

TRANSITIONING STUDENTS TO THE MIDDLE SCHOOL:  
A CASE STUDY

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**(ABSTRACT)**

The purpose of this study was to describe how students moving from a school for students with learning disabilities to a regular public school classroom adjusted to the new school setting. The questions guiding the study were derived from issues identified by Dweck and Elliot in Fisher and Cooper (1990) as important to students when they change schools. The guiding questions are: What are the education settings in each school and how does the student adjust to the differences? How does the student react to the presentation of structured, sequential instruction in one school and to varied instructional techniques in another? What is the student's relationship with the teachers in each school? What is the student's relationship with peers in each school?

Three students participated in this case study. They were observed and interviewed in both the private and public school settings. Data include school histories, academic records, observations and interviews. Student observations took place in classes, school hallways and while they participated in school programs. Interviews were conducted with the students, their parents and their teachers in both schools.

The findings of the data analysis indicated that when the students changed schools they adjusted easily to the larger school setting and to the new instructional methods. Two of the students worried about grades and their academic progress in both settings and were able to find ways to meet their learning needs in their new environment. The

three students described themselves as being happy, making friends and establishing relationships with their teachers within the first six weeks in their new school.

Suggestions for further research include following these students for a longer period of time. Another study might compare the school experience of students with similar learning characteristics who are not considered to be students with a learning disability.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The transition from elementary to middle school can be a period of excitement, opportunity and growth enhancing challenge to young adolescents. It can also be a period of apprehension as students face yet another set of unfamiliar environments, expectations and societal pressures. Beginning sixth grade middle school students have been in school for at least six years. Even without geographical changes, during those school years, the students could have changed school settings several times, moving from pre-school to elementary school and then on to middle school. Each new school setting constitutes adjustment for the students. The new school setting has another physical setting, set of expectations and rules to learn. There are new teachers and peers to get to know. Instruction may be presented differently as moves to higher grade levels accelerate expectations. Adjustment to these differences must be made by all students as they progress through the educational system (Vernberg and Field in Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990).

Students do not have just these changes to cope with. They also have their own unique sets of strengths and weaknesses, personalities, family situations and personal concerns to consider as they make changes. The students' adjustment and assimilation into the new school environment is important to them not only because it represents the foundation from which they continue to grow and develop as students, but because they spend much of their days and years in the school setting.

This study follows three students who have been in a small, structured, private school for students with learning disabilities, Dashwood School, as they enter a public school. Each of the students had been in the public school system prior to entering Dashwood School and now moved back to the public school. While all students have similar adjustments to changes in school settings, the question arises: is this adjustment

difficult for students who are moving from a very structured environment designed specifically to meet their needs?

This case study emerged from my work as an administrator at Dashwood School. It focuses on three students who, after spending one to three years in the structured environment of Dashwood School, are returning to a regular public school classroom after fifth grade. The three students in this study had been diagnosed by a psychologist as students with learning disabilities before they entered Dashwood School. The varied psychological diagnoses of the students involved in this study are: Attention Deficit Disorder, Specific Learning Disability of Written Expression Disorder, Central Auditory Processing Disorder, Separation Anxiety Disorder, Opposition Defiant Disorder and Articulation Disorder.

I began the initial data collection with Denzin's (1970) advice to write a case study from a life history perspective. The life history perspective allows the researcher to understand events from the person's viewpoint and opens questions into areas that may appear to an outsider to be resolved (Denzin, 1970, p. 257). Through the process of viewing the students as individuals with specific life histories, I also began to learn that although the students were approximately the same age and had attended Dashwood School, their journeys were very individual. I grew to understand this process as a journey through the schooling process. During this journey each student had unique experiences and interactions with teachers, peers and instructional techniques. Each student needed to adjust to these elements of schooling in their individual ways in any school change (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990). The "tasks of adjustment" identified by Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper became the basis of the study's research questions and the focus of interview questions after the initial life history data collection.

For this study, the transition period is defined as the last six weeks of the spring semester at Dashwood School, the intervening summer and the first six weeks of the fall

semester in the new school setting. As I studied the students, I focused my attention on the students' tasks of adjustment identified by Vernberg and Field as (1) adapting to a new school setting with new rules and expectations; (2) learning through different instructional styles; (3) establishing relationships with new teachers and (4) establishing relationships with new peers (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p.128).

The four tasks of adjustment to different schools are issues of utmost importance to all adolescents as they adapt to new school environments, and I surmised that the learning disabilities would make adjustments more difficult. Much research has been done on how teachers may instruct students with learning disabilities when they are integrating them into the regular classroom, but I found less information concerning how the students adapted to a different learning environment. The three students of this study were not just students with learning disabilities adapting to a different classroom. They had been removed from the public school setting, had been placed in a unique, structured private school, and were returning to the public school.

The two school settings involved in this study are very different. The first school, Dashwood School, partners with the nearby public school districts when the "most restrictive environment" for learning is deemed appropriate for some students. Dashwood School has this distinction because the students are separated all day from other students who do not have learning disabilities.

At Dashwood School, students spend their day in a classroom of ten students, a teacher and a teacher's assistant. They participate in individual and small group reading and math for ninety minute blocks each day. The instruction is structured with skills being presented in a predetermined order which combines multi-sensory modalities and repetition of old and new information. Every week students receive science or social studies education for thirty minutes. The school's atmosphere constitutes quiet work without discussion or group projects.

The public middle schools, on the other hand, are characterized by having class teams of fifteen to twenty students within the larger public school setting. Team members change classes together throughout the school day, and team teachers have daily planning time in order to work together and to plan interdisciplinary studies. The varied instructional techniques which are used in middle school consist of individual and group projects, oral reports and discussion. Students in these middle schools are instructed by several teachers and participate in classes with students with and without learning disabilities.

*What was the purpose of the study?*

The purpose of the study is to describe how students moving from a school for students with learning disabilities to a regular public classroom adjust to their new environment. Because the schools are different in settings, instruction and population, I wondered how traumatic the school change would be for the students and how they would adjust to the differences. I focused on several tasks of adjustment, including adapting to different school settings, developing relationships with new teachers, developing relationships with new peers, and reacting to different instructional techniques (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 128). It seemed particularly compelling to be able to study the transition of these three students since, although much has been written about instructional techniques teachers may use when integrating students with learning disabilities into their regular classrooms, little information is available on the adjustment of students with learning disabilities who have been in a structured, “most restrictive environment” and who later move into the regular classroom.

### *Adjusting to change*

In *On the Move: The Psychology of Change and Transition* (1990), Vernberg and Field discuss topics that are important to students when they change schools. It is described as,

The individual involved in the transition is faced with a number of tasks which make demands on his or her adaptive resources. Some of these tasks are psychological, such as accepting the loss of an important person, activity, or object. Others are social or interpersonal, such as establishing new friendships and relationships with teachers. Still others are physical, such as performing new behaviors required in a new role or setting. (p. 128)

Once major tasks accompanying a transition are identified, attention can be turned to identifying the multiple factors that influence how successfully these tasks will be accomplished (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 128). Changing schools is a complex process for students. It usually involves a move to a new school location with new peers and teachers. Instructional methodology may be different. Adjusting to this transition is an important task. Each student also has personal reactions to events that influence how these tasks can be accomplished (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 128).

Balk (1995) writes that there are three aspects of a successful transition from elementary school to the middle school. The first is that the students consider the transition as a regular event that is supposed to happen. Second, the students view the transition as desirable and important to growing up. Third, the transition process is more natural if the young adolescent talks with other students about the transition. Balk writes that it is important for the students not to remain isolated from others, but to have the support of a friend (Balk, 1995, p. 324).

*What are the issues in this study?*

Because the purpose of the study was to look at how students adapt to a new school, there were many of aspects of adjustment that could be studied. For example, a study could have been built on how well the students performed academically. However, in studying change, I looked at adjustments that all students must make when they change schools. The issues identified by Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper (1990) became the research questions for this case study. They are:

1. *What are the education settings in each school and how does the student adjust to the differences?*
2. *How does the student react to the presentation of structured, sequential instruction in one school and to varied instructional techniques in another?*
3. *What is the student's relationship with the teachers in each school?*
4. *What is the student's relationship with peers in each school?*  
(Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 128)

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

There are several topics that provide important contextual background and associative information for this study. There are very clear legal guidelines in educating students with learning disabilities. Thus, an examination of the concept of the “least/most restrictive environment” is included. The three students in the study are eleven years of age. They are young adolescents on the threshold of adolescence. Changes of physical, emotional and conceptual growth that occur during adolescence are included as information fundamental to understanding the typical young adolescent. The social context of learning is included because it is an important element in the school environment. Descriptions of Dashwood School and middle schools are included as part of the contextual background of the study.

#### *The Law: the least restrictive environment for student education*

The three students in this study had been removed from the regular classroom setting for their education and were enrolled in a small, private, homogenous setting. The decision to remove them from the regular classroom was based on their academic achievement levels and psychological test results. Typically, before students are moved from a regular classroom or a public school setting, other educational techniques have been used to teach the students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 94-142) protects students from readily being separated from their peers during their education. The regular classroom is regarded by this law as being the least restrictive environment in which the students’ learning differences can be accommodated. An education setting in which all of the students are those with learning disabilities and which is located in a separate classroom or completely different building is regarded as more restrictive. The further away the educational setting is from the regular classroom,

the more restrictive it is regarded. Therefore, the separate facility of Dashwood School would be regarded as the most restrictive environment in which a student could be educated because it is physically away from the regular school and its student population consists entirely of students with learning disabilities.

A basic principle in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly Public Law 94-142, is that special education students should receive education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This is built on the concepts that students with and without disabilities should have social interaction with each other and that special needs students should be provided with an appropriate education that will benefit them. (Fuchs, 1995, p. 214)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act specifies that in some cases the regular classroom may not be capable of providing an appropriate education to all students and in these cases appropriate education considerations supersede social interaction goals (Fuchs, 1995, p. 214). When this occurs, special classes, separate schooling, or other “removal of disabled children from the regular educational environment may be appropriate when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. 1412 (5)(B)).

IDEA further specifies that educators have the following responsibilities to students with special education placements. They must (1) establish an individualized educational plan, (2) conduct an annual review of student progress, and (3) administer a comprehensive reevaluation at the end of three years.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. It prohibits schools or other institutions that receive federal funding from discriminating against individuals on the basis of a handicap. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) of 1974 specifies that all



students should receive a fair and equal education. Learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, ADHD, are defined as educational handicaps.

Section 504 and P.L. 94-142 laws prohibit discrimination through "Provision of different or separate benefits or services unless such action is necessary to be effective." The Learning Disabilities Association describes an example of this discrimination as "separate classes, schools, or facilities." These laws stipulate that students should all receive the same educational experiences as students without a learning disability (Section 504; P.L. 94-142; The Learning Disabilities Association).

When a student is having difficulty learning in the regular classroom, instruction can be augmented throughout the school day by programs that address specific educational needs without excessively disrupting the regular classroom experience. Alternatively, students might receive help from an aide who stays with them and helps them to learn in the regular classroom where both students with and without learning disabilities learn at the same time.

When these educational interventions are not successful, an evaluation of the students' learning needs must be made. This is required by Section 504 Regulations, 34 CFR Section 104.35 (a). This section stipulates that a school district evaluate "any person, who because of handicap, needs or is believed to need special education or related services." The law also requires an evaluation before any significant change in placement is made.

These laws are designed to assure that handicapped persons receive the same opportunities as those without handicaps. This includes equal access to classes, schools and libraries as well as to all instruction offered to non-handicapped students.

### *Adolescence*

Young adolescence is the period of development when an individual is changing from a child to an adult. The change is not always a steady transition, but is

characterized by uneven growth spurts. Some of the characteristics of this period are lessened identification with parents, increased identification with peers, intense (although often transitory) involvement in causes, infatuation with hero figures, and investment in a relationship with an opposite sex peer. During young adolescence, adults are still important to the adolescent. But as their hormones begin to change, causing increased bone length and acne, they begin to redefine their own sexual role and their relationships with peers (Balk, 1995, p. 18).

Changes in self-concept are embedded in these changes. Balk (1995, p.172) writes that self concept development "appears to occur in calm, steady progress." Self concept is influenced by the transitions faced as students leave elementary school and enter middle school. Self concept reflects high or low self-esteem and self acceptance or rejection. Changes in self concept are central to the psychology of the adolescent (McCandless, 1970, p. 437). This is due in part to the physiological changes which cause the individuals to change their notion of themselves. For instance, body shape changes as body fat disappears and is replaced by muscle. While this is occurring, young adolescents may be influenced by the media, leading them to believe that some body images are more acceptable than others. The combination of personal changes and the influence of the outside world may cause them to redefine their sense of self.

The adolescent's interest in the opposite sex causes the adolescents to redefine their relationships with their own and the opposite sex. For instance, a physically developing young girl may not want to play coed sports, but participation in all male sports may become more important to boys (McCandless, 1970, p. 437).

There are also changes in social attitudes and expectations as individuals move from childhood to adulthood. For instance, young adolescents are expected to demonstrate more self control and acceptance of personal responsibility as they get older.

The self-concept, or how individuals view themselves, functions as a means of self-evaluation. For instance, categories of self-concepts which are ranked highly by

adolescents are: intellectual competence, physical attractiveness, physical skills, social attractiveness, sex-typing identification, leadership qualities, moral qualities and sense of humor. Adolescents begin to self-evaluate themselves in these categories. Because they are regarded as important qualities to the adolescent, their own self-evaluation influences their self concept (McCandless, 1970, p. 446).

Adolescents are also self-centered. Elkind has extended Piaget's theory of egocentrism, lack of cognitive ability to understand someone else's viewpoint, to include imaginary audience and personal fables. By imaginary audience, Elkind means the adolescent's tendency to think that they are the center of everyone's world. For instance, they are concerned with their own appearance and assume that everyone else is too. By personal fable, Elkind refers to the adolescent's tendency to consider their experiences to be totally unlike what anyone else has experienced or can understand. For instance, they feel that their life experiences include emotions that are different from those that others experience (Balk, 1995, p. 211; Elkind, 1967).

Motives affect learning and performance because students must decide whether to seek or avoid tasks. Their motives are related to potential success or failure. For instance, every situation provokes an approach-avoidance conflict. Individuals must decide whether to approach or avoid the task. Dweck and Elliott write that those students whose motive it is to achieve success will approach feasible tasks. Those students whose motives are to avoid failure would "avoid most strongly tasks of intermediary difficulty" (Dweck and Elliott in Mussen, 1983, p. 648). They continue, "individual's beliefs about the outcomes they experience guide their subsequent behavior in that and analogous situations" (Dweck and Elliott in Mussen, 1983, p. 650).

Motivation for adolescents is built upon their experiences with tasks. If they have experienced failure judgments in regard to their competence in a subject, they are unlikely to be motivated to keep trying to learn that subject (Dweck and Elliott in Mussen, 1983, p. 643).

### *Social contexts for learning*

The three students in this study had to adapt to a different social context for learning when they changed schools. The normative student populations changed when they moved from the most restrictive to the least restrictive educational setting. In Dashwood School the students were part of a homogeneous student population of students with learning disabilities in a most restrictive learning environment. The instruction at Dashwood School was structured to meet the needs of the individual. When they moved to the public schools, the students were in larger classes and were grouped with other students with and without learning disabilities. The instruction in the public school setting was developed to meet the learning needs of the group. Rogoff (1990) writes that culture and language are the transmitters of knowledge and that this transfer of knowledge happens through students' participation in society. Because of the differences in the student populations at the two schools, these students were in different "societies." The different student population groups that they were being educated with changed and the methods for teaching and the information being presented changed as well. Dewey believed that "desire is the ultimate moving springs of action (Boydston, 1991, p. 45)." He urged teachers to know and understand their students so that they could develop educational strategies that reflect their motivation, interests and needs. Dewey further stated, "Education must begin with psychological insight into a child's capacities, interests and habits" (Wiles and Bondi, 1993, p. 3). Dewey's concept of teacher is that of an insightful, informed guide who knows her students' cognitive styles, needs and capabilities. Dewey's work reflects concern about students who have been educated in separate environments. He wrote, "democratic social arrangements promote better quality of human experience." and "learning should not take place in isolation" (Boydston, 1991, p.18, p. 28).

