

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study explores the implementation of Section 504 policy for adolescents with disabilities in two middle schools. It identifies factors and how they affect plan development and implementation across the domains of number, content, and decision-making. The influence of these factors on students' demographic profiles sheds light on who these students are and on how Section 504 accommodates them. Interest also included exploration into why plan numbers differ between the two middle schools. This chapter includes conclusions drawn from the results and a discussion of findings that relate to the two main questions in the study. Implications of the results follow. The final section identifies recommendations for practice and future research.

Conclusions

Section 504 is a legal mandate that operates in this school district as a team-based function under site-based governance. Beyond the contoured procedures that local Section 504 guidelines articulate, school-based teams of multifaceted membership exercise their responsibility to determine if a disabling condition substantially limits one or more of a student's major life activities. Learning often is the major life activity threatened in school settings. If a student is eligible, the team develops an individualized accommodation plan for the student. Accommodations and services permit access to programs, activities, and facilities. Awareness and consistency of team structure and functioning are imperative in arriving at decisions

about accommodations that “level the playing field” and result in opportunities for Section 504 students, opportunities comparable to those provided for their peers in general education. The importance of proper teaming, and understanding thereof, are germane to achieving meaningful outcomes for students (Kruger, Struzziero, Watts, & Vacca, 1994). Lack of such understanding has a diminishing influence on student entitlement to consideration for eligibility, on the quality of services provided to students qualified under this mandate, and on the legal defensibility of team decisions.

In these two schools, Section 504 is process dependent as indicated in local administrative guidelines. These guidelines identify team members and delineate the process teams or committees should follow during the implementation of this mandate. The terms “team” and “committee” are interchangeable. Two middle schools used local guidelines to identify students with impairments qualified for Section 504 protection, and to determine these students’ accommodation needs. Schools received technical assistance and staff development on Section 504. Special education coordinators from the central office provided the technical assistance on Section 504 and special education matters. Staff development sources and audiences varied. Parents are valuable and resourceful participants in the process, with influence that affected team decision-making. School-based teams, parent involvement, and a number of other factors led the researcher to conclude that relevant factors affecting the process are team members’ awareness of Section 504 procedures, time, cost, and school profiles.

Sub-Question 1: Who are the students served under Section 504 in these middle schools?

Finding 1.1. Students served under Section 504 in these two middle schools were primarily Caucasian males with ADD/ADHD who came from families of moderate to high socioeconomic status. In a study of the prevalence of ADHD among school-aged children, Lefever, Dawson, and Morrow (1999) discovered similar demographics in terms of ethnicity and gender. Students in the current study were less likely to receive free and reduced-price lunch, to previously have received special education, or to have been retained. Even though some of these students attended a school with a large number of highly mobile students, the majority of them were less likely to move from one school to another during the same school year. They were more likely to inhabit classrooms with an average teacher-pupil ratio of 23.5:1, but less likely to receive services in classrooms where inclusion occurs. Half to the majority of these students came to the attention of schools because of referrals made by parents—or by both parents and professionals from the medical or mental health community—if their impairment resulted from ADD/ADHD. It appeared that school staff was the referral source if these students manifested physical impairments.

In terms of demographic profiles, one could conclude that students with Section 504 plans in both schools are very similar in terms of ethnic groups and gender, free and reduced-price lunch (socioeconomic level), and the existence of ADD/ADHD as an impairment requiring accommodation.

Sub-Question 2: What comprises the content of their Individualized Accommodation

Plans?

Finding 2.1. Most of the plan content in both schools included accommodations generally identifiable among sound instructional practices or effective teaching tenets. Across accommodation categories, schools used instructional supports more often, but the single most highly used accommodation emerged from the category of environmental adaptations. It was called seating arrangements, but is more widely recognized as preferential seating.

