed. perceives themselves as more intelligent. (11)	20	91	19	68
Similar opportunities upon graduation as Non-disabled peers. (20)	17	78	23	82

**Appendi**

## SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY

Self-esteem is defined as the regard a person holds for himself or herself. A person who feels good about themselves and their accomplishments would be said to have a high self-esteem.

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1. Grade placement ( circle one )      7   8   9   10   11   12
  2. Sex ( circle one )                              Male              Female
  3. Age ( circle one)   12   13   14   15   16   17   18   19   20
  4. Ethnicity (circle one)      White   Black   Hispanic   Asian   Other
- 

5. Approximately how many hours do you spend per day in "regular" education classes? ( circle one )

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

6. Approximately how many hours do you spend per day in "special" education classes? ( circle one )

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

7. Approximately how many years have you been enrolled in special education? ( circle one )

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10-

---

8. My self-esteem before enrolling in special education was good.

( circle one )

SA              A              N              D              SD  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9. My self-esteem since enrolling in special education has gone down.

( circle one )

SA              A              N              D              SD

10. Special education students are as smart as regular education students.

(circle one)

SA            A            N            D            SD  
Strongly Agree    Agree       Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

11. Regular education students think they are smarter than students in special education. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

12. I'm as smart as regular education students. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

13. I could do well in all regular education courses. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

14. I would rather get C's and D's in regular education courses than A's and B's in special education. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

---

15. I would rather not participate in special education. ( circle one)

SA            A            N            D            SD

16. I would feel better about myself if I were not enrolled in special education courses. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

17. I would do poorly (academically) if I were not enrolled in special education. (circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

18. I would be a better person if I were not enrolled in special education. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

19. I would feel more confident about myself if I were not enrolled in special education. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD

---

20. When I graduate (high school) I have the same opportunities as regular education graduates. ( circle one )

SA            A            N            D            SD