Piaget's work centers on the individualistic acquisition of knowledge. Learning for him is the internalization of a notion. This cognitive construction is accomplished

individually through assimilation, accommodation and the development of schemata. For Piaget, adolescence is a period distinguished by changes in reasoning and uneven development. For instance, Piaget's concept of *decalage*, development which is uneven, affects the adolescent both socially and cognitively. *Decalage* has also been correlated with uneven identity formation (Balk, 1995, p. 114). The characteristic of unevenness is often associated with individualized cognitive processing and the need for individualized, progressive assessment, even though self concept tends to develop more steadily (Balk, 1995, p. 172). Uneven development of abilities is also a characteristic of the dyslexic student (Pavlidis, 1981, p. 101).

During adolescence, the development of formal operations expands to include an understanding of social reality (Balk, 1995, p. 114). Piaget maintains that the advances in informal reasoning enables adolescents to reflect on their social experiences (Balk, 1995, p. 182). Further, Piaget wrote that as adolescents grow and begin to engage in meaningful activities, they begin to develop abstract ideas. This occurs as the students move from concrete to formal reasoning. These efforts need to be supported, however, in a place "where one can become pragmatic without having to become cynical about ideals and moral principles" (Wiles and Bondi, 1993, p. 27). Through these developments and experiences knowledge is constructed and assimilated for the individual.

Vygotsky wrote that participation in cooperative learning or "cultural activities with guidance of more skilled partners allows children to internalize tools for thinking and more mature approaches to problem solving" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 14). Further, Vygotsky's theories state that "more competent peers," as well as adults, can aid children's development (Moll, 1994, p. 155).

An important aspect of Vygotsky's work is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is the students' optimum instructional level. It encompasses the skills that the students have with the guidance of a more experienced or knowledgeable guide. The zone of proximal development requires that the teachers know their students'

development, strengths and weaknesses in order to effectively guide their students' progress from what is known to the acquisition of additional knowledge.

Peer grouping with more competent peers complements Vygotsky's theories. He believed in using language through dialogue for problem solving and the "more competent peers," as well as adults, can aid children's development (Moll, 1994, p. 155). Vygotsky wrote that problems which are presented to students in a group initiate learning that has its beginnings in the social interaction of the group. Learning that has its roots in group dialogue. Then becomes internalized to the individual's thinking process. This learning process occurs through the dialogue which helps individuals to clarify their thoughts. The social interactions also serve as a source of ideas and diverse perspectives because members of the group bring their own concepts and thoughts to the dialogue (Harste, Short, Burke, 1988, p. 12).

Vygotsky further stresses that teachers need to understand students and their social world. Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development examines human development in relation to individuals' interactions with others around them over time" (Moll, 1994, p. 287). Vygotsky also stated that "human thinking must be understood in its concrete social historical circumstances" (Moll, 1994, p. 319). Vygotsky has influenced current theoretical perspectives that emphasize the societal context of cognitive development as thought develops from a socio-historical perspective. In this respect, the individual and the environment are inseparable for understanding intellectual development. Therefore the environment in which the students are learning is important to understand in order to foster academic success.

Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky emphasize the importance of understanding the students' need to work in groups, develop identity and for guided challenge. Dewey believed that the learning styles and voices of individuals in a class should be considered as part of a democratic classroom. Piaget believed that teachers need to understand their students' cognitive processing in order to construct appropriate tasks for them. Vygotsky

believed that students have a zone of proximal development in which guided instruction enhances cognitive development.

Dewey believed that learning is a social experience and does not take place in isolation. Piaget believed that social life transforms the individual's nature and is necessary for the development of logic. Vygotsky believed that social practice is essential for learning and developing ideas. The work of Vygotsky, Rogoff and Dewey influences the nature of this study because the social experiences, cohort groups, adult relationships and instructional groups changed when the students moved from one school to another.

#### *Education at Dashwood School*

The students who attend Dashwood School range in age from six to fifteen years of age. They are grouped by achievement and age into classes of ten students. Dashwood School focuses on the instruction of language processing difficulties through the Orton-Gillingham approach. (See Appendix H)

Instruction at Dashwood School is based on the phonetic, structured Orton-Gillingham teaching methods and is organized into large blocks of time. Reading is taught daily in an one and one-half hour block and also is interspersed throughout the day. The students receive instruction in math for one and one-half hours each day. The primary emphasis of the school is on the teaching of reading, but students receive some instruction in other areas as well. Science is taught for thirty minutes each week in the fall and social studies for thirty minutes each week in the spring. The students receive twenty minutes of physical education each day and keyboarding instruction twice each week. Art and music are taught twice during the month.

All instruction at Dashwood School is directed by the student's Individual Education Program (IEP), that is written by the student's child study committee. Each group of ten students has a teacher and a full time teacher's assistant. While the students

are in one room, there are actually different lessons going on simultaneously.

Occasionally, two or three students will be gathered around a table working on the same skill such as letter recognition or syllabication. Teacher directed short skill lessons are presented to the whole group.

Instruction at Dashwood School is teacher-modified Orton-Gillingham approach. Students begin in the program at a level which is commensurate with their level of achievement when they enter the school. For instance, a ten-year-old student may not have learned letter sounds and shapes. This student would be grouped with other ten year olds, but would begin by learning the letters through the Orton-Gillingham instructional methods.

The Orton-Gillingham instructional methods are a structured, formal and systematic program. The multi-sensory teaching technique establishes sound-symbol associations and systematically builds up words from letters. Its aim is to establish decoding and encoding skills which are based on the relationship between sounds and symbols.

When students are taught through the Orton-Gillingham approach, they first learn letters. When these are thoroughly learned, the letters are used to build words. Phonic drills and constant revision are built into the program. For instance, learning the letters through different games such as picking them out, finding them on different cards, matching, etc. are included in the initial learning phases. After a few letters are learned through this continual practice and reinforcement, students are taught to blend sounds into words, to identify polysyllabic words, divide words into syllables and to blend syllables into words.

Once the students have learned to analyze words into component sounds, they learn to spell. The instruction of spelling is presented through a four-step program which includes the teacher saying the word while the student repeats the word, names the



letters, writes the word, names each letter as it is written and repeats the word. This approach incorporates repetition as well as auditory, visual and kinesthetic modalities.

The Orton-Gillingham methods are not used as a supplement to sight or basal readers. The program specifies that no materials outside of the Orton-Gillingham books should be used until the visual, auditory and kinesthetic aspects of language are established. As a result Dashwood School classrooms do not have independent reading books that are commonly found in public school classrooms.

Reading is taught through the Orton-Gillingham methods until each bit of knowledge is thoroughly understood and easily recalled before progressing to another step. Each step is presented through a multi-sensory approach so that a letter or word is heard, seen, felt and drawn as it is taught.

### *Middle schools*

Middle schools in this study, have grades six, seven and eight, which are designed to reflect the needs and development of a young adolescent. Middle schools should prepare students for the transition to adolescence, continue general education, present abundant opportunities for exploration of interests, individualization of instruction, flexible curriculum and have an emphasis on values (Alexander, 1969, p. 24).

In middle schools, students are divided by grade into teams within each grade. These teams consists of subject area teachers and students that identify with each other as a group within the larger grade of two hundred to four hundred students. These teams stay together throughout the day only moving out of their team for classes such as band, chorus or exploratory courses where they meet other students in the same grade with similar interests.

Teaming allows students to be arranged heterogeneously into groups with which they can identify (Gutheinz-Pierce and Whoolery, 1995, p. 63). Often these teams have names, slogans, tee-shirts, etc. These symbols help the students to feel that they are part

of a special community within the larger school. The teams consist of a teacher from each academic discipline. The teachers have one or two planning periods each day and are; therefore, able to discuss students, plan field trips, plan events for the team and have joint parent-teacher conferences. The teaming concept also allows the teachers to change their schedule so that all classes do not need to meet in the same schedule each week. This schedule flexibility lets students explore a topic in more depth through labs or field trips. For instance, longer periods of time might be needed for a long science lab. This flexible scheduling would allow for that. Another day, the language arts teachers may need more time for writing or a film (*Turning Points*, 1989, p. 52).

Teachers and administrators working with middle school students need to understand and enjoy the characteristics that make the young adolescents unique. A thorough understanding of the adolescent includes knowledge about the physical characteristics, emotional, social and cognitive development which is indicative of the age group. Middle school teachers should also be well-versed in the instructional methodologies such as cooperative learning and independent learning that are appropriate for young adolescents (Gutheinz-Pierce and Whoolery, 1995, p. 61; Reed, McMillan, McBee, 1995, p. 7).

The middle school curriculum includes a continuation of the general education foundation. However, it also reflects the adolescent's growing awareness of social issues. Components are built into the instructional methods for self-expression and independent learning because the students are increasing in their ability to be independently responsible and self-disciplined (Alexander, 1969, p. 24).

Instructional methodologies in the middle school usually reflect the cognitive, social and intellectual development inherent in young adolescents (Gutheinz-Pierce and Whoolery, 1995, p. 62). Since social relationships are important at this time, instruction often includes small group interaction and cooperative learning techniques. Since young adolescence is a state of enhanced curiosity, students are also given ample opportunities

for independent learning. Adolescence is also a period of time when students are becoming more aware of social conditions and life values; therefore current events and values are addressed through the subjects being taught. Interdisciplinary units are also valuable instructional techniques because they enable the students to apply what they are learning in one subject to another and to study a topic as a whole. Interdisciplinary units also enable several teachers to combine their subject area expertise to develop a program for the students.

Exploratory courses are also often part of the middle school curriculum. These mini-courses allow students to experience various subjects in a short period of time. Through these courses students may decide whether they would like to pursue an academic subject more deeply. For instance, astronomy or Japanese might be offered in a short exploratory course format. Mini-courses also allow the student to experience less academic subjects that they might want to pursue independently. This might be a course on reading a particular mystery author, cooking or bicycle repair (Wiles and Bondi, 1993, p. 157).

Exploratory or mini-courses can also be used to allow students to pursue one aspect of an academic subject in depth. For instance in science, a student might elect to study a mini-course in microbiology, agriculture, chemistry or physics. This not only allows students to learn about an aspect of a subject which they find interesting, but it allows them to decide whether or not they would like to study it further during high school. Sometimes mini-courses are designed to give students a chance to become involved in community service projects. This opportunity allows them to experience how valuable and important community service is to society and to the people in the community (Reed, McMillan, McBee, 1995, p. 9).

Independent study is often part of the middle school curriculum because young adolescents are developing independence and responsibility. Independent study gives them an opportunity to design a project and carry it out. This independent work enables

them to experience control and empowerment while they study a topic of interest to them.

Assessment in the middle schools is also designed to meet the needs of the young adolescents. Because young adolescence is a period of erratic growth, it is important to continually assess the students' progress. Steady assessment allows the students' work to be viewed from a continual spectrum, rather than on a short-term basis. Because the young adolescents are assuming more responsibility for their lives, they may benefit from being involved in conferences between teachers and parents. They may also benefit from being involved in determining the criteria on which they are to be assessed (Wiles and Bondi, 1993, p. 234). Since the young adolescent is in a period of self-discovery and responsibility building, it is important that the evaluation procedures used in the middle school help the adolescents discover and understand themselves. This can be partly accomplished through process evaluation. It's also important that young adolescents view their own progress so they can understand their own strengths and weaknesses.

Middle schools often offer special interest activities for students. This is done by incorporating time into the day for these activities or by offering them before or after school. These activities are designed to offer an opportunity for the students to learn a new topic or hobby such as chess or archery. They also offer an opportunity for young people to develop academic and non-academic skills.

Middle schools have teacher advisory programs that consist of a teacher advisor and a small group of students. The teacher advisor meets with the small group of students during an advisory period which is incorporated into the school day. Advisory programs generally meet for a short period of time, but allow the students to know one teacher very well. It also provides an opportunity for the teacher to know the students in the small group. The teacher advisory program enables the students' development to be guided in a positive direction, to foresee and stall any problems which might be occurring

in the development of the students and it allows an adult who knows particular students very well to speak for them in team meetings when necessary.

Young adolescents need to feel welcomed at their middle school. They also need to feel that they are part of a self-contained school community within the large school. Since this age is one of great change it is important that the students feel accepted and liked as they are developing. This can be accomplished through the teaming concept and through the teacher advisory programs which are part of the middle school concept (Reed, McMillan, McBee, 1995, p. 9).

The literature review in this study contributes to an understanding of the context by providing a foundation which is inherent in the work. The section on adolescents is meant to help the reader understand the personal development of the participants. The section on the law helps to explain how the participants arrived at Dashwood School. The discussion of social contexts for learning helps to explain the importance of the different school settings. The section on Dashwood School explains the specific instructional techniques which are the focus of the school and the middle school section outlines the philosophies and concept of the middle school.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

#### *Participants*

I had hoped to study three students who transferred to the same school or the same school district. However, during the time frame of the case study only five students from Dashwood School were ready to transfer to the regular sixth grade. I eliminated two of them as candidates for the study because they had multiple physical and emotional handicaps.

The other three students were invited and they and their parents agreed to participate. They transferred to different schools. Vicki and Joe went to sixth grade, middle school classrooms in different school districts. Pam's mother decided, after the study began, to have Pam placed in a regular fifth grade classroom when she transferred to the public school system.

Ideally, the students in this study would have attended Dashwood School for the same number of years and transferred to the same grade and school. However, students could not be found that matched this description. The difficulty in finding students for study is addressed by Denzin (1970) as:

The choice is made, assuring variety but not necessarily representativeness, without strong argument for typicality, again weighted by considerations of access and even by hospitality, for the time is short and perhaps too little can be learned from inhospitable parents. Here, too, the primary criterion is opportunity to learn (Denzin, p. 244).

Subject anonymity was achieved by replacing the names of the participants and locations with pseudonyms (Delamont, 1992, p. 180). I used pseudonyms which were derived from E. M. Delafield, *A Diary of A Provincial Lady* (1982). All students and

their parents signed permission forms allowing me to interview them, their teachers and to review Dashwood School records and middle school grades. In addition, the public school systems' administration and Dashwood School administrators gave written permission for the students' records to be included in the study.

### *Data Collection*

#### *What methods were used to conduct the case study?*

The study was conducted as a case study of three adolescents as they move into public school. The case study approach allowed me to examine the complexities of the students' schooling circumstances. I learned about their circumstances and reactions in detail, treating schooling as personally and socially meaningful as seen in a continuum of past, present and future (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 109-111; Denzin, 1970, p. 220). I attempted to learn about how the students perceive and react in their understanding of their world (Delamont, 1992, p. 7).

This case study primarily has characteristics of the intrinsic case study which provides a "better understanding of a particular case" (Denzin, 1970, p. 237). The intrinsic case study is defined by Stake as, one "we are interested in, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case" (Stake, 1995, p. 3). The intrinsic features allowed the study to focus on three students who transferred from a specific school, Dashwood School, to a public school. Because of the uniqueness of Dashwood School's instructional techniques (structured, individualized phonics and math) there are issues which are specific to this case and are not generalizable to all students who transfer between schools. The results, however, are generalizable to students who transfer from Dashwood School to a public school.

I used qualitative methods of observation and multiple interviews. However, I also used document analysis by using standardized test results, psychological reports and

academic progress reports. This was invaluable because interview remarks and test scores often helped explain each other. For instance, a drop in test scores often precipitated a parent's decision to change schools or change educational approaches. If I had only looked at test results, I would not have been aware of their ramifications. Interviews without the additional input of report results would not have allowed me to fully understand events and their causes (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 109; Hammersly and Atkinson, 1992, p. 137). For example, one student had a specific diagnosis, "Central Auditory Processing Disorder;" but without the interviews and observations, I would not have understood the student's specific reactions and adjustment to the learning difficulty.

Qualitative study stresses the meaning of human behavior in the context of social interaction. It places an emphasis on the ability to know and understand others through introspection and reflection from detailed description and observation (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan and Sjoberg, 1991, p. 36). Denzin writes that the case study "culminates in the obtaining of information that the researcher is unable to obtain from experiments and surveys." For him, this approach which encompasses the life history of the subject has four uses:

1. It provides the ability to interpret ongoing social acts from the perspective of the persons involved.
2. It provides data on the subjective side of routine institutional experiences and processes.
3. It opens avenues of inquiry into areas that appear resolved.
4. It provides the data observers are presently unable to obtain from the more behaviorist experiments and retrospective surveys.

(Denzin, 1970, p. 257)



This study is consistent with the uses that Denzin has outlined. For the purposes of clarity and accuracy, extensive interviews were conducted with teachers and parents. These interviews helped me to understand the student's life history as the details were addressed at different interview times and by different people.

This study used the research methods of interviews, audio recordings, transcription, analysis of documents and observation.