Many instructional supports directed teachers in their responsibilities during plan implementation. In the majority of instances, the impact on teachers' responsibilities was low. However, some accommodations required significant time-usage, preplanning, and daily vigilance of academic performance and behaviors.

Accommodations were somewhat similar for students with ADD/ADHD and those with physical or mental impairments. However, students with physical impairments required more technology and services than those with ADHD or mental impairments. Clearly, parents influenced plan content and helped determine plan effectiveness. Their demands for unwarranted accommodations sometimes undermined the intent of Section 504 and raised issues of fairness and justifiable use. Fewer plans and accommodations may be required in schools that routinely use instructional strategies and have teachers who collaborate frequently on their students' performance. Devitt (1995) made a similar discovery about the use of instructional strategies. Perhaps frequent use of these strategies help explain why the number of accommodations used

in School LPU averaged out slightly lower per student than what was found in School HPU.

Finding 2.2. Schools sometimes capitulated to parents' demand. Actions of this sort exceed the intent of Section 504 and are thereby unnecessary (Lyon v. Smith, 1993). Parents tended to heavily influence the Section 504 process and the types of accommodations their children received. This was especially true if parents manifested a high level of awareness and advocates supported them. Schools were intimidated under such conditions and yielded to parents' requests for certain accommodations. On occasion, the accommodations that parents received for their children were unrelated to leveling the playing field. Even in some instances where schools did not include certain accommodations, parents made unilateral decisions to purchase certain accommodations that school staff used outside of decisions made by the team. This practice occurred in both schools and raises questions about benefit to the student, abuse of FAPE, and the legitimacy of using accommodations beyond the preponderance of need. Fowler (1992) indicated that parents believe they know more than school administrators do about their children, especially those with ADHD. This conclusion may have been drawn from the fact that school-based teams sometimes relinquished their authority to external power bases. Accommodations can be costly. They are not consolation prizes. Over-identification and over accommodation probably will occur in the wake of ignorance, intimidation or niceness (Zirkel, 2000). Therefore, decisions about accommodations should be reasonable. Unlike the IDEA, Section 504 has no "reasonableness" requirement. This condition merely filters over

from the courts. However, schools must regard reasonableness and cost because Section 504 has no funding stream.

Sub-Question 3: How do administrators and teachers describe the process with which they develop and implement Section 504 policy?

Finding 3.1. Administrators employ a multifaceted school-based team approach based on the school district's local Section 504 guidelines to make decisions during the Section 504 process. A host of factors influenced decision-making. These factors include team members' level of awareness, fragmentation in team function, role conflict, time, communication, and to a lesser extent, cost. School teams followed local Section 504 guidelines, but believed these guidelines were ambiguous. Team members understood their roles, but the responsibility for team functions seemed to rest on the shoulder of the site administrator—especially in the wake of tough decisions. This misconception could have arisen from the fact that at the building level, the site administrator received more training or information and updates on Section 504 policy than did others on the team.

Finding 3.2. Availability and use of time devoted to the process was limited and prohibitive to aspects of the Section 504 process, but not to plan implementation. Consequently, team structure weakened and interfered with the consistency applied to team functions. For example, scheduling problems preempted the attendance of some teachers and guidance counselors at Section 504 meetings. When substitutes could not be hired, or drawn from existing staff allocations, the students' core team teachers were unable to simultaneously attend meetings. This problem routinely affected teachers of physical education or exploratory subjects. As another example, one

teacher delegated his role to the special education inclusion teacher, allowing her to initiate referrals to the Section 504 committee on his behalf.

Finding 3.3. Levels of awareness among team members varied. Awareness was highest among central office administrators and lowest among teachers. Fragmentation in team structure and the manner in which individuals shared information on Section 504 contributed to low awareness. Among administrators and teachers, perceptions about the purpose of Section 504, and steps in the Section 504 process seemed confused with procedures found under the IDEA. Section 504 is an antidiscrimination mandate crafted to level the playing field such that students with particular permanent or temporary impairments have equal access to education programs, activities, and facilities. Understanding of this aspect paled among the site administrators, teachers, and parents who formed the nucleus of the Section 504 team.

Clearly, some ambiguity was associated with federal regulations, local Section 504 guidelines, and the lack of an individual to mentor facilitators, and to monitor the Section 504 process across the school district. This was problematic for central office administrators. A few team members and one central office administrator sometimes confused Section 504 procedures with IDEA regulations, an issue that Reid, Maag & Vasa (1994) describe as a barriers encountered by Section 504 policy users. Another issue contributing to team fragmentation was the multi-tasking associated with the performing multiple job roles. Involvement with Section 504 was not the primary job that the administrators interviewed. They inherited or were delegated this responsibility. For Section 504 administrators in particular, balancing other responsibilities with their Section 504 role increased demands on their executive

management functions, time required to implement the steps in the process, and some teachers' perceptions that their contributions to the process were devalued. When these administrators had temporarily designate facilitation to others, questions arose about the competence of some administrator designees.

Finding 3.4. Low awareness invited intimidation. Schweinbeck (1995) found that some administrators lack knowledge about the Section 504 process. Lack of knowledge cultivates the probability of inappropriate service delivery to students and the commission of procedural improprieties. In this study, team members were intimidated when parents exercised a greater familiarity with the Section 504 mandate than did the remainder of the team, or retained advocates from the legal, medical, or mental health communities to represent them at team meetings. At times, the presence and participation of these advocates influences the level of support other team members offered to the site administrator when tough decisions were required. Consequently, parents sometimes overly influenced eligibility outcomes, the selection of plan accommodations and, consequently, plan numbers.

Finding 3.5. Conflict was inherent among team processes, but layers of awareness and agreement existed as well. Clearly, central office administrators, one site administrator, and most teachers viewed Section 504 as helpful, even though a few teachers also regarded it as a purposeful crutch for some students and their parents. The majority of administrators and teachers in both schools also understood "placement" as a location in general education classes. However, site administrators and teachers agreed on the exclusion of students with Section 504 plans from placement on inclusion core teams. Interestingly, exclusion of Section 504 students

from inclusion teams did not seem discriminatory on either team. Generally, most participants understood that related services were available.

Teams needed support. Administrators and groups at all levels experienced role conflict. Administrators at both levels struggled with soft boundaries evident between Section 504 and the IDEA. Their concerns comprised the wide latitude for variance in decision-making related to Section 504, personal discomfort ascribed to flexible interpretation of Section 504 guidelines, the impact of school and community cultures on team decisions, challenging and contentious parents, and fairness of accommodations. Teachers in both schools experienced conflict associated with extraordinary time demands that throttled instruction and planning, unreasonable demands from parents, and perceived abuse of Section 504. Isolated instances of conflict—most notably among teachers—dealt with the by-products of poor parenting, over-reliance on familiar strategies, class size, and lack of teacher attention to students with special and diverse needs. Some team members shied away from tough decisions, leaving a great deal of responsibility to fall to the site administrator. These findings are antithetical to the mutual support expected among team members.

Conflict comes about during the course of collaborative processes. Most team processes include conflict resolution steps as a means of resolving conflicts and strengthening the team. These steps or procedures occur outside of the Section 504 process. In this study, conflict encompassed pertained to loosely structured guidelines, lack of simultaneous participation of all core team teachers, lack of time to attend meetings and to execute managerial functions, role conflict, pressure induced by parents from high socioeconomic levels, and ambivalence concerning the

benefits of capacity-building. Conflict issues sometimes interfered with the logic applied to decision-making and contributed to perceived abuse of Section 504. Even though it did not appear pervasive, there was a perception of the devaluation of teacher input into team decisions. While this perception probably originated from the splintering of teacher participation related to unresolved scheduling problems, growth of such a perception across team members could equal reality. If trust is low, then faulty perception can have an adverse impact on team decision-making.