#### *Permission for the study*

My first step in designing this study was to request permission to pursue the study from the administration at Dashwood School. Then, because each of these students would be transferring to a public school, I completed the public school systems' formal consent forms in order to study the students in the middle school. Next, I requested and received approval by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Tech to proceed with the study. Finally, I asked the three students and their parents if they would like to participate in the case study. When all three students and their parents agreed to become part of the study, I began the interviewing and observation process.

#### *Fieldnotes*

During the interviews, I jotted notes, that I refer to as fieldnotes, in order to document my observations. I also used them to note important issues, and themes and to keep track of questions that were generated through the interview process. As an interview progressed, the fieldnotes helped me to focus and guide the conversation towards issues. In addition, I used the fieldnotes to help me remember and to clarify conversations. Sanjek refers to this process as "producing meaning through interaction with the ethnographer's headnotes" (Sanjek, 1990, p. 92).

### *Journal*

I also kept a journal of my interviews. I used the journal after each interview to record observations, impressions and comments I might have made during the interviews. I reviewed the journal to look for and define emerging themes, issues or patterns from the interviews. I also used the information in the journals when I coded patterns and issues (Delamont 1992, p. 54; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 165).

### *Time line*

The first interviews took place during the last six weeks of the spring semester, while the students were at Dashwood School. They continued through the summer and during the first six weeks of the fall semester, after the students had transferred to the middle school. The six weeks focus period allowed the transition period to be observed, but the study ended before the students had become fully assimilated into the new school environment.

A chart of interviews and observations reflects the study's time line. (see Table 4.1)

Table 4.1

INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

	Spring Semester						Summer				Fall Semester					
Weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vicki	O	O	O	OI	OI	OI		I			OI	OI	OI		OI	
Joe	O	OI	O	OI	OI	O					O	OI	OI	O		OI
Pam	OI	O	OI	O	OI	OI		O			O	O	OI	O	OI	
Parents			I	I		I		I					I	I		I
Teachers			I	I		I						I	I		I	I

Observations and Interviews with Parents, Teachers and Students.

O=Observation

I=Interview

### *Interviews*

Interviews are important to the case study because they allow the researcher to "get information about activities that for one reason or another cannot be directly observed" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 106). Interviews were important to this study because I used interviews to gain a lot of my data. Additional information was derived from files, standardized test scores and from observation. Except for the first interview with each student, I audiotaped and took brief notes. I was concerned that the tape recorder would make the students feel uncomfortable, so I did not begin audiotaping until the second interview. However, during the rest of the interviews I audiotaped and took brief notes. These notes helped me to focus and to remember important points. The teachers' and students' interviews took place in classrooms, offices and libraries. The parents' interviews were in their homes and one parent chose to meet in a coffee shop.

I began the initial interviews with the life history perspective referred to by Denzin. As the study developed the later interview questions built upon the life history foundation and focused on the "tasks of adjustment" to different school environments identified by Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper (1990). The interview questions were open-ended enough to generate conversation and description, but structured enough to focus on topics. The first interview questions were built around Denzin's suggestion that the initial interviews focus on the developmental history of the individual in the areas of demographics, sociopersonal, sense of self, recreational and enjoyable activities. (see Table 4.2) The three areas of sociopersonal, sense of self and enjoyable activities were addressed in each of the interviews with parents, teachers and students so that the answers could be triangulated. I had not initially included the area of demographics because the students were in the same school setting and information concerning other schools which they had attended was in their files. However, the students' school history became important to understanding how the students had arrived at Dashwood School. This history became part of the interviews particularly in the parent interviews. In the

initial interviews I also asked questions regarding the students' perception of the public school they would be attending in the fall. The parents, students and teachers each had their own perceptions of what the student would experience during the next school year. This information allowed me to triangulate all of the pre-conceived ideas about the middle school.

#### *Interviews with students*

I interviewed each student a minimum of six times. At least three of the interviews with the students were in the spring and at least three were in the fall. In the initial interview, I focused on learning about them as individuals and gaining an understanding of their schooling experiences from their perspective. I also needed to gain their confidence so that they were relaxed and comfortable talking with me. The students seemed to enjoy the interviews and talked readily of subjects that were interesting to them. Because I worked at Dashwood School, Pam would often ask me, "can we talk now?" I was able to observe the students in both schools in classes, as they walked in the halls and participated in school programs. I was able to observe the three students daily while they were at Dashwood School. Once they changed schools, my observations though not daily, were for longer periods of time.

#### *Interviews with parents*

I interviewed at least one of the parents of each student twice: once in the spring or summer and once in the fall. The parents were instrumental in explaining the students' entire education experiences to me. They were able to discuss the student's entry into school and the process that brought them to Dashwood School. They also substantiated or contradicted statements made by teachers or students. There were several instances in which events were viewed by parents and teachers differently.

### *Interviews with teachers*

I interviewed the students' Dashwood School classroom teachers and aides during the spring semester. At the new schools, I interviewed learning resource teachers, subject area teachers and homeroom teachers. All of the teachers helped me to understand how the students adjusted to their environments, learned and interacted with their peers. The teachers also were able to describe the students' behavior as they approached and completed tasks.

I had previously established relationships with teachers at Dashwood School. I gained a rapport with the public school teachers by talking with them before and after class, helping to grade papers and talking with them about their general education thoughts before beginning the audiotaped interviews.

Table 2.2

Initial Interview Questions

<b>Category</b>	<b><i>Sense of Self</i></b>
<b>Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What words come to mind when you think about yourself as a student?</li><li>2. Can you tell me about how you have changed as a learner and what you are like now?</li><li>3. How have you felt about yourself while you have been a student at this school?</li></ol>
<b>Parents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What kind of experiences has (name) had in school?</li><li>2. How do you regard (name) as a student?</li></ol>
<b>Teachers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Describe how (name) regards himself/herself as a student</li></ol>
<b>Category</b>	<b><i>Academic</i></b>
<b>Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What is your favorite way to learn something?</li><li>2. How long do you study when you are not at school?</li><li>3. Tell me about school.</li></ol>
<b>Parents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How has (name) changed as a learner throughout his schooling? What is (name) like now?</li><li>2. How long does (name) study each day?</li><li>3. How do you feel about (name's) transfer to the middle school?</li><li>4. Tell me about (name) and school.</li></ol>
<b>Teachers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Would you describe (name) as a student?</li><li>2. How has (name) changed in his learning style or habits since you have known (name)?</li><li>3. How does (name) do in school?</li></ol>
<b>Category</b>	<b><i>Social</i></b>
<b>Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Describe your friends at Dashwood School? What are your favorite things to do with your friends? Are some of your friends here?</li><li>2. Describe your friends outside of school. What do you do together?</li><li>3. What do you like about your friends?</li></ol>
<b>Parents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Describe (name's) friends at Dashwood School.</li><li>2. Describe (name's) friends outside of school.</li></ol>

**Teachers** 1. Describe (name's) interactions with other students. What do they do together?

**Category** *Recreation*

**Students** 1. What are your favorite things to do when you are not in school?  
2. Are you involved in any sports or other group activities outside of school?

**Parents** 1. What does (name) do after school?  
2. What does (name) enjoy doing?  
3. What group activities is (name) involved in outside of school?

**Teachers** 1. What does (name) enjoy doing?

**Category** *Perception of public school*

**Students** 1. What do you think the middle school will be like?  
2. Do you think that you will like it?  
3. Will you know anyone there?

**Parents** 1. What do you think the middle school will be like?  
2. How do you think (name) will do there?  
3. Do you think (name) will know anyone?

**Teachers** 1. What do you think the middle school will be like for name?



Table 4.3

Fall Interview Questions

<b>Category</b>	<b><i>Adjustment to new school setting</i></b>
<b>Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What is this school like?</li><li>2. Is it what you expected it to be like?</li><li>3. What do you like best/least about it?</li><li>4. How is it different from Dashwood School?</li></ol>
<b>Parents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How has (name) adjusted to the middle school?</li><li>2. Has the middle school been as you expected it to be?</li></ol>
<b>Teachers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How has (name) seemed to have adjusted to being in a new school?</li></ol>
<b>Category</b>	<b><i>Reaction to instruction</i></b>
<b>Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What are the classes like here?</li><li>2. Are the classes the same as at Dashwood School, are they easier/harder?</li><li>3. How are the classes different?</li><li>4. Do you have much homework? How much time do you spend on it each night?</li><li>5. What are your favorite/least favorite classes? Why?</li><li>6. What do you do in your classes? Do you like what you do?</li></ol>
<b>Parents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How much time does (name) spend on homework?</li><li>2. How do the classes seem to be going for (name)?</li></ol>
<b>Teachers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How is (name) doing in your subject/class?</li><li>2. What are you working on?</li><li>3. What kinds of things do you do?</li><li>4. How is (name's) work?</li><li>5. Does (name) participate in class?</li></ol>
(Pam)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Does Pam complete her work?</li><li>2. What does Pam's behavior like?</li><li>3. Does Pam read on her own?</li></ol>
(Vicki)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Is Vicki keeping up with her work?</li><li>2. Does Vicki ask a lot of questions? Who does she ask?</li><li>3. Does Vicki seem to hear and understand in class?</li></ol>

- (Joe)
1. When does Joe participate in class?
  2. How does Joe do in writing activities?
  3. What writing does he do?

**Category**     *Relationships with teachers*

- Students**
1. What are your teachers like? What is (specific teacher) like?
  2. Are they as you expected them to be?
  3. Do you have a favorite teacher? Why?

- Teachers**
1. Does (name) talk with you very much? When?
  2. What is (name) like to have in class?

- Parents**
1. Have you met (teacher's name)?
  2. How does (name) seem to be doing with his/her teachers?

**Category**     *Relationships with peers*

- Students**
1. Did you know anyone at this school when you came here?
  2. Are any of your friends in your classes? Who?
  3. What are the other students like?
  4. Do you see any of the kids in your classes outside of school?
  5. What do you do with your friends?
  6. Are you involved in any activities outside of school? Are any of the other students in them too?

- Parents**
1. Did (name) know anyone at the middle school when he/she/ went there?
  2. Is (name) in any activities outside of school?
  3. Does (name) get together with friends outside of school, when, how often?

- Teachers**
1. How does (name) get along with the other students in your class?
  2. Does (name) talk with them a lot? When?
  3. Do you think (name) has made friends in the middle school? Why?

### *Data analysis*

The data were triangulated for validation. The type of triangulation that I used consists of checking "inferences and facts drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others" (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1992, p. 198). I did this by asking questions which addressed the same topic in interviews with the student, parent, a teacher at Dashwood School and at the middle school.

In analyzing the data both definitive and sensitizing concepts were considered (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1992, p. 180). Definitive concepts are those attributes that the data have in common. The initial interviews provided the basis for the definitive concepts and helped me to understand the students' world, their perspectives and the issues that are important to them.

Sensitizing concepts are data that suggest directions that I had not considered when I asked the questions or organized the study. This includes issues that Denzin refers to as "not raised when the study was begun."

I followed the analysis process of observation, note processing and reflection found in *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1992, p. 165.) In order to do this I scheduled time between each student interview to transcribe tapes and to analyze data. Interviews with the students were conducted during the last six weeks of the spring initial data collection. Interviews with the students' teachers and parents occurred between the student interviews. Interviews with some parents and students also continued over the summer months. Observations of the students occurred regularly throughout the first six weeks of the study. Because I was at the school every day with the students, I was able to have several impromptu interviews with teachers and students as well as formal interviews. I was also able to observe the students in many situations such as special events, classrooms, hallways, etc.

During the fall data collection, teacher and parents interviews were scheduled during the middle and end of the transition study. This gave teachers time to learn about

their new students and gave parents a chance to observe adjustment to the new school. Observations of the student behavior occurred in spaces of several hours, half days and whole days throughout the fall six weeks. I was able to observe the students in multiple classrooms, hallways and special programs.

The definitive concepts, those that are common issues, emerged from the sequential interviews with students, parents and teachers. Denzin refers to the sequential interview process as "prolonged interviews." The prolonged interview data collection was valuable because it allowed me to know the students for a steady period of time and to combine observations, look for patterns, formulate new questions and learn sensitizing concepts. As I was learning about the students and establishing and building a data foundation, I was able to continue to "interact with the subjects and reflect upon their statements" (Denzin, 1970, p. 237).

#### *Document Analysis*

Student descriptive data from Dashwood School and public school files were used to aid in the formation of an understanding of the educational world and experiences of the students. Data gathered from Dashwood School included scores on the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Test, the Wide Range Achievement Test, the Peabody Individual Achievement Test, the Key Math Test, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children and scores on the Literacy Passport Test. It also included whether the students received special services such as counseling or speech and any other test results which were available.

Descriptive information which relates to middle school academic progress was obtained from the middle school teachers. These data included the teachers' indications of the students' academic progress during the first six weeks of the fall semester. The descriptive information added to an understanding of the individual. "Records, then are used to establish actors as 'cases' with situated identities, which conform to 'normal'

categories or deviate in certain identifiable and recordable ways" (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1992, p. 142).

### *Coding data patterns*

In order to understand the information that was available through the multiple interviews, I needed to organize it. My procedures were to read through the transcriptions and my notes soon after each interview. I also wrote in my journal. This enabled me to become familiar and comfortable with the data from each interview before the next scheduled interview. After reading through each transcription, notes and the journal, I coded themes and patterns by making notes in the margins and color coding themes. Sometimes it was necessary to group the same notes under multiple codes and sometimes to cut out sections of notes and paste themes together on paper (Delamont, 1992, p. 154).

### *Role of the researcher*

Through the process of completing this study I have come to appreciate the importance of the personal perceptions of the researcher to the study. Each person views incidents and issues through his own personal lens. This lens is made up of the experiences and beliefs of the researcher and those beliefs influence how the study is conducted. For instance, this study was a personal experience for me because I have been involved in education for many years and have been an administrator at Dashwood School, one of the schools in the study. I grew to know the students and to care about their experiences in both schools. Sanjek addresses the involvement which occurs in ethnographic research,

Ethnographic research is an intensely personal experience for the fieldworker. She or he meets people, is introduced to still others, locates a

range of informants, develops a variety of relationships, and enters data about and from this set of persons into fieldnotes (Sanjek, 1990, p. 398).

In conducting and reporting this study there are several factors which are tensions or dilemmas that I dealt with. My role as an administrator at Dashwood School may have clouded my ability to view the educational situation clearly from the students' perspective. I needed to be aware of hearing and understanding from the students' viewpoints, rather than my own. I found that the students and their parents were often openly critical of teachers or schools other than Dashwood School. I often wondered whether they would have felt more comfortable making critical remarks about the school if I had not been affiliated with it.

I sometimes felt uncomfortable when parents explained a situation differently than I had observed it or than it had been described by a teacher. In one incident, a parent described putting a lot of effort into helping with a classroom project. The classroom teacher had explained the project as a frustrating experience because the same parent would not help with the project.

The prolonged interview strategy may have affected the study. The interview questions might have caused the students to think about and reflect on the discussion topics. This reflection process might have caused a change in the individual's thinking. The questions during the spring and fall were on similar issues which could have affected answers through familiarity with the discussion on these topics.

In addition, my reactions needed to be carefully guarded. Because I have been a teacher for twenty-two years, I have concerns about issues in education. Revealing those concerns could cause the student, teacher or parent to guard responses. This was true when Pam was telling me about attending a rock concert during the school week and missing school as a result of it. I wanted Pam to be relaxed and comfortable telling me

about her experience and so I needed to be guarded concerning my personal judgment regarding attending a late night rock concert during the school week.

Another tension was inherent in this study because I am an administrator at one of the schools while I was observing classrooms in another. I needed to create a rapport and help the public school teachers feel comfortable with my observing in their classrooms. In order to do this, I talked with them about topics of interest to them before and after class, graded papers and helped students during the class.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Students at Dashwood School**

There are three eleven year old, Caucasian students in this study. Two of the students are females, one is male. All have been at Dashwood School for at least one year, ranging from one year to three years. Each had been evaluated as a student with a learning disability prior to entering Dashwood School and all three students had experienced academic difficulty in the regular classroom before third grade. One female participant, Pam, was educated in Dashwood School because the school district believed it would be the best place for her education. The other female, Vicki, was placed at Dashwood School because her mother was not satisfied with the school district's educational accommodations for Vicki's learning difficulties and she wanted her daughter to be educated in an individualized school setting. The school district paid the tuition for both Pam and Vicki to attend Dashwood School.

Joe attended Dashwood School because his mother was not satisfied with the education he was receiving in the public school. She wanted him to be educated in a school which she believed would understand his learning difficulty and that specialized in teaching students with learning disabilities. The school district did not believe the placement in Dashwood School was necessary for Joe to receive an appropriate education and they would not pay his tuition. Therefore, Joe's parents paid the tuition for Joe to attend Dashwood School.

*Who are the participants?*

*Vicki*

Vicki is a slim young lady with short blond hair who has been a student at Dashwood School for three years. She is popular with her peers and gets along well with her teachers at both Dashwood School and the middle school. She is described by her



teachers as "precious." Her mother refers to her as the family "peacemaker." Vicki enjoys recreational league basketball outside of school. She attends school dances and enjoys talking on the telephone and getting together with her friends. .

Psychological reports refer to Vicki as shy, cooperative and unsure of her abilities. The second grade psychologist's report described Vicki as "cooperative but appeared reserved and somewhat shy, speaking in a low volume...an average-appearing, cooperative, and attentive young lady." The fifth grade psychologist's report states that Vicki "is described as generally average in comparison with other students at the Dashwood School...She was very attentive during this evaluation; although she seems somewhat unsure of her abilities at times, Vicki is readily encouraged to attempt more challenging tasks."

Vicki is described by her mother as someone who "likes to be going all the time. She likes to go places, she likes to be with her friends. She is more social. Well, I guess all of my daughters are that way with their friends...she has a lot of friends."

Vicki lives in a single parent home. There are six children, foreign exchange students and Vicki's mother in the family. Some of the children have more severe learning and emotional problems than Vicki. When these difficulties result in hospitalization, they cause additional stress on the family and attention and energies are spent on those children with the most immediate problems.

#### *Vicki's family*

Vicki is a twin in a family of six children who range in age from seven to sixteen. Vicki is one of twin eleven year olds. The family lives in an established middle class neighborhood. Her mother has recently taken a job monitoring telephones at the family's church.

Her parents have been involved in a bitter divorce which has resulted in the three oldest daughters being estranged from their father; they refuse to visit with him. Vicki,

her twin and their younger brother see him every other weekend. Her Dashwood School teachers, the Dashwood School secretary and the observation section of the public school system's sociocultural assessment all note the "close relationship" that Vicki has with her father. Vicki's mother, Mrs. Cook, has remarked that Vicki is the closest of the children to her father. Mrs. Cook indicates that Vicki spends every other weekend with him, although she stays overnight with her grandmother near her father's home.

The family consists of five daughters and one son. The oldest daughter is a student in an international baccalaureate program, which Vicki's mother describes as "really advanced, but it is tough, extremely tough." She expressed concern that her oldest daughter had not received the grammatical skills that she needed to succeed in this challenging program. However, she believes that Vicki has these skills and "so I think that she is going to do okay." She continued,

As a matter of fact she has learned more skills, I think, she, she is probably going to be better prepared than a lot of the kids that are there [middle school]. Just when she was writing the papers she...made a lot of English papers this year and had to do a report. These were things that...and my other girls had not done had not been prepared for that...the grammar, they just...were not prepared...had not done that.

The second daughter, as well as the oldest, are in gifted programs and advanced placement classes.

The third daughter, Leah, who is 13 years old, has been identified as having learning problems. She has received tutoring to help her with her learning. Her mother describes her as "the kind of child who will play both parents against each other if she could." This child was hospitalized in a psychiatric center for three days this spring. She was experiencing depression and suicidal tendencies. After the weekend that Leah was hospitalized, Vicki returned to school with numerous bruises and scratches on her face

and neck that she told her teachers had been caused by this sister. Vicki's teacher reported,

Vicki came in the other day all scratched up and banged up. She and Leah had a physical fight, and Vicki is not one bit aggressive, not an iota of aggressiveness in that child. Apparently Leah got mad at her and just attacked her. She was full of scratches, her neck, around her eyes; oh, she looked terrible.

Vicki's twin, Michelle, who also attends Dashwood School, misses quite a bit of school due to complications of epilepsy. Mrs. Borden, the Dashwood School teacher, describes her as having "profound learning difficulties." She is described by her mother as having visual perception problems. Visual perception refers to the ability to understand the meaning of visual stimuli and are associated with reading skills (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 84). Additionally, Mrs. Cook stated that, "Michelle does have central auditory processing disorder, among other things, and it has never actually been labeled. Just multiple learning disabilities." Michelle is described by her mother as, "Michelle is the spunkiest and she is...she is my child...she is amazing to me she can...she has this perceptual thing, she can read people. It's unbelievable how she knows how people are, she is just real feisty and spunky."

Mrs. Cook described Vicki as a perfectionist.

She is such a perfectionist in everything. She is really high strung, she gets embarrassed very easily and ...she is the peacemaker. Everything has to be...you know if somebody is arguing, she tries to be the peacemaker, her sister or...she would rather give in than have an argument. I think the thing that worries me the most is her being such a perfectionist. I mean it is good to a degree, but it is not to the degree that

you worry, to the degree that she does worry. Even her room...her room, has to be...to the point that her room has to be...a certain way.

She relates this tendency to be a perfectionist to the characteristics that she found in her ex-husband. "[ex-husband] was such a perfectionist that he wouldn't ride in the car with the family to church. Yeah, he wouldn't go anywhere....everything had to be perfect all of the time. Just totally perfect."

Later in the interview, Vicki's mother referred to Vicki as a perfectionist again.

I see it as perfectionist. The way she is about her room. The way she is about her...ahum, like a funny thing like money. Vicki loves money. She loves to have it and she will hold on to a nickel. Because we tell her that she is going to be an investment banker some day and she knows every penny, nickel, dime whatever that she has to a degree that...one of the older girls, her older sisters will say, Vicki can I have a dollar? And she writes it down. It's funny, we laugh at her all of the time. She is the only one like that. The others are not such tightwads.

She is extremely high strung about doing things right about wanting to be perfect. She worries....It was to the point where I would call the teachers several times and say, she is driving me crazy. It has to be perfect. She comes in the door and the first thing she does is sit down at the table and work. And she will hardly do anything else. It has to be right.

When things do not go right, Vicki's mother reports that "she cries, whines, stomps her feet."

The youngest child, Kevin, is a boy who is described by his mother as not having any difficulties in school. Kevin had friends in the home while I was interviewing his mother.

In addition to being the single mother of six children, Vicki's mother also has exchange students living in the home. Last year's exchange student returned from Europe to vacation with the family before beginning college in the fall.

Vicki's mother has recently started working part-time outside of the home. She has obtained a job answering the telephone a few days each week at two local churches. She told me that she particularly enjoys the job because her hours and days were flexible.

The combination of the bitter divorce, the exchange student and the new job has left Vicki's mother very busy. The turmoil in the home has affected Vicki. This was evident at Dashwood School where Vicki often arrived at 9 a.m. instead of 8:15 a.m. because her mother did not get her there earlier. In addition, her teacher at Dashwood School, Mrs. Borden, was concerned because Vicki was not taken to the library to check out books for a school report. Mrs. Borden states,

I would say of the six reports she was late on three of them. Her mother couldn't get her to the library. They had six weeks to do outside research, get information and to write the rough draft and bring it in. And she was late quite a few times. Her mother called me with some excuses, which sounded valid, you know, several times. They just didn't get it organized....We ended up getting her the books here.

Notes that were sent home reminding the mother of the importance of the library trip were unanswered. Telephone calls that the teachers made to the mother concerning these reports were not returned. The teacher continued,

I have checked with the parents. I told them countless times that this was coming, and she indicated that this was not a problem. I think Mom just

doesn't have her act together like she use to. She's [Vicki] come in without a coat quite a few times in the middle of winter, just forgets it. She's [Mrs. Cook] just not as organized. I mean, I see such a difference from last year when the divorce was just starting. I think things have become very unpleasant.

#### *Vicki's early education*

Vicki's kindergarten teacher had recommended that she repeat kindergarten. Her parents had felt, however, that since it was a half-day program and they were unable to send Vicki to a full day program at another school, she would not benefit from another year of half-day kindergarten.

She went to first grade. Vicki's mother requested that a Child Study Committee be formed and that Vicki be tested by the school system during the fall of her first grade. The Child Study Committee consists of teachers, psychologists, parents and administrators. The committee's purpose is to design an educational plan for a child. In making a recommendation, the committee reviews recent psychological tests which include cognitive level, grades, teacher progress reports, socio-cultural reports and medical examinations. All of this data is used to draw a conclusion concerning the best educational methods and setting for a student. A determination might include placement in a specialized school or in remedial classes.

The first grade testing indicated that Vicki was able to write the alphabet, but could not name the letters. She could write her name, but could not identify the letters. She was able to identify ten out of thirteen upper case letters, could identify one word, but was unable to spell any words. Although her chronological age was 6.4 years, her age equivalent on the Kaufman Test of Achievement was below age 6.0 in math, reading, and spelling. Her perceptual age on the Bender Gestalt was 5.9 to 5.11 years old. The Visual Aural Digit Span Test reflected a test age of 6.6 to 6.8 years with a comment that

the scores were significantly weaker in written expression. On the WISC her full scale IQ was 84, her Verbal IQ was 87 and her Perceptual IQ was 84. (See definitions)

The testing psychologist wrote that she was within the low average range of cognitive ability and that she was immature in academic readiness and visual motor skills. Her committee did not find her eligible for any special education programs. At that time the testing psychologist recommended that she be taught with repeated drills, repetition with letter recognition and formation and associating sounds with letters. The first grade teacher recommended that Vicki repeat first grade.

Vicki's parents chose to send her to second grade. In October of second grade, Vicki again received a battery of tests "owing to concerns regarding her slow progress in reading, particularly as it relates to distinguishing sounds." The testing school psychologist wrote,

Cognitive functioning continues to be measured in the low-average range. Her language arts skills do parallel over all intellectual development....There is not a statistically significant difference between ability and achievement. Educational growth relative to formal skills will probably progress at a rate moderately slower than that of the average student, however she should be able to maintain pace with the regular classroom given instructional materials at her level.

Vicki's mother indicated that there was disagreement between the members of the child study committee over the results of Vicki's second grade testing. "There were disagreements between school psychologists and disagreements between teachers. One person even got up and walked out of a meeting because there was so...there was such a difference in opinion as to what Vicki's problem was." During this meeting the speech and hearing supervisor for the school system suggested that Vicki be evaluated for a

Central Auditory Processing (CAP) disorder. (see Appendix A) Vicki's mother took her to a local university where this test was administered to Vicki.

The results of this testing indicated that Vicki had difficulty putting together sounds that she hears in each ear. The sounds which are heard by a person generally fuse into a single word, however, sounds did not merge into one intelligible word which Vicki could understand. The testing also indicated that Vicki had difficulty understanding words when they are spoken in a noisy environment.

The testing audiologist made five recommendations. He recommended that Vicki either sit very close to her teacher or that she use an FM system; that Vicki receive individual tutoring for her reading skills, especially sound symbol associations; that Vicki receive auditory training to develop listening skills in the presence of noise; that her central auditory skills be retested in one year; and that Vicki receive individual therapy to develop phonemic synthesis skills. Phonemic synthesis refers to the ability to blend sounds into words (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 270).

The FM system was initiated. This system consists of ear molds which Vicki wore and a small microphone which the teacher wore ( BeVille, Personal communication, October 30, 1996). Vicki's mother stated, "It worked for awhile, but she could, even the rustle of classroom paper or whatever, she would lose part of what she was hearing."

Vicki's mother continued to be dissatisfied with the efforts of the school system to educate Vicki. She was very active in the PTA and other organizations at Vicki's elementary school and was able to voice her complaints and concerns about the school to administrators within the school system. Vicki's mother knew about the educational processes at Dashwood School and she believed the school would provide the best education for her daughter. Vicki's mother said, "I don't know who it was that suggested Dashwood School." She later mentioned, however, that many years ago she had worked at Dashwood School and was familiar with the program.



Because of Mrs. Cook's continuing concerns, Vicki's educational committee reconvened and the decision was made to place Vicki in a school which specializes in the education of students with learning disabilities. Neither of Vicki's psychological test reports through the school systems found her to be learning disabled because she does not meet the diagnostic criteria. Her cognitive levels are consistently low to low-average. There is not a discrepancy between cognitive level and performance and she is described as an over achiever.

An audiologist, however, found that her area of learning difficulty seemed to be in central auditory processing which inhibited her understanding what she would hear. Although the report recommended individual instruction, she has not received individual tutoring outside of Dashwood School to help her learn the sound symbol relationships.

*Vicki's learning difficulty: Central Auditory Processing*

Vicki has been diagnosed by an audiologist as having Central Auditory Processing Disorder. The audiologist indicated in his report that this auditory processing difficulty causes words to be unclear for her. The audiologist's report recommends that she receive in-depth instruction in phoneme/grapheme relationships. She has been receiving this instruction through Dashwood School for several years and her teachers have indicated on Vicki's progress reports that she has mastered the 98 sounds of the Initial Sound Deck. (see Definitions) The second grade psychologist's report indicates that she would benefit from a nurturing environment. She has been in a supportive school and has established a close relationship with one of the teacher assistants who spends time reassuring her and supporting her efforts to learn.

Vicki's difficulty with relating sounds and letters was first mentioned in her first grade psychologist's report. At that time the testing psychologist recommended that she receive drills "associating sounds with letters." This was addressed through the Initial Reading Deck.

The second grade psychologist's report states that Vicki understood language and that her achievement levels reflected her ability levels. The report states, "Her language structures were adequate, and she readily understood the language-based questions." It continues, "She had a significant deficit falling well below-average on a task requiring visual analysis where she could not rearrange blocks into a pattern like that presented on a card." In regard to language arts, the report states, "Her language arts skills do parallel overall intellectual development. In this regard, there is not a statistically significant difference between ability and achievement."

The second grade audiologist's report states that,

Vicki does demonstrate an auditory processing difficulty. Her main area of weakness is binaural fusion. This means that it is difficult for her to put together what she hears in each ear. Although this skill will develop further with age, she performed significantly poorer than other children her age. Vicki had no trouble understanding sentences in the presence of a single competing sentence, but the considerable drop in word recognition in noise shows that she will have considerable difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments such as the classroom.

This report recommends that she receive "individual tutoring for her reading skills, especially sound symbol associations."

A speech/language diagnostic evaluation completed in fifth grade reflected a single word receptive vocabulary score at the twenty fifth percentile. However, the evaluation indicates that Vicki "displays no articulation" problems. A test given to evaluate expressive vocabulary and semantic knowledge reflected scores that were "well within age and standard score norms on semantic abilities." The over all results were that Vicki did not need speech therapy because she has "...age appropriate semantic (word

meaning) and syntactic (form, structure and word order of a sentence) skills" (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 17).

The fifth grade Central Auditory Processing Report states in its introduction that,

Mrs. Cook reported that Vicki is presently enrolled in the fifth grade and is experiencing difficulty listening to directions in school. Other problems reported by Mrs. Cook include ear infections, and language delays, learns poorly through the auditory channel, performance is below average in one or more subjects, says 'huh?' and 'what?' at least five or more times/day, difficulty with phonics, difficulty following auditory directions, often misunderstands what is said, easily distracted by background sounds, forgets what is said in a few minutes, cannot always relate what is heard with what is seen, and has trouble recalling a sequence she has heard.

The fifth grade Central Auditory Processing test results found a "profound delay in blending sounds into words." It also states that, "The speech discrimination in noise test demonstrated some delay separating the speech signal from background noise when using both ears." This report suggests that Vicki would benefit from improving "her knowledge of phonemes of the language." It also suggests the use of a "Free-field auditory enhancement system should be most beneficial to eliminate background noise and significantly enhance the speech signal." This is a system which utilizes speakers in the classroom. It enhances the teacher's voice and minimizes ambient noises such as shuffling paper and whispering (BeVillie, Personal communication, October 30, 1996).

The fifth grade progress report from Dashwood School also addresses Vicki's knowledge of the phoneme/grapheme relationships.

She has worked hard to master the 98 phoneme/grapheme relationships of the Initial Reading Deck, all additional

phoneme/graphemes and final stable syllables of the Advanced Reading Deck, and the entire Spelling Deck.(see Definitions) In addition she has mastered the six syllable types, five syllabication rules, rules for adding suffixes, and pluralization rules for weekly spelling tests.

*Inconsistencies concerning Vicki's ability to follow directions, her language arts skills, hearing and Central Auditory Processing skills and parental support*

There were differing viewpoints involving Vicki's ability to follow directions, her language arts skills, and her ability to hear and process language. There were also inconsistencies concerning Vicki's parental support towards her education.