Finding 3.6. Parents heavily influenced team decisions. Their participation in and level of awareness about the Section 504 process varied simultaneously with their level of education and the degree to which they were informed or well-represented by advocates. Their level of resourcefulness bewildered the team, exerted a negative influence over school staffs, and seemed abusive of Section 504. Responsibility designated to parents ensured their participation in the process and served as a measure of reciprocal accountability for plan implementation. They shared valuable information about their children and their children's needs with the team through their participation in all aspects of the process. Most often, their level of education affected the quality of their contributions. Some parents accepted the conclusions arrived at by the majority of those on the team, without question. These parents typically were those of low SES. Parents of moderate to high SES more frequently challenged or exercised their capacity to confound the process through their efforts to effect desired outcomes. Some administrators and teachers believed these parents abused the process. Subsequently, the impact of such abuse influenced both the provision of a plan and its content.

Finding 3.7. Time requirements were negligible in terms of demands on administrators and facilitators managing the process, loss of administrators' and teachers' personal time, loss of teachers' instructional and planning time, and gaining time required for staff development and capacity-building. To manage time requirements, teams held meetings before or after school, hired substitutes to monitor classes as teachers attended meetings, staggered teacher attendance at meetings, and used administrative assistants or other school staffs to cover classes. The two administrators from the central office believed teachers needed compensation for attending meetings that extended well beyond their contract day. Site administrators concurred with time costs. High time demands were associated with executive or managerial functions. Lack of time influenced how the team congealed to receive or provide information. Teachers also recognized time infringements. Administrators and teachers regarded some time demands associated with the process as substantial. In this study, lack of time was the enemy of the Section 504 process.

Finding 3.8. Staff development needs existed. Communication was top-down and inconsistent. Ambiguity associated with federal regulations, local Section 504 guidelines, and identification of an individual to mentor facilitators, and to monitor the Section 504 process across the school district was problematic for central office administrators. From another vantage point, the value of staff development as a source of communicating Section 504 information was ill regarded or considered untimely by some teachers. Information "trickled-down." Relegation of some staff development activities to the status of "optional attendance" provided a loophole for continued misinformation and lack of understanding pertaining to Section 504. Some

staff believed that some teachers communicated less well with students from diverse backgrounds and this “teacher problem” lead to a Section 504 referral. Among central office and site level Section 504 administrators, the communication of information precipitated the desire for additional guidance and support.

Central office Section 504 technical assistance providers wanted an opportunity to reverse the top-down flow of communication with the OCR through dialogue on the role of school districts in serving students under Section 504. Lack of support seemed to induce feelings of personal or professional need among these Section 504 technical assistance providers. Building level Section 504 administrators received combinations of voluntary and mandatory staff development on Section 504 regulations. In both schools, designees also facilitated the Section 504 process. Consequently, newly acquired information on policies and case law came to them indirectly or trickled-down to building level staff.

Organizational support is required to further the capacity teams to understand their function. Such support begins with clear communication of purpose supported by training. In this study, training and the sharing of information were too inconsistent. Schweinbeck (1995) posits some substantive elements of staff development content. This content includes awareness of Child Find, FAPE, reasonableness, discipline, procedural safeguards, teacher accountability in the evaluation process.

Finding 3.9. Costs are associated with Section 504. McKiernan (1997) found that nominal costs occur with Section 504 in terms of strategic modifications, but major costs are evident concerning transportation, technology, and staff time

demands. Furthermore, related costs influence management and organization budgets based on school district size. In this study, one central office administrator estimated costs that approximated \$50, 000 for the school district. These costs covered materials and equipment, transportation, related services, assistive technology, and human resources. Some parents purchased equipment unilaterally. Even though parents willingly may purchase equipment, the reality of a free and appropriate education pales under such practices. Purchases of this kind may appear duplicitous. Time costs associated with executive functions were recognized. As in McKiernan's study, these issues dealt with management and organization.