*Ability to follow directions*

The teachers and Vicki's mother differ regarding their views of Vicki's ability to follow directions. Vicki's mother stated during the second grade sociocultural assessment that "Vicki has problems with short term memory and problems following directions. She stated that she has not observed any attention problems." However, the testing psychologist at that time did not mention finding problems with short term memory, attention or following directions.

Her ability to follow directions appeared again in the referral section of the second grade psychologist's report. "She is noted [by her mother]as having difficulty following directions." However, Vicki's memory is addressed later in the report,

A variety of sub tests indicates that short-term auditory memory is a relative strength, and that short-term visual memory is a moderate weakness. She has good memory for sequential auditory facts involving numbers or words. Visual memory skills were low-average, and compared to overall cognitive development.

In fifth grade, teacher behavior reports state that Vicki does not "display a short attention span, have difficulty completing academic tasks, or become easily distracted. The report continues, [she obeys] "teacher's directives or classroom rules."

The fifth grade psychologist's report concurs with the teacher's views of Vicki's ability to attend. It lists Vicki's strengths as "attention, paper-pencil skills, work habits and group skills." Her weaknesses are listed as "expressive and receptive vocabulary, generalization of learning, high cognitive abilities, expressive writing and math skills."

In contrast to these two reports, Mrs. Cook described Vicki to the audiologist as unable to follow directions or comprehend what has been said to her.

#### *Language arts skills*

Mrs. Cook and Vicki's teacher at Dashwood School, Mrs. Borden, differ in their perceptions of Vicki's strengths in her language arts skills. Vicki's test results reflect that her skills are weaker than Mrs. Cook believes they are.

Mrs. Cook's related to me that Vicki has a strong background in writing and grammar. She said that Vicki has been exposed to more report writing and grammar than her older daughters who are in advanced high school classes. She continued to describe her belief that Vicki was more prepared for success in the middle school than her other daughters had been when they entered the middle school.

However, the fifth grade Gates MacGinities Reading Test indicates that Vicki's skills lag by two years. Vicki entered the sixth grade reading on the 4.2 grade level. The Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement administered during fifth grade indicated that her written sample is 3.8 grade equivalent; her punctuation is 3.3 grade equivalent; her spelling level is 4.8 grade equivalent, her word usage is 4.1 grade equivalent and her proofreading skills are 3.9 grade equivalent. Mrs. Borden, Vicki's language arts teacher, also expressed concern about Vicki's language arts skills, "She has a lot of problems with

comprehension...she looks blank when...she just doesn't understand language, she doesn't understand the use of words."

### *Hearing and Central Auditory Processing*

There have been differing opinions about Vicki's ability to hear and to process language through central auditory processing . The second grade Central Auditory Processing evaluation mentions a ruptured eardrum and tubes in her ears.

Medical history was positive for repeated ear infections when Vicki was younger, and she had P.E. tubes placed when she was three years old. About two years ago, Vicki ruptured her eardrum as the result of an accident. Her hearing was evaluated at that time and found to be within normal limits.

The information concerning a ruptured eardrum does not appear to be pursued as a complication to Vicki's hearing. It is not included on any psychological test results, the sociocultural assessment did not mention it, nor did the speech reports.

Vicki has been a student at Dashwood School because it was believed that she had a central auditory processing difficulty. Central Auditory Processing (CAP) (see Appendix) refers to the way in which auditory information is processed. When the information is not processed efficiently and accurately the ability to communicate and to learn is impacted (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 12). Although two audiologists have identified this problem, the education system does not believe Vicki had this problem when she entered the middle school. As a result, Vicki no longer qualified for special education services.

Interestingly, Vicki's last audiologist's report suggested that she receive the instruction that her teachers had stated that she had mastered. The audiologist wrote that Vicki could benefit from improving "her knowledge of phonemes of the language." A

month earlier her teacher wrote, "she has mastered the 98 phoneme/grapheme relationships."

### *Parental support*

Vicki's mother was persistent in pursuing psychological testing and educational modifications for her when she was in first and second grade, before she entered Dashwood School. As Vicki was preparing to leave Dashwood School, the public school home-school visitor was compiling data for Vicki's continuing eligibility for special services through the school system. These services included the \$7,000 tuition payment at Dashwood School. In order to complete the data, a current Central Auditory Processing examination needed to be completed. Vicki had been identified as having a central auditory processing difficulty and it was this difficulty which classified her as eligible for special services. The home-school visitor was frustrated because he had assured Vicki's mother that the school system would pay for the examination, she only needed to make an appointment and take Vicki for the test. Vicki's mother did not return phone calls or answer his letters.

In May, Vicki's eligibility meeting was held. Eligibility meetings are important because they determine services which students will receive. Parents, teacher and school representatives attend the meetings. Vicki's mother did not come to the meeting and the Central Auditory Processing examination had not been completed prior to the eligibility date. Before the meeting formally began, the staff at Dashwood School called Vicki's mother to ask if she would like the meeting delayed so that she might attend. She told them that she had to work and would not be able to attend the meeting.

During our later interviews, Mrs. Cook commented that the flexibility of her job was important to her so that she would be home when her children needed her and could attend school functions. Her statement to me contradicted her earlier reason for not attending Vicki's eligibility meeting.

Additionally, Mrs. Borden, the teacher at Dashwood School, expressed frustration with Mrs. Cook's inability to take Vicki to the library in order to complete her class reports. She was also concerned because Vicki often arrived late for school and often without a coat during the winter months.



### *Joe*

Joe is a brown haired, eleven year old boy who plans to be a veterinarian when he grows up. Joe is quiet in school and plays recreational league soccer. He has attended Boy Scout camp and participated in swimming activities. His mother and his teachers view him as a worrier who likes to have his school work perfect. They describe Joe as a student who sets high expectations for himself, but does not like to correct his work.

Joe's last formal academic report completed by his Dashwood School teachers, lists these areas of concern:

- \* sensitive to academic correction
- \* quick to demoralize
- \* unrealistic personal expectations
- \* spelling application (weekly tests on a list are excellent)
- \* written language (formulating topic sentence, unity, clarity)
- \* proofreading and editing (does not find errors)
- \* copying (far point is most difficult).

Far point refers to copying material which is on the blackboard while sitting at a desk in the classroom. Written language deficits are recognized by being "unable to categorize or classify words in the proper sequence....written communication...is usually marked by gross disorganization. Units of thoughts are completely scrambled throughout paragraphs and even within sentences" (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 186).

My observations of Joe reflected his frequent tendency to demoralize. He often would have a depressed, sad look when he walked in the halls and sat in class. His behavior in class reflected a lot of wiggling, looking around and staring into space.

### *Joe's family*

Joe is the older son in a family of two boys. He was born in Canfield, a college town about an hour north of his present home in Wattsville. When Joe was in kindergarten his parents divorced. During the summer before Joe's second grade, his mother remarried and she and the boys moved to her husband's home in Wattsville.

The move was very traumatic for both Joe and his mother, Mrs. Boxe. She reports that Joe's younger brother, Tate, who was two years old at the time, seems to have been less negatively affected by it. Joe still talks about his friends in Canfield and the cul-de-sac on which they lived. Even though many of his former friends have also moved away from the neighborhood, Joe still regards it as home and misses bike riding and his friends there. His father still lives in the Canfield area. He has not remarried and Joe and his brother visit with him every other weekend, as well as for extended periods of time during the summer. Their father stays with the boys in Wattsville when Joe's mother and stepfather travel.

During our interviews, Joe and his mother described the move to Wattsville as difficult. Mrs. Boxe said,

Moving to Wattsville was a really hard, hard thing to do for all of us. Just the physical moving away from all of our friends, our family, my working, my job. And unfortunately I was going through the same things that the kids were going through....So it was just all of us, we were going through it.

Joe's adjustment difficulties to this move resulted in anxiety attacks after returning from visits to his father's home. During these anxiety attacks, Joe's emotions and behavior were difficult to control and he had trouble breathing. He received counseling in order to help him deal with his emotions concerning these changes. Joe's

mother explained that the counselor felt that the anxiety was misplaced fear and he worked with Joe to help him cope with his feelings.

### *Joe's early education*

When Joe was in kindergarten at Hall Elementary School in Canfield, the teachers felt that Joe needed to continue developing his pre-reading skills. But, they did not regard his language skills as seriously deficient. Mrs. Boxe said, "he knew the alphabet and he knew the sounds, but he could not get them to go together, so early on...kindergarten he did fine and I guess they just gave him that space ...to develop."

The ability to put letters and sounds together is referred to as perception, "the cognitive ability of the individual to both recognize and integrate external stimuli" (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 181). Joe's difficulty matching known sounds and letters indicates trouble with the visual perception aspects of language processing. This continues to be a difficult area for Joe because even as he has learned to read and write his spelling skills have lagged. This is due to spelling skills involving the ability to transpose sounds to letters accurately as part of the visual perception skills (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 181).

During first grade, Joe participated in the Chapter I reading program at Hall Elementary school. He also attended a summer program at Hall Elementary, before he moved to Wattsville. Mrs. Boxe regarded these programs as supplemental to Joe's regular reading instruction. She did not view Joe's participation in these programs to be indicative of a reading deficit.

After two months as a new second grade student at Cass Elementary, Joe's mother was informed that "he's got a problem and we've got to have him tested." She was surprised, "I just kind of figured that he was like a little boy who didn't like to read and...was just into other things. I didn't think there was a problem." She was also surprised that he had a learning difficulty because "he was making grades that were A's

and B's, even on his report card." Mrs. Boxe continued to describe the transition to Cass Elementary School,

It was a struggle and...we were not used to the homework that they dished out and it was...plus we had just moved, it was a huge transitional thing for Joe too. So, in the back of my mind, I'm thinking this is a transitional thing. He is going into a school that is like so far above, academically what he came out of that it is just...a whole lot of things weren't clicking.

During the first part of second grade, Mrs. Boxe and Joe also became aware of his difficulty with written expression. Difficulties with written expression are often not discovered until second or third grade because it is when students are generally required to communicate through the written rather than the verbal medium (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 186). The second grade students at Cass Elementary were writing in journals. Joe had not written in journals before and he experienced difficulty putting sentences together. Mrs. Boxe said, "Joe had never been exposed to that and he was going into it and now they are writing journals. So, he had this problem with the written expression."

In November of Joe's second grade, testing which was administered by the school district reflected that he was a student with a learning disability. In January of Joe's second grade at Cass Elementary School, he was placed in the language arts class for students with a learning disability. He continued receiving language arts instruction in this classroom for the remainder of second grade.

Mrs. Boxe requested that the language arts learning disabilities teacher instruct Joe in areas that she felt he had missed as a result of changing schools. She described the resulting subject matter as, "They went back to pop pop and all of that kind of stuff and I mean he was making A's and then the next day he didn't know how to spell them." By

December of his third grade, Mrs. Boxe spoke with school administrators and said, "I can't see that you guys are doing anything differently, I want him out of this class because number one there is a stigma attached to it and I don't see what you are doing differently." She continued, "He [Joe] didn't understand that it was important to spell correctly." She felt that it was "important ...to know that you can't spell" and that making corrections is "ultimately your responsibility." Mrs. Boxe believed that Joe should become aware of how he learned and find methods that allowed him to learn efficiently. Mrs. Boxe described her frustration, "the bottom line was, that the schools were dealing with the learning disabilities problem, the way that they knew to deal with it and it was not benefiting Joe. They were not instilling in him responsibilities about what learning disabilities entails."

Mrs. Boxe continued,

I don't think that he learned anything about dealing with the learning disability....I think that they tried to sugar coat it with the kids themselves. I don't think that they dealt with the kids individually that did have a learning disability because they were in to that everyone is kind of equal and needs to have the same opportunities....but when you have someone who is different and they do need extra things, you need to be aware of it...Because ...they weren't teaching him the skills that he needed.

Mrs. Boxe was frustrated with instruction in the class for students with a learning disability because she did not feel that the instructional techniques and material were individualized to meet Joe's educational needs. She explained that she talked with the teacher and said,

He doesn't know how to spell...he doesn't have a concept of what spelling is, so why don't we go back to the very beginning and start with words that sound alike so that he can get that understanding.

You know, he was in second grade [before placement in resource language arts] with that whole language they were encompassing all of the words that he had in English and math and social studies...so that he would come home with lists of spelling words like culture and multiplication and there was no way...for him to logically put patterns together.

Joe spent the remainder of his third grade in the regular classroom with his progress being monitored by the learning disabilities teacher. He was also receiving tutoring after school in language arts by another learning disabilities teacher in the school system. At the end of third grade, Mrs. Boxe said, "It dawned on me again, I've got someone from the school who is doing what they think they know is the best for him, but I don't think they have the time to pinpoint exactly what he needed as far as growing goes."

Because of Mrs. Boxe's dissatisfaction with Joe's tutoring during third grade, Joe was taught during the summer by a teacher unaffiliated with the school system. After the summer instruction, Joe entered the fourth grade at Cass Elementary without a tutor. His progress continued to be monitored by the learning disabilities teacher and he received class modifications for his learning difficulties. These accommodations included not having spelling errors counted against his grades and having more time in class to complete writing assignments.

After his fourth grade at Cass Elementary School, Joe's mother placed him in Dashwood School's summer program and then enrolled him in fifth grade at Dashwood School. The school system believed that Joe's educational needs were being met by the public school and, therefore, did not provide financial support for Joe to attend Dashwood School.

*Joe's learning difficulty: Specific Learning Disability of Written Expression Disorder*

Joe was initially tested during his second grade by the Wattsville County school district. The test results revealed a discrepancy between Joe's ability and his achievement levels as indicated by the WISC-III. (see Definitions) The WISC-III, Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Third Edition, is an oral, individually administered test of intelligence which yields a Verbal IQ, a Performance IQ, and a Full Scale IQ. Because it yields scores on both the verbal and nonverbal abilities of individuals, the WISC is the preferred intelligence test for students with learning disabilities (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 66).

The Performance IQ reflects Wechsler's belief that "the individual's drive and persistence are part of his intelligence." The Performance score is meant to reflect the individual's "drive mechanisms." The Verbal IQ reflects the person's ability to learn and perform in a school setting (Wilson, Robeck and Michael, 1969, p. 1969).

Joe's Full Scale WISC score was 103-112, with Verbal sub test of 111-121 and Performance sub test of 91-105. The variations in these scores signified the discrepancy which allowed Joe to be eligible for special services through the public school system as a student with a learning disability. Research has shown that students with a markedly higher Performance IQ may have a language problem and that a markedly higher Verbal IQ may indicate emotional blocking (Goodwin and Klausmeier, 1975, p. 501). The second grade reporting psychologist wrote, "Joe displayed a significant weakness in auditory sequencing on the Verbal scale." Auditory sequencing refers to the ability to remember the order of individual sounds. Students with this disorder usually have problems reciting the alphabet or carrying out directions in the order that they are given (Sutaria 1985, p. 128).

On the Performance scale, Joe exhibited a significant strength in concentration and visual-motor speed. Visual-motor speed refers to the ability to integrate vision with the movement of body parts. Children who have difficulty with visual-motor integration have trouble buttoning, lacing and cutting. They also usually experience difficulty copying from the chalkboard. This test also indicated that Joe displayed a significant weakness in visual sequencing. Visual sequencing refers to the ability to see objects in a particular sequential order. This would also affect an individual's ability to copy the alphabet in the correct order or to see the order of letters in words. His learning difficulties were thought to be based on "tasks which require perceptual organization skills such as visual organization and sequencing." The second grade psychological report also noted that Joe was "experiencing adjustment difficulties due to the recent move and resulting separation from his father."

Joe was tested by a psychologist in private practice after Joe finished the fifth grade. Those test results indicated that "there is no significant discrepancy between achievement and psychological test scores." As a result, the report continued, "Joe does not qualify as a student with learning disabilities by state and federal guidelines." The fifth grade psychological report continued,

One of the issues in Joe's struggle with written language is seen in his struggle with sequential production in general; that is, organizing ideas sequentially in a step-by-step fashion. Thus, he has problems generating the narrative flow of creative writing, developing outlines and writing drafts because of poor temporal staging (use of steps in a process). He also struggles with active working memory, so he has a very hard time writing, remembering and thinking at the same time.

Joe's "visual organization and sequencing" difficulties are evident through his spelling skills. He is unable to retain the memory of either individual letters or the



sequential order of letters in words. For example, visual sequential memory difficulties manifest in the spelling of words as "gril" instead of "girl" or "mthoer" instead of "mother" (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 184).