The question of resource competition surfaced. Section 504 offers no reciprocal opportunities for funding partnership, but has the potential of extracting fiscal demands that affront the notion of reasonableness (Lingren, 1996). Each school purchased materials and equipment of with relatively low budget impact. Time costs were associated with awarding compensation for meetings held well beyond the contract day. Indications were that such compensation should be monetary. Teachers, however, mainly associated time costs only with plan development, not with plan implementation. Essentially, schools funded their own time costs. Costs were more obvious to administrators, than to teachers, and appeared to affect plan content more than plan numbers.

Because Section 504 has no funding source, issues of resource competition between general and special education students attract concern (Center for Special Education Finance, 1999-2000). Some onlookers profess that Section 504 can exact

deposits that drain local dollars. For these reasons, school districts should realize that Section 504 might be what Weatherly (1999) proffered, a "sleeping giant".

Finding 3.10. Contributions of Section 504 to the education of all students were recognized. It was generally agreed to among administrators and most teachers that Section 504 contributed to educating students by heightening teachers' awareness of particular students' needs, helping teachers focus on all students, and helping teachers understand ADHD and its' concomitant effect on students. For students with impairments, it provides access and opportunity to remain in general education classes to learn. Central office administrators recognized that Section 504 expanded the general education teacher's understanding and awareness of students with this disorder, and addressed reasons for students' accommodations. Section 504 allowed the student to remain in the regular classroom, forcing teachers to deal with children of all socioeconomic levels, and helping other children become more tolerant of students with disabilities. Adverse impact occurred, as well. Teachers generally denied huge success stories when students used Section 504 accommodations; the plan alone was no deterrent for students with ADHD. Some teachers felt that the number of students with ADHD was increasing, but other teachers felt that these students were products of the pace and rigor of the curriculum or the societal influences. Additionally, Section 504 further labels ADHD students and fosters potentially negative connotations. Even with strategies and medication, the plan alone gave no guarantee of progress. Some progress was evident when multi-modal approaches, medication management, and counseling support were used in conjunction with other strategies delivered by teachers, administrators, and other

support staff; this finding also was implied among those made by Devitt (1995) in her study of the evaluability of Section 504.

Limitations

The findings apply only within the scope of the design employed. Empirical research is required if information is to be generalized. Explorations omitted inspection of testing accommodations. A growing body of research exists on the import of such explorations; this is especially true in terms of current reform efforts dealing with accountability and the use of testing accommodations by students with disabilities. Parents were not included in the research design, so it is difficult to know their perceptions of how decisions are made about the Section 504 process, the content of plans, or the number of plans in a particular school. Utilization of plan numbers reported by OCR requires caution due to the stratified randomization and research design employed during data collection.

Implications for Practice

Administrators understood Section 504 policy and procedures better than did the majority of teachers who participated in the process. In fact, awareness was lowest among teachers. Staff development needs existed. In some instances, parents or their advocates appeared more aware of the policy than administrators and teachers. Team building and staff development are required in building the capacity of site administrators and teachers in understanding Section 504 policy and their roles in the process. Additional organizational support is required to eliminate explicit and implicit issues associated with time and cost. Teachers, instructional leaders, and other user groups should consider a range of information when determining

accommodations, as well as the use and benefit of the accommodations being evaluated. Review Child Find practices, as the likelihood of under-identification of students eligible for Section 504 protection exists in both schools. Over-utilization of Section 504 may have occurred in School HPU, compared to possible underutilization in School LPU, especially among students from diverse populations and backgrounds.

Schools should be mindful of the potential for discrimination inherent in denying or removing a student from placement on an inclusion team solely because the student qualified for services under Section 504. Retention or having limited success in school may lead to qualification for services under Section 504. This option may apply to some students even if they are under referral for special education services. Use of Section 504 services for qualified students may increase their opportunities for academic success. Administrators should be cautioned against overuse of accommodations, especially if the intent of such use is to give a student unfair advantage.

1. Identify the school division's Section 504 coordinator. This individual and a school district office can monitor growth in numbers and increase awareness among administrators and other users of Section 504. Consider having this individual emphasize process improvement, content appropriateness, on-going capacity building activities, and data collection. Revisit the school district's Section 504 guidelines to determine the need, if any, for restructuring. Where opportunities exist and benefit would result, tighten loose policy as appropriate to simplifying procedural processes. Explore drivers and

restrainers associated with continuing governance by the special education office.

2. Conduct a needs assessment to determine levels of awareness existing among administrators and instructional and support staff concerning Section 504. Respond to staff needs through the provision of appropriate staff development activities. Schweinbeck (1995) lists content worthy of inclusion in such training efforts. Periodic training sessions may assist administrators with increasing their comfort level in facilitating the Section 504 process and in working more confidently with parents and their advocates. Involve staff in team-building activities to increase the likelihood that teachers will come to view themselves as active and viable participants in the Section 504 process. Better outcomes may result for students. Consider utilizing training that is comprehensive, mandatory, and available across sites. Training conducted in partnership with institutions of higher education, as well as medical and mental health communities, could improve the consistent flow of accurate information across multiple audiences (i.e., administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, school social workers, and psychologists).
3. Expand the capacity of staff to better serve students with physical and mental impairments. Emphasize daily use of effective teaching practices, disability and diversity awareness, as well as provide suggestions on how to create a warm and caring classroom environment for all students.
4. Expand Child Find activities. Pursuit of Child Find would bring more students

and their parents to the attention of school personnel, as well as further the school district's efforts to comply with the Section 504 mandate. Parents are resourceful and make worthy contributions to the process. School staff should utilize parents' resourcefulness within the bounds of the mandate. Many opportunities to build trust between parents and school staff accompany the Child Find process. Schools should cultivate these opportunities. In so doing, parents less likely to have information-access, the support of advocates, or representation by pediatricians may come to form stronger and more lasting partnerships with schools. If trust increases between schools, parents may rely more on schools; reliance on advocates may decrease.

5. Establish a database to monitor the number of students identified under Section 504 and the cost to serve them. Collect data on students referred to the Section 504 team, on decision-making practices, and on how accommodations are used.
6. Monitor costs to determine any significant budgetary impact. Costs appear to have no substantive influence at this time. However, schools should be prepared for such eventualities. Address significant costs, if any.
7. Develop a system to more expeditiously track highly mobile students. Ensure that little time is lost completing Section 504 referrals begun at other schools, resuming services for identified students, and minimizing delays caused by lost records.
8. Examine the representation of females and minority groups among the population of students with IAPs. Determine if under-representation exists, especially in School HPU. Consider identification practices utilized,

- institutional norms that may exist, and representation other groups among referrals to the Child Study Team (renamed the Student Support Team) and Special Education Committee.
9. Increase utilization of prereferral intervention teams such as the Student Support Team (SST). Effective teaching strategies comprise the bulk of plan content. Some of these strategies are available through the Student Support Team. However, use of the SST to expressly bypass the Section 504 team should be avoided. Even though accommodations appeared more easily reconciled in the mind of providers when impairments were visible, less obvious disabilities are just as real. Though invisible disabilities present more challenges related to identification and accommodation, administrators and teachers cannot avoid these difficult decisions.
 10. Reexamine organizational support to identify and eliminate disruptors to the process. Create time to have teachers participate as full partners in the process. Inform them of useful strategies. Remind them that the strength of any strategy is the goodness of fit between (an accommodation, modification, or strategy) and the problem it was selected to address. Any strategy that avoids unfair advantage and overcomes “true” barriers to programs, activities, or facilities, is a good strategy. When students’ needs change in light of their substantially limiting impairments, or accommodations appear ineffective, the appropriateness of such accommodations should be reexamined.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Duplicate the study at the elementary and high school levels to determine if similar findings exist under similar conditions, adding a quantitative dimension.
2. Examine pre- and post- academic performance for students receiving Section 504 services.
3. Explore demographic variables for patterns suggestive of over or under-representation of any particular group(s) of students. When there are indications that particular groups of students are under-or over-represented, carefully examine such situations.
4. Examine which are actual monetary costs attached to the process. Because no funding stream exists for Section 504, it would be beneficial to understand the expenditure of funds in relation to the implementation of the Section 504 process.
5. Investigate time-management procedures used by administrators and teachers related to executing the Section 504 process. A time and motion study may be very useful in balancing administrators' and teachers' responsibilities related to the process.