The psychologist's description of Joe's learning represents the characteristics of a student with a learning disability who is experiencing difficulty processing language. Because he has trouble putting sounds and symbols together (phonics), he also has difficulty writing those words. His trouble with sequencing affects his spelling of individual words and of stringing words into sentences (composition).

Mrs. Borden completed a questionnaire in which she describes Joe similarly as, A diligent student. He exhibits strengths in the areas of decoding, comprehension, vocabulary, math computation and problem solving. He has difficulty with spelling, written language, proofreading and editing, copying, and going beyond literal meanings to interpret and evaluate. Joe needs multiple explanations, repeated reinforcement and support after being introduced to new concepts.

Joe's difficulty with sequencing is addressed by both of the fifth grade psychologists who tested Joe. The school system's psychologist states "sequential processing continues to be very difficult for this youngster as he struggles with information, such as spelling and mathematics which must be in a certain order." The private practice psychologist wrote,

It is apparent that he is also struggling with visual sequential memory for letters within words in his creative writing. One of the issues in Joe's struggle with written language is seen in his struggle with sequential production in general; that is, organizing ideas sequentially in a step-by-step fashion. Thus, he has problems generating the narrative flow of creative writing, developing outlines, and writing drafts because of a

poor sense of temporal staging [putting time in perspective and managing time]. Writing requires that the student sustain the narrative flow while thinking and remembering the proper punctuation and capitalization for a sentence.

Joe's sequencing difficulty directly impacts his written expression. The sequencing of thoughts, clarity and unity are all affected by the written expression disorder. Joe practices his written expression skills in his language arts class. He writes daily in his journal and answers critical thinking questions. Mrs. Boxe is concerned that Joe will experience difficulty passing the written section of the state's Literacy Passport Test. She has hired a tutor to help prepare Joe for the spring examination.

Some of Joe's teacher's comments and the test results have indicated difficulty with copying. However, since Joe has entered middle school his board copying has not been a problem for him. The information that he has copied from the board has been neat, clear and easily understood. Spelling has continued to be a difficult area for Joe. For example, on a recent test, Joe spelled his name wrong, but his teacher's name correctly. He struggles with and worries about his weekly spelling tests.

### *Social issues*

Mrs. Borden, Joe's teacher at Dashwood School described Joe's social interactions with his peers as,

I think the position he is in at this school, he is one of the top learners. And it's apparent. They know their pecking order. He has enjoyed that thoroughly. He has set himself apart a little bit, that he is one of the special, better learners...but he has set himself apart.

Mrs. Borden perceives that Joe has purposely separated himself from the other students. However, children who are students with a learning disability, often demonstrate social inability by being shy and withdrawn. Sometimes they show extreme passivity and sometimes anxiety in the presence of their peers. Students with learning disabilities may exhibit little social initiative and may spend much of their time in isolation or relate to younger children, older youngsters, or adults more comfortably than with their own age peers (Levine, 1995, p. 226).

Social-emotional problems are common among students with learning disabilities. Some students with learning disabilities are described as being “lethargic, quiet, not given to much activity and the cause of little disturbance in class....this kind of child frequently causes him to go unnoticed in regular classrooms” (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 230).

#### *Inconsistencies in Joe's test results and sequencing ability*

Inconsistencies concerning Joe's learning center on differing test results and differences in his ability to sequence.

#### *Test results*

As part of the school district's testing, the Woodcock Johnson Reading Test, a reading test which consists of many sub tests, had been administered to Joe in third, fourth and fifth grades. (See Appendix A - Definitions) His scores reflect some changes in skill levels. Some of the sub tests were not calculated annually and are of less value for comparison. However, the broad reading, math, written language, and knowledge sub tests were reported consistently. Joe's math scores have improved steadily. However his written language scores reflect variability in improvement. His reading scores do indicate some change, but they are neither dramatic nor consistent.

Mrs. Boxe was alarmed by Joe's fifth grade written language grade equivalent score of 1.3. She was concerned that Joe had been at Dashwood School where he should have received intense, individualized instruction in written expression and she felt that the test scores were wrong. Because Mrs. Boxe was dissatisfied with these test results, she decided to have a psychologist who was not affiliated with the public school system administer a battery of tests to Joe.

The psychologist's report comments,

His face always clouded over when he was unsuccessful with an activity, and he needed reassurance throughout the evaluation that tasks were supposed to become more difficult before he would be given another activity to perform. It was necessary to reiterate that point frequently with Joe....However, with encouragement and the support of the counselor, he plugged along and completed everything that he was asked to do.

Joe's reactions to tasks that he perceived to be difficult reflects findings reported by Dweck and Elliot that if individuals perceive that they are incompetent in a task they will not be motivated to keep trying (Dweck and Elliot, p. 643-650 in Mussen 1983).

The local psychologist administered the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test rather than the school administered WISC-III. Wilson, Robeck and Michael (1969, p. 270) studied both tests and found that "youngsters with perceptual handicaps or those who had motor difficulties often did better on the Binet than on the WISC, which tends to penalize for these handicaps while testing for energy output." The psychologist wrote,

There seems to be even development between verbal and nonverbal reasoning and quantitative reasoning, with Joe consistently performing in the average range. His cognitive flexibility is generally typical for age, and his level of cognitive performance on the Binet indicates that he would be a comfortable C level student if he were able to

consistently perform at his current cognitive functioning level. Other psychological tests also indicate that general developmental status is average on a relatively consistent basis.

The report continued,

[Joe] technically does not qualify as a learning disabled student by state and federal guidelines because there is no significant discrepancy between achievement and psychological test scores. However, there are really two issues in his learning profile which impact dramatically on his academic performance and create stress for him in a regular classroom; his difficulty with sequential processing and active working memory.

The report concludes,

Joe's struggle with written language is seen in his struggle with sequential production in general; that is, organizing ideas sequentially in a step-by-step fashion. Thus, he has problems generating the narrative flow of creative writing, developing outlines, and writing drafts because of a poor sense of temporal staging. He also struggles with active working memory, so he has a very hard time writing, remembering and thinking at the same time....He just does not develop (memory) strategies independently and needs to be taught strategies for thinking, remembering, and organizing....Because he has so much difficulty with sequential processing, he really needs to see some overall plan of the gestalt in order to make sense of the parts.

Temporal staging refers to temporal-sequential disorganization which indicates a difficulty with the ordering and managing of things in relation to time. It affects Joe's ability to plan and use time efficiently and to remember things in the correct order. Joe's

difficulty with temporal sequencing affects his logical ordering of ideas in his written expression (Levine, 1994, p. 139).

The private psychologist's report does not support Joe's need for learning disability services. The test results did not reflect a discrepancy between his ability and achievement levels. However, it mirrors earlier concerns about Joe's written language. In addition, the psychologist added that Joe is unable to develop his own strategies for remembering information or to work efficiently without understanding how the parts of a task fit into the whole.

### *Sequencing*

Joe's psychological test results have revealed that Joe has difficulty with sequencing. Students with learning disabilities who are unable to sequence in the written medium are often able to do so orally. This was true of Joe. During our interviews, Joe was able to orally put events and directions in sequential order on several occasions. Joe was able to relate the order of a special program at Cass Elementary. This included the various activities, the order of presentation and his role in the special events.

In addition, Joe related a field trip that began with leaving at 5 a.m. His story includes a rough order of leaving in the morning, traveling by bus, visiting two towns and details about the trip.

We got to school at 5 a.m. We went to (first town),...(second town). Had lunch. We had to wait a long time there. It was a neat bus. It had TVs radios, the seats turned into little beds. After (second town), we went to another little place. It started raining. Me and my buddy got split up. We went to a doctor's house. The food was like it was back then. They had a gift shop. My friend bought some money for me that was like the olden times. We went to a military college. Saw rooms, food, gift

shop, uniforms, guns through the years. The guns held three bullets. I wouldn't want to go there.

Joe was also able to relate the steps in a science experiment.

We pulled layers off of a leaf. I did mine on euglena, a type of fungus. It's not plants or animals. It looks like a raindrop with a tail on it. You separate it with iodine, cornstarch mixture and water. The colors separate into layers 1-2-3.

He related a typical day at his Dad's house.

We're going to my Dad's. My aunt will take me to the mountains to ride horses while my Dad is at work. Then she will pick out a movie, we'll have lunch outside, we'll watch the movie. Dad comes home. He works, but he comes home early. Sometimes my Dad will cook. My brother likes to eat frosting.

Although Joe's test results have indicated that he has difficulties with written sequencing, he was able to orally relate events which include details in a reasonably sequential order.

### *Pam*

Pam Wills is a short, blond, freckle-faced youngster. She is attractive with long, full, sometimes straggly hair. Some days at Dashwood School Pam dressed in lovely, long cotton print dresses. But, on most days she dressed in Disney motif clothing and carried a Pocahontas motif backpack. She is warm, friendly and likes Barbie dolls. When I arrived at Dashwood School she greeted me with a hug and has not stopped spontaneously hugging in the time that I have known her. When I visited with the Wills family, Pam initiated my sitting in the living room and brought me a glass of ice tea. She is described by her teacher, Mrs. Borden, as "creative, she's not afraid to put a real cute thought to paper or unique thought, but certain skills are hard for her. She does have to keep working with them. I think she's going to be successful."

Pam's behavior difficulties have negatively impacted her education. Her school file is full of behavior incidents. In her latest psychological report the following areas were re-evaluated: ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), Separation Anxiety Disorder, Opposition Defiant Disorder, Specific Learning Disability, and Articulation Disorder. She has been a patient at a University Diagnostic Center, has taken several kinds of medicine to help regulate her behavior and currently sees a psychiatrist, a psychologist and while she was a student at Dashwood School, the school counselor.

### *Pam's family*

Pam is the middle child in a family of three girls. Her family lives on a cul-de-sac in an established neighborhood. There are children riding bikes in the wide street on which they live. The family's front yard is cluttered with broken and discarded toys and yard tools. The Wills family includes a cat, two friendly mixed breed dogs and two very unfriendly, thorough-bred, barking dogs that are kept in the basement.



Pam's older sister, Helen, has been diagnosed as being a student with a learning disability. Her mother, Mrs. Wills, describes Helen's learning difficulties as more general and Pam's as a learning problem which is caused by her lack of attention to task and behavior. Pam also has a younger sister, Sharon. She has not been tested for learning problems. Sharon attends a different elementary school than Pam attended while she was a student in the public schools.

#### *Pam's early education*

When Pam entered day care, she exhibited behaviors that would later be characterized as Separation Anxiety Disorder because of Pam's extreme reluctance to leave her mother. Mrs. Wills describes dropping her off at day care, "They would see me coming and have to drag her out of my arms and I would have to leave with her screaming." Although some resistance to leaving a mother may be found in many pre-schoolers, Pam's reluctance to separate was found through psychological testing to be clinically significant. "Clinical judgment must distinguish developmentally appropriate levels of separation anxiety from clinically significant concerns about separation seen in Separation Anxiety Disorder" (*DSM IV*, 1994, p. 113).

Mrs. Wills continued, "The teacher would hear [her] coming in the door. Of course she was pretty hyper then, too. She wouldn't sit down and eat lunch, things like that in a group." This behavior is described in the Separation Anxiety Disorder literature,

Going to school is the predominant symptom. It is not only the child's major course of distress, but the one that attracts the most attention.

The panic attacks are severest in the school where the child's shrieking may literally interfere with teachers' conducting their routines (Gardner, 1985, p. 6).

After her day care experience, Pam entered public school kindergarten. She missed twenty-three days of school during her kindergarten year. She went on to first grade and missed five days of school during first grade.

In second grade, Pam changed public schools, but the characteristics of the undiagnosed Separation Anxiety Disorder continued. Mrs. Wills described her second grade experience,

When I go to drop her off, she didn't want to get out of the car, you know things like this. She had a teacher that she totally over run. The teacher was so...sweet. And how would you put it, she would...I went and talked with the teacher and I said you cannot let this child over run you. I mean, she was just so nonchalant. Pam would tell her what she was going to do and not the teacher.

During second grade, Pam's teachers recommended that Pam receive psychological testing through the school system. The issues that the teachers felt needed to be addressed by the testing were Pam's "short attention span, inconsistent performance and retention of academic information, restlessness and below grade level reading skills." The results of this testing reflected a discrepancy between Pam's verbal and nonverbal reasoning skills; excessive inattention impulsivity and hyperactivity; delayed perceptual-motor skills; and poor short-term sequential memory skills. As a result of these test results, she was found to have an Articulation Disorder and to have a Specific Learning Disability of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). The child study committee concluded that Pam would learn best in a small, structured environment. As a result, Pam entered Dashwood school in December of her third grade.

Pam's mother describes Pam's third grade transition to Dashwood School as smooth.

She had a really sweet teacher at first, took her in, babied her, loved her to death. She was the only girl in her class I think. That didn't go too bad, because that was in Miss B's room and she absolutely loved her to death and, you know, coaxed her into doing stuff.

Pam's fourth grade became less smooth. Mrs. Wills continues, "And I think once they moved her [moved to fourth grade the following fall]...once Miss B. left, then we ran into more problems...because then she was introduced to a new teacher up there. I think that started some more problems up there. She didn't like change."

Teacher comments during Pam's fourth grade year include:

- \* During math time, she has difficulty staying on task; shows defiant behavior and lying.
- \* In reading class, these are the behaviors I have been seeing: task avoidance, inability to complete work, defiant behaviors, lying to the teacher.
- \* She is usually a good worker, but, however, on days that she refuses to come into the classroom she has difficulty getting back on track.
- \* On Monday, she started the day refusing to come into the classroom and showed lack of respect to adults.

Pam's behavior problems during fourth grade continued to escalate and resulted in several medication changes and admittance to a university medical center. When she returned from the medical center, Pam and her family began family counseling and behavior modification planning with a psychologist. The medical center doctors readjusted her medication and the psychological diagnoses of Separation Anxiety Disorder and Opposition Defiant Disorder were made. Her teachers commented that after her stay, "I have seen a big difference in Pam's behavior and attitude towards school." and "Pam is making great choices this week."

Pam's fifth grade at Dashwood School continued to be more settled. During this time, her teacher's comments include,

- \* When Pam is off task we can usually get her to start focusing with verbal reminders.
- \* There have been a few times; however, that she was unable to become focused.
- \* Since December we have seen several incidents when Pam was out of control. We were unable to determine what precipitated these behaviors.

During her fifth grade at Dashwood School, progress reports and behavior checklists reflect that Pam continued to exhibit a short attention span, to be inattentive and easily distracted. However, these reports also reflect that she was less restless, had fewer mood changes and less unpredictable behavior than when she was in fourth grade.

Pam's education has been negatively impacted by her behavioral issues. At the end of her fifth grade at Dashwood School, her Woodcock-Johnson reading test level was 4.0 grade level. Her Key math score was 4.0 grade level and her PIAT written language score was 2.5 grade level. Pam's full scale cognitive level has ranged between 90 and 101 since her testing began in second grade. These scores reflect an average to below average cognitive ability.

The current scores have also made Pam ineligible as a student with learning disabilities in the public schools. At the end of fifth grade, her child study committee reclassified her as, Other Health Impaired, OHI, on the basis of the diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, ADHD.

#### *Pam's learning difficulties*

Pam's third grade psychological testing diagnosis included Articulation Disorder, Specific Learning Disability, and suspected Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The

Articulation Disorder which was diagnosed while Pam was in kindergarten was based on her difficulty articulating the letters "s" and "f." A report completed by a speech/language pathologist concluded that Pam had a weaknesses in "listening, following directions, a depressed vocabulary, semantics, syntax and pragmatic language skills." The report continued, "Articulation errors are present: /s/, /f/. Expressive vocabulary is above receptive vocabulary skills, Pam does not process directions well (listening), pragmatic language skills are deficient." Pam received speech therapy through the public and private schools. As a student in the fifth grade she was found to have normal articulation and was dismissed from speech therapy.

As a second grader, Pam was found to be a student with a learning disability based on "evidence of uneven cognitive development with nonverbal reasoning ability being significantly more developed than verbal reasoning ability." The school system's psychological report continued,

Visual-motor integration skills and short-term memory appear to be delayed as well. Educational achievement levels are severely delayed in reading, decoding, spelling and reading comprehension. Also, it appears that Pam is demonstrating many behaviors which are consistent with a suspected Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

During Pam's stay at the University Medical Center the diagnosis of Separation Anxiety Disorder and Opposition Defiant Disorder were also made. Separation Anxiety Disorder, "developmentally inappropriate and excessive anxiety concerning separation from home" and "fear of going to school to the point of panic" is evidenced throughout Pam's school history (*DSM IV*, 1994, p. 113). For example, Mrs. Wills' described Pam's fourth grade, "She was very uncooperative, ah, she didn't want to go to school, she didn't want to do her work or she would give one teacher a hard time and the other teacher not or vice versa." She continued,

She wouldn't get on the school bus, she wouldn't get off the school bus. She got very dependent on me, she didn't want to leave me, then I found out that she would follow me, you know, she would stand there and walk out the door, but if I walked out the door, she would follow me,...it was really something. She wasn't doing her work, she wasn't doing anything at school. She just shut down on everybody.