Lessons Learned From Research

1. Carefully schedule the collection of interview data from teacher interviewees. Most teachers are ten-month employees. School closing procedures occupy them from May to mid June. During the months of June through August, they may be completely inaccessible because of summer vacations. The researcher

will have to select alternate interviewees. For example, two teachers were going on vacation and would not be back until late August; another was not returning at all. Teachers are artifacts of the school's culture. When they are absent from that setting, naturalistic observations are more difficult. The sense of culture within the organization may change when observations of the culture occur outside of a natural context, thereby hindering the richness inherent in naturalistic observations. For instance, one teacher interviewed in her home had to balance the interview and the care of her child. Data collected outside of the natural setting also may require the researcher to consider safety concerns in traveling to residential areas within or outside of the city; this is especially true if the researcher is female. Take simple safety precautions. Develop an interview schedule (note names, addresses, dates, times, and phone numbers). Leave them with a responsible individual, so that your whereabouts are known to someone you trust.

2. Difficulties may occur in obtaining documentation from students' records during the summer months. Records may be unavailable due to the routine transfer of records on students transitioning to subsequent grade levels or schools. When students' records are difficult to obtain through expected methods, or tracking of records appears to have dead-ended, query attendance secretaries who have remarkable recall of students and tend to maintain personal written records or notes on when and where records have been filed or sent.

3. Interviewing and transcribing data are tedious processes. However, one comes to appreciate these processes when one realizes that data analysis has already begun. Subconsciously and then consciously, preliminary themes, concepts, and categories begin to form. As ideas emerged, it was helpful to maintain memos (notes) or record these ideas on index cards. Avoid the temptation to “make the data fit.” Because as the properties of initial categories are identified, themes and concepts may change as well.
4. Qualitative research is an involved process. Make sure that your research topic is important to you. You may live with it for quite some time.
5. If your study is qualitative, and the majority of those on your committee prefer quantitative rather than qualitative methodology, restructure your committee. The requirement for rich, thick description sometimes competes with the more straightforward approach of interpreting statistics. If one is more familiar with quantitative rather than qualitative methodology, one may struggle with separating the two paradigms. Additional time may be required to learn more about qualitative methodology.
6. The phrasing of how and why questions are important, as are the probes within these questions. When using general interview guides, and the respondent’s reply leads to a question not included in the guide, ask it. This may be an excellent opportunity to offset any weaknesses existing in the initial structure of your questions. Adjust your raw data table to include both the question and the response. Using grounded theory, the process is all about discovery.

7. Qualitative research is an intimate process. You live with the data and try to control it, before it brings you to tears. The organization of the data becomes paramount. Create tables that permit quick reviews of data or evidence. It may also be helpful to add data source notations if the origin of the data are not clearly identifiable in the title of your table or figure.

These are the conclusions, limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research that pertain to the discoveries made throughout the exploration of this study. Research lessons learned from those explorations are given for the benefit other researchers in their quest toward “discovery.” The researcher hopes the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned provoke thought and stimulate a desire to further explore the topic of how adolescents are served under Section 504 policy.

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