Defiant Opposition Disorder is described by the *DSM IV* as a ,  
Recurrent pattern of negativistic, defiant, disobedient and hostile behavior toward authority figures that persists for at least six months. Its characteristics are: losing temper, arguing with adults, actively defying or refusing to comply with the requests or rules of adults, deliberately doing things that will annoy other people, blaming others for his or her own mistakes or misbehaviors, being touchy or easily annoyed by others, being angry or resentful, or being spiteful or vindictive (*DSM IV*, 1994, p.91).

Mrs. Wills describes Pam's school behaviors which reflect these characteristics.

She gave Miss V. a really hard time. A really, really hard time. She seems to cling more to one teacher than to another. She just closes down, she wouldn't do her work, she wouldn't do what the teacher was asking and she would argue back with them. It kept escalating and escalating and escalating. I don't know what was going on with her but she was a mess, she was absolutely a mess. Her behavior was uncontrollable, very much so.

Mrs. Wills describes some of Pam's behavior at home during this period,

It was bad, it was real bad. There were days when she tried to crawl out the window when she got mad at me, she would open the window in her bedroom and threaten to go through it and run away. All kinds of things that she was doing...She wouldn't sleep, she wouldn't eat,...I mean this child, she was up at three o'clock in the morning, eating, watching television...she wouldn't eat at all, wouldn't eat her lunch at school wouldn't eat at home.

At Dashwood School, I have observed Pam refuse to stay in her classroom or listen to her teachers. At one point, she hid on the attic stairwell and refused to come out for half of a school day. Her teachers and her mother categorize this behavior as "manipulative."

All of these behavioral characteristics contributed to her parents' and teachers' belief that Pam should be examined at the children's diagnostic center at the state university. The physician's conclusions after working with Pam for three days were that she needed to regularly visit with both a psychiatrist and a psychologist. Since her stay at the center she has been regularly seen by both doctors. She visits the psychiatrist every few months and has her medicine, wellbutrin, regulated. Pam takes 75 mg. of wellbutrin each day. She takes it divided into two parts, one part in the morning and another at noon. Wellbutrin, which is the generic drug bupropion, is used to treat depression. The medication information sheet which comes with the drug lists possible side effects that may go away during treatment as, "restlessness, agitation, dizziness, dry mouth, difficulty sleeping, headache, nausea, vomiting, constipation, change in weight or tremor." The sheet continues that the patient should check with the doctor if the symptoms "continue or are bothersome."

Pam visits a psychologist weekly in a family counseling session. Sometimes the psychologist also counsels Pam separately. Pam also saw the school counselor at

Dashwood School twice each week. During one of these thirty minute sessions Pam would interact with other students and during the other thirty minute session she was counseled alone. Pam does not have school counseling sessions at the public school.

*Inconsistencies in perception of Pam's move to Dashwood School, Separation Anxiety, Opposition Defiant Disorder, grade appropriateness, decoding skills and interactions with other*

Inconsistencies concerning Pam's learning issue have to do with perceptions of her behavior by her teachers, and her mother; behaviors in different educational settings; perceptions of grade appropriateness; phonics ability and Pam's reactions to individual teachers.

Much of her ability to sit still and concentrate on her school work at Dashwood School was orchestrated by behavior modification techniques designed by the school counselor or her psychologist. For example, the counselor developed a program to reward her for the time she was able to spend on task. Over a period of four days, she was able to receive one section of a McDonald's coupon for each half hour she spent on one task. After she was able to do her class work for four days in a row, she earned the entire McDonald's coupon.

The psychologist also put together a behavior modification plan which was coordinated between Mrs. Wills and Pam's teacher. The end result of this program was a Barbie doll of Pam's choice. The psychologist also designed behavior modification programs that regulated Pam's behavior at home.

*Varying perceptions of Pam's move to Dashwood School*

Although Mrs. Wills describes Pam's move to Dashwood School as "smooth" and she "was coaxed into doing stuff," her teachers' reports reflect less ease of transition. Some of the written teacher comments during the third grade school change include:



- \* Pam is currently below grade level due to her problems attending and lack of a strong phonic background;
- \* Pam does have days where she does not respond well to rules and correction;
- \* Pam's meds have been changed twice since she's entered my classroom [six months] she exhibits a great deal of difficulty attending in a whole group activity when she is not properly medicated;
- \* Complains of headaches, stomach aches.

Shortly after Pam entered Dashwood School, she was seen by her neurologist.

His report states,

The mother receives glowing reports from the school saying that she is raising her grade level and, within the limits of her learning disability, is doing extremely well. She shows little sign of ADHD at school except for being off task some. She is not a behavioral problem at all either at home or at school and is in a very good mood today. This is particularly encouraging in view of the fact that her older sister, Helen, is still having a lot of behavioral problems and sometimes they impact on Pam. She is sleeping much better now after having some initial insomnia. Her mother sees her as eating as well as she ever has. She looks great today and is very friendly and out-going.

Reports written by her teachers during the same period of time that the neurologist wrote that Pam was doing well indicate,

Displays short attention span, has difficulty completing tasks, is easily distracted, daydreams, acts impulsively without apparent self-control, displays low frustration tolerance, demonstrates sudden or

dramatic mood swings, must have immediate rewards or gratification, is lethargic.

*Separation Anxiety and Opposition Defiance Disorders in different settings*

At Dashwood School, Pam's Separation Anxiety Disorder and Opposition Defiance Disorder had escalated to the point of hospitalization. However, the University Medical Center report states,

Throughout her admission, Pam came to school eagerly each day. She interacted readily with both her peers and adults. Pam asked a lot of questions regarding various outings or objects in the classroom. She was somewhat hesitant to complete school work but did so with a minimal amount of coaxing and the use of contingencies.

The medical center report contrasts with comments from Pam's mother and her teachers that she would refuse to leave the bus, needed to be carried into the school building, refused to do her work and argued with teachers. .

*Grade appropriateness*

Perceptions of grade appropriateness for Pam differed between school administrators, school psychologists, teachers and parents on her child study committee. The psychologist and the learning disabilities coordinator believed that she had progressed in controlling her behavior and gained enough skills to enter the chronologically appropriate sixth grade. They argued that holding Pam back a year would be detrimental to her self-esteem. However, Mrs. Wills and her teachers at Dashwood School were concerned that Pam was too immature to enter the middle school. Mrs. Wills wrote to the public school system stating that "based on her

achievement level and her low maturity level, Dashwood School recommends that she be placed in the fifth grade when she re-enters the [public] schools."

#### *Decoding skills*

Pam's latest psychological report states that Pam has "demonstrated limited phonics decoding skills." Her teacher's reports at the same time list one of Pam's strengths as "decoding."

#### *Interactions with others*

Pam is inconsistent in her interactions with others. For instance, she reacts differently to each teacher. During my observations and interviews with her, I noticed that she responded with curt, one word answers to a question from her last year's teacher. However, when another teacher from the school asked her a similar questions, Pam responded with a lengthy explanation. Pam's behavior also changed at the medical center where she was cooperative. This contrasts with her teacher's reports of difficult behavior at Dashwood School.

## Chapter V

### An Analysis of the Transition to Middle School

Chapter Five focuses on the students' transition period to their new schools. The chapter is organized by a separate discussion of each student beginning with the spring semester when the students were anticipating their school change. The students' their parents' and teachers' reactions and thoughts concerning the change are included in the introductory sections of each students' narrative. Next, each issue of the students' role in the school, reactions to teachers, instruction and peers are addressed separately. This is presented by research question. For example, I discuss Vicki in the Dashwood School class setting and then as a team member at the middle school. The narrative continues by describing relationships with teachers at Dashwood School and then the relationships established with teachers in the middle school. The students' relationships with their peers is addressed last.

An analysis of the three students is presented in the last section of the chapter. This section also discusses each research question separately.

#### *Vicki 's transition to middle school*

Vicki was not eligible for special education instructional modifications when she started middle school because she was not considered to be a student with a learning disability on the basis of the Central Auditory Processing test results. The decision not to qualify Vicki for special education was based on psychological tests that indicated she was an overachiever because her achievement test scores were higher than her cognitive scores.

Vicki, her mother and her Dashwood School teacher were nervous about Vicki's move to the middle school. For example, I asked Vicki to describe her impression of the middle school after her orientation tour. Vicki said, "It was nice...the eighth graders are

wild, though. And I can't work the lockers." We discussed how to unlock her locker and I asked Vicki why the eighth graders seemed wild to her. She answered, "I was coming out and they were yelling and screaming and one of the girls fell. They were just wild." I continued asking, "Was she jumping and tripped or how did she fall?" Vicki answered, "Well, they were just shouting at each other...they were just wild. It was loud, too."

Later in the interview Vicki added, "I'm nervous about the work...I don't know if I'll be able to do it....What I saw on the board, it looked really hard. I've never done it before."

Vicki's mother, Mrs. Cook, was anxious about Vicki's move to middle school. She said,

I am nervous. I am extremely nervous about it, because I know, I know what happened to Vicki when she was in the regular classroom and I know that the time will come when she has to do that. But, I know how she did before in a regular classroom, and she was lost and so I am extremely nervous about the middle school situation where she has to change classes and there are so many different kids.

Her teacher, Mrs. Borden, said that Vicki had a headache after the orientation tour. She said,

Vicki was terrified, absolutely petrified....a huge, monumental step for her.....[I'm] worrying about it. It's hard to let her go...I know she wishes Ms. Thomas [the teacher assistant at Dashwood School] could go with her. She's losing a whole support system and she knows it. It's scary. And she may be fine. She may turn out to be okay...It's a healthy thing that she's not just jumping in and being oblivious to what's happening.

The fifth grade psychologist's report addresses Vicki's transition to middle school.

Vicki is a very pleasant and cooperative young lady although she does relate some anxiety about entering middle school. Middle school will likely be a big adjustment for Vicki, although it is one for which she seems prepared. She seems pretty secure in knowing other students, so her experience is likely to be a positive one.

1. *How did Vicki adjust to the school settings?*

*The class at Dashwood School*

As a student at Dashwood School, Vicki blended into her cohort group. She and her peers had similar cognitive abilities and interests. Vicki and her friends were popular with the other students and staff at the school. The staff took a special interest in her and her family situation and provided emotional and educational support for Vicki. For example, when her family was unable to take Vicki to the library for books that she needed, her teacher made arrangements to take her .

*The Team at the middle school*

Vicki entered the middle school as a regular student without any instructional modifications. She is on a team, the Rays, with twenty-five students whose standardized test scores fell as Mrs. Barnes, one of Vicki's middle school teachers, describes them, "in the lowest quartile." The team's homeroom is located behind the offices and small classrooms for students with learning disabilities. The classroom is large, noisy and cluttered with books and clothes. The random piles of mixed personal and school belongings give it a disorganized look. Four students sit at long tables. During my visits to the classroom, the teacher has either been at the blackboard or at his desk. The class does have a teacher assistant who I've observed individually answering the students' questions.

Although Vicki is on a team of twenty-five students, instruction is generally in groups of five, ten or fifteen because many of the students are students with a learning disability who receive instructional modifications and small group instruction. This arrangement allows the whole team to benefit from the instructional modifications, even though they, like Vicki, may not be classified as students with a learning disability.

2. *How did Vicki react to structured and varied instructional methods?*

*Instruction at Dashwood School*

Vicki's Dashwood School teachers describe her on progress reports as "highly motivated and diligent...excellent worker...work is neatly and accurately done...consistently checks her work for accuracy...uses class time wisely. I am proud of Vicki's very fine effort."

In Vicki's classes, I have observed her doing air writing. This is a type of multi-sensory instruction where letters are written in the air. She participated in teacher directed small group and individual instruction. I have observed Vicki reading directions, listening to directions in a small group, writing in a notebook and taking tests.

*Instruction at the middle school*

Vicki is in a group of nine students for reading and language arts. Her teacher Mrs. Barnes, explained,

She is in the rotation with the LD kids. So that means that she is where I am when they go to science and where I am when they go to social studies. So, she can get help as if she were an LD student. She can get any kind of individual help or modifications or things clarified.

Mrs. Barnes coordinated the Child Study Committee meeting that met after the first week of school due to Vicki's mother's concerns. Mrs. Barnes describes the events this way,

At the beginning of the school year, Vicki was having a lot of frustration. She would go home and worry her mother to death about what homework she had to do. I think one night at 12:30, her mother finally got her to go to bed because she's so concerned. Her level of concern is way up high. Her mother finally put her to bed at 12:30; she found Vicki back up on the floor in the kitchen at 4:30 in the morning still trying to do some of this work. Her mother was just extremely concerned. Vicki would come to school and act relatively calm because she's a really good student, and what happened was the eligibility (Child Study Committee) had to reconvene on her just at the beginning of the school year. At the end of her year at the Dashwood School, they had said that she was no longer eligible for LD. However, it was recommended that her mother follow through with the central auditory processing problem that she has. So when they finally got the report back from that, the eligibility reconvened because I think her mother was quite concerned about no longer qualifying for services. And the results of that were that she still didn't qualify for LD services, but a lot of modifications would be made for her in the way of repeating directions for her, clarifying things one on one, making sure that she had examples of things that she needed to do, shortening some assignments, working with three by five cards when she had to give an oral report. Our school counselor spent a good bit of time talking with her and that's kind of an on going thing where she'll see the counselor periodically.



The middle school has a homework hot line that students can call each night to review assignments and directions that were given during the school day. Mrs. Barnes puts the team's work on the hot line. She said Vicki relies on the repeated directions and often asks for assignment examples, "she'll usually ask me if I can put an example on the hot line for her. So she will...I'm sure she'll continue to need some of these things re-explained or whispered to her. Just things kind of clarified."

The teachers on Vicki's middle school team use a combination of educational techniques. Vicki copies from the blackboard, takes notes, completes worksheets, takes quizzes and tests and gives oral reports. Mrs. Barnes said,

She was pretty nervous about having to stand up in class and give an oral report. They [the students] had to find an article out of the newspaper or take something that they had seen on TV and give a current events report, and she's pretty nervous about doing that. That's when our guidance counselor had worked with her on that about using little cards, which she has done. She has made herself some little three by five note cards to use.

During the first six weeks, Vicki's grade averages were all A's and B's with quiz grades ranging from 100's on reading quizzes to 70's on social studies quizzes. She described social studies as "boring" but says she likes being a student at the middle school. She said,

I like it. I really like it here, it's nice. But it was easier for me at Dashwood School...It was easier work there and I understood it better.

We had smaller classes there at Dashwood School than here...It was a lot easier for me to hear because I can't hear the teacher sometimes and I don't understand what he's saying. I just can't hear him. I used to wear a hearing aid and I can't hear now because it's hard.

The “hearing aid” Vicki refers to was actually the FM system that she used in second grade. It consisted of ear plugs that worked by amplifying the teacher’s voice and blocking extraneous noise.

When Vicki first entered the middle school she had a lot of anxiety about her ability to complete the academic work. However, Vicki has adjusted to the new instructional methods at the middle school by seeking help through different avenues than the ones she used at Dashwood School. There she relied on her favorite teacher’s assistant to repeat directions for her. In the middle school she relies on the homework hotline. She has been an anxious student in both school settings. At Dashwood School her teacher described her as “very quiet, very unsure of herself. She doesn’t have exceedingly high expectations, she just gets nervous. She’s very dependent as a student. She needs a lot of stroking.”

In the middle school her teacher explains,

She’s so overly concerned about and wants to over-achieve. If she can’t live up to that, she is real frustrated by it.....Sometimes she’ll ask again. Not always. It kind of depends on how clear the teacher is or how complicated the directions are.

Vicki has carried her desire to over-achieve into the middle school. Although Vicki’s language arts teacher indicated in our interview that the guidance counselor would work closely with Vicki, they have only met once during the course of this study. She has found a different avenue for support through the homework hotline in order to have her questions answered.

### *3. What relationship did Vicki establish with her teachers?*

#### *Teachers at Dashwood School*

Mrs. Borden describes Vicki as,

Precious, she's a beautiful child, just beautiful.... Vicki is just a placidly pretty little girl. She's going to be smashing, she really is. She's got shiny hair, has just a little bit of flare about her, just beautiful..... Well, she's so fetching. All the adults seem to gravitate to her. She's just a lovely, lovely young lady.

There was one particular teacher she liked and she tried to help her all the time, Ms. Thomas, and she just adored her. And she really seeks her out for support. Even if she knows how to do something, she asks Ms. Thomas again.

When Vicki was a student at Dashwood School she relied on Ms. Thomas. For example, after the teacher has given an assignment, Vicki will quietly go to Ms. Thomas's desk. Their conversations are usually short with Ms. Thomas rewording the assignment or encouraging Vicki with, "You remember this...do this..."

Mrs. Borden describes Vicki as a student who becomes nervous about learning. She states, "Academically she gets nervous very fast. Very insecure." She continued,

She needs stroking. She really does. She gets nervous and she doesn't want to make mistakes, she doesn't like mistakes, but she doesn't have exceedingly high expectations, she just gets nervous. Anything new, we did something new with creative writing this morning, she didn't panic, she just checked with Ms. Thomas before she would even start. She wouldn't even give it a try. So, she needs watching in that way. Make sure she's got a comfort level before she starts something. Here we can handle her.

She just gets scared of an assignment. If you ask her a question and she doesn't know the answer, her hands go up to her face immediately,

as if shielding herself. Doesn't give herself a second try--she just really gets jittery inside, I believe.

As I was organizing my interview with Vicki, Mrs. Borden warned me that Vicki would react this way to my questions. Vicki sat straight in a chair, her back did not touch the back of the chair, her ankles were crossed and her hands were folded. She usually responded with one or two word answers. When I asked her questions related to how she went about learning, she answered, "I don't know." But she did not put her hands to her face or become visibly nervous. Her other answers about school consisted of a few words, mostly "yeah." However, she spoke comfortably about a doll which her friend had made for a school project. She said,

We had a project and we were reading American Girl books, and for her project she did Samantha; and she made Samantha. She loves to make crafts. And she made her...she brought this fake hair and then she took a soap bottle that you use to wash hands with, and she put paper mache over it as her birthday dress.

#### *Teachers at the middle school*

Vicki's teachers at the middle school said, "We truly think the world of her. She's a wonderful little girl." On one of my visits, I found Vicki running errands for her social studies teacher and taking her team's cans to the recycling center.

Vicki describes her teachers as "nice." She finds them different from the teachers at Dashwood School, "They're different. I don't know. They're really different. A lot busier. [Mrs. Barnes] is nice. I like Ms. Thomas, though, a lot.....I kind of miss some of the teachers there."

The teachers at both schools spoke highly of Vicki. At Dashwood School, Mrs. Borden said, "Hopefully some teachers will take her under their wing. There was one

particular teacher she liked and she tried to help her all the time, Ms. Thomas. She just adored her and she really seeks her out for support.”

At the middle school, Mrs. Barnes’ comments included,

She and I are pretty close and I think she and Ms. W, our counselor, really hit it off. She seems to be very happy here. Mrs. M, her reading teacher just thinks the world of her. We truly think the world of her. She’s a wonderful little girl.

The teachers view Vicki similarly at both schools. Vicki doesn’t report feeling a close relationship with the middle school teachers like she had at Dashwood School. During the course of this case study Vicki spent a day at Dashwood School talking with Ms. Thomas. Through this visit, Vicki was able to receive the emotional support that adolescent students need during change (Dweck and Elliott in Mussen, 1983, p. 643).

#### *4. What were Vicki’s relationships with her peers?*

##### *Peers at Dashwood School*

My observations of Vicki reflect a normal, outgoing eleven year old girl. She had two close friends at Dashwood School and played basketball on the county’s recreational league team. At Dashwood School, she walked down the hall between two friends, sat with friends during lunch and at school programs. During the school programs, she and her friends sat in the back of the room and giggled. When adults watched them, they paid attention to the education program, but when the adults looked away, they resumed whispering. She enjoyed herself at school skating parties. Mrs. Borden said, “She flirts with the boys a little bit, some of that very appropriate, though, very age appropriate. She’s just part of the group...well liked by everybody.”

*Peers at the middle school*

Vicki has made friends at her new school, whispering and walking with several other girls through the school halls. She wears bright nail polish, attends school dances and meets with a friend to “do each other’s hair” before dances. Vicki describes her friends, "This Thursday I'm going to one of my friend's house because there's going to be a dance Friday and we're going to it after school. So she wants me to do her hair." [The other students her classes], "They're nice." I asked if she had a boyfriend because several boys stopping to wave to her while we were talking. She replied, "No, but a lot have asked me."

Vicki has made friends easily at both schools. As a student at Dashwood School she participated in school sponsored skating parties and conversed freely with her classmates before and after class and in the halls. She has kept in touch with friends from Dashwood School, visiting at their homes after school and on weekends. Her friends have not visited her home when she was a student at Dashwood School, nor as a middle school student.

### *Joe's transition to the middle school*

Joe was looking forward to being in the public schools again in the fall because he had missed his friends, school activities and science class while he was at Dashwood School, although he was worried about the “rough crowd” he might find at the middle school. Joe’s mother was concerned about his being in classes for students with a learning disability because of the “stigma attached to it” and “his feelings of being separated and being taken out and labeled.” She described Joe’s anxiety about the school change as,

He is a little apprehensive, but it is not because of the learning. He is more concerned about the drugs, the people that are bigger than he is, he is not a very extroverted, social person. He doesn't go into new situations well.

#### *1. How did Joe adjust to the school settings?*

##### *The class at Dashwood School*

As a student at Dashwood School Joe was restless in class, day dreamed and needed to be urged by his teacher or the teacher assistant to continue working. He did not initiate conversations with his classmates and at lunch, his teacher, Mrs. Borden explained, “He normally just sits with the teachers. He’s very good with adult conversation. He puts himself above the other kids a bit.”

##### *The team at the middle school*

Joe is a student in regular classrooms except for language arts. These classes range in size from eighteen to twenty students. He receives his language arts instruction in a class for students with a learning disability. This class of six students follows the sixth grade curriculum, but incorporates smaller groups and instructional modifications to meet the learning needs of the students. The students sit in desks that form a large

circle and behind them, they each have cubby holes for their personal belongings. It seems to be a very relaxed atmosphere with posters and organized clutter.

2. *How did Joe react to structured and varied instructional methods?*

*Instruction at Dashwood School*

At Dashwood School, Joe was considered a bright student. Mrs. Borden explained that Joe's work at Dashwood school tended to be "a little more difficult and more challenging" [than the other students in his class]. However, she believed that he needed intensive instruction. She continued,

[when he entered Dashwood School] He did not have a clue about phonics. Did not have any direct phonics training. And his composition skills were very, very weak, were practically non-existent. Handwriting was a problem. He can decode, but comprehension is a problem. Very good on factual comprehension, he is a very literal person, but has trouble getting beyond the literal.

In teaching Joe, Mrs. Borden found that he produced "an enormous amount of work." However, he often had a lot of errors which he would become discouraged about correcting. He would demoralize quickly and adopt a "There, I won't even face it attitude."

At Dashwood School, Joe's instruction was based on multi-sensory teaching techniques. Mrs. Borden described the methods used to teach Joe.

He needs the multi-sensory. I don't think he always likes it. I think he thinks some of it might be juvenile. He has done them, because he is very agreeable with teachers, but I don't think he likes to do the air writing ("writing" words in the air before writing them on paper) and use the gross motor as much as he probably needs to. He needs to see it, he



needs to hear it, he needs to feel it. Especially with copying. He miss-copies, copying is difficult for him. He'll leave out words, he'll leave out letters. He needs to be air writing it first so he can then put it on paper, you know, to have that feeling in his arm. So I think continuing with multi-sensory would be good for him. I think he will need to use a tape recorder for taking notes.

#### *Instruction at the middle school*

Instruction in Joe's regular classes consists of lecture, small group projects, note taking, and reading. Although he worries about his grades, during the first six weeks in middle school he achieved A's and B's in all of his class work. He continues to dislike copying from the board, but his current subject area notebooks are complete and legible. He has not used the tape recorder his Dashwood School teacher thought he might need for taking notes.

Spelling continues to be difficult for Joe. His language arts teacher states that Joe's paragraph writing continues to reflect disunity. However, Joe can think critically and can elaborate on his writing orally. He participates in class discussions, peer editing activities and enjoys oral reading. He volunteers to read from a novel, from his own writing and interacts successfully in group work.

Joe has continued to be restless in class. At Dashwood School, I observed him wiggle in his seat, play with his pencil, twist his hair, stare out the window and intermittently complete some paper work. His actions are similar in the middle school. However, he leaves his seat more in the middle school. He will sit down, stand up, get tissues, sit down, write a word, leave his seat for another tissue, get a book, put the book back, get a notebook, then go to the restroom. He continues to not attend to a task for a concentrated period of time.

On the other hand, Joe interacts with his peers and participates during class discussions. The instructional methods which are used at the middle school promote these skills. The students engage in peer editing, they exchange letters that they have written to each other. They participate in class discussions about directed topics, Writing Workshop and they read novels. It is possible that these instructional techniques have helped to present Joe with opportunities and methods for interaction.

Joe continues to be a worrier who demoralizes when his work is not perfect. During one of my observations at the middle school, Joe completed a spelling test. He explained to the teacher that he did not think that he had done well and left the room. After she had graded the test, she found that he had missed three words out of fifteen. His teacher remarked that “he likes to be perfect and doesn’t like to correct errors, he demoralizes quickly.” These comments were very similar to his Dashwood School teachers, who also noticed that Joe was impatient with errors, did not like to make corrections and demoralized when events did not go well for him.

As a middle school student, Joe’s Written Expression Disorder is not consistently present. Some of his written work is almost without errors. On other papers, he will misspell his own name and spell his teacher’s name correctly. On written work which reflects his thoughts or opinions, sentence structure is correct and spelling errors are minimal.

### *3. What relationship did Joe establish with his teachers?*

#### *Teachers at Dashwood School*

At Dashwood School Joe tended to interact with the adults more than with his peers. His teacher commented that he would come to school quiet and sullen in the mornings. When he talked with his teachers it would generally concern his family and trips to visit his father. Mrs. Borden noticed that he usually conversed with her on a Monday morning after he had spent the weekend with his father. On other days he would

have little to say. She said, "He doesn't talk a lot in the morning, he's not unpleasant, he just doesn't have a whole lot to say." She describes Joe as,

A very determined young man. He knows that he has certain weak areas and he's willing to do what he has to do, but he also gets frustrated very fast when it's not perfect. He sets very high goals for himself, not always very realistic. Not everybody gets one hundred on everything, there's nothing wrong with a ninety-four or a ninety-six, but he demoralizes very quickly.

*Teachers at the middle school*

In the public middle school, Joe seeks out his language arts teacher for conversation each morning. He talks with her about his weekends with his father and his school work. Mrs. Downy describes this interaction,

He does talk to me about problems he's having such as the science....He was happy last week because he said he got to go see his Dad. He'll come in a little bit earlier and kind of walk around the back and chat a little, bit, usually....He'll usually come in first and he'll tell [me] what kind of a day he's having.

I've seen more moods with him than with the other kids, his mood really varies.....he is arrogant and [he thinks he is] a little better than the others.

Joe has established a warmer relationship with his language arts teacher at Brittany Middle School than he did with his teachers at Dashwood School. He makes a point of talking with Mrs. Downy about his concerns. She has spoken to his science teacher about Joe's worry that she teaches too fast. Joe has complained to Ms. Downy

that his science teacher, "she just goes on" and "she keeps moving even though I don't understand."

Joe's teachers at both schools characterize Joe as "arrogant," "moody" and a student who "demoralizes" quickly when faced with imperfect work.

#### *4. What were Joe's relationships with his peers?*

##### *Peers at Dashwood School*

Joe did not mix with his peers at Dashwood School. When he walked down the hall with a group, he moved just slightly to the side of it, so that he was not in the middle or actually part of the group. When he entered the classroom in the morning, he would touch the desks of other students, but he did not talk with them. He answered in short phrases when other students spoke to him, but I did not observe him initiate conversations with the other students.

During my interview with Mrs. Boxe, she revealed Joe's impression of his peers at Dashwood School.

He didn't like them. I asked him, have you made any friends? And he said, "No, because I don't like them, they are loud and they don't listen and they are impolite." And he just went through the list of the things he didn't like about it. But, now when he was there, I think, he interacted...he was just not like, "Let's invite so and so over," like he does at home with the kids in the neighborhood. I don't know, maybe he realized it was a short term situation. I don't know.

At Dashwood School, Joe's social relationships reflected the characteristics of learning disabled students that include being withdrawn from his peers and more comfortable with adults. At Dashwood School, he was always on the edge of his peer

group and preferred to eat lunch sitting next to his teacher. Recently, Joe confided to me that he "was always getting punched around" by the other boys at Dashwood.

Mrs. Borden, his teacher, describes Joe as

A bit arrogant to the other students particularly. It's taken 'till this point at the end of the year [May] for him to really warm up to the other kids. He puts himself above the other kids a bit.

Later in the interview Mrs. Borden discussed Joe's social relationships. She described Joe's interest in food, grams, fat and calories as very adult like.

He interacts with the adults.....I wouldn't be surprised if he has a crush on one of the girls. But he doesn't know how to do it. He doesn't know how to flirt. He's not youthful. That's another thing about him, he's not a youthful child. He's very adult like in many ways.

Mrs. Borden believes that Joe has friends outside of school. These friends are from Cass Elementary,

He was with some kids he knew from before--so I think he does have friends outside of here. I don't know if he thought this was a temporary placement and I'm not going to get vested into friends and have to leave them behind. That's why I used the word arrogant--he's just always put himself slightly aside from everybody else.

During our interviews, Joe expressed missing his friends from Cass Elementary. He said that both he and his brother had friends there. He referred to his friends when he was on a field trip, "Me and my buddy got split up.....My friend bought some money for me that was like the olden times." He continued, "The kids were nicer there. There was only one kid there that thought he was everything--you know."

Joe was anxious about some of the social situations he might encounter at Brittany Middle School. However, once he was a student at the middle school he found his social experiences to be less threatening because, "at least I don't get punched all the time."

Joe's social interaction was addressed in the fifth grade school psychological testing because he expressed missing his previous school,

Joe was very friendly and quickly wanted to talk about what was happening at Cass Elementary. He indicated that he missed his friends and teachers at his old school and he voiced concern about getting behind in science, his favorite subject. He told this examiner that he was unhappy in this current school situation and that he felt threatened by some of the other male students.

#### *Peers at the middle school*

Mrs. Downy, Joe's learning disabilities language arts teacher, reflects that Joe "thinks maybe he shouldn't be in here...he thinks he's a little better than the other kids...but he is very bright." His former teacher, Mrs. Borden, described Joe similarly, "He puts himself above the other kids a bit....he's one of the special, better learners."

During his first six weeks in middle school, Joe has had two social situations during which he has asked adults to intervene. In one, Joe was chosen by his physical education teacher to be captain of his group's team. He has been unhappy about this because he says, his team "always loses and the kids won't listen to me." In his role as captain, a female teammate became angry and pushed Joe. He went to his language arts teacher very upset and demanded to leave school immediately. Mrs. Downy responded to Joe that he couldn't leave school unless he was sick. He insisted that he be allowed to at least call his mother. Joe went to the office to do this, but she was not at home.

In the second incident, Mrs. Boxe said that Joe became "distressed with some of the kids on the bus." Events appeared to escalate and Joe was uncomfortable with the behavior of the other students on the bus. Mrs. Boxe intervened by calling the Supervisor of Transportation for the school system to "get it straightened out and things are better."

At Dashwood School Joe was quiet and did not interact with his peers. I did not observe other boys initiating conversation with Joe at Dashwood School. I did not observe or was ever aware of students punching Joe. He indicated that they did; however, "[at the middle school; unlike at Dashwood School] I don't get punched everywhere that I go."

At the middle school, his classmates approach Joe for conversation and engage him in games of playful rough housing. When they do not initiate these interactions, Joe will tend to stay at the edge of the crowd as he did at Dashwood School. However, at the middle school Joe does begin some conversations with his classmates. Although Joe has experienced uncomfortable social situations in physical education class and on the bus, he is interacting more with his peers in the middle school than he did at Dashwood School. My observations of these differences have been in the hallways, before, after and during classes. His interactions with peers in the middle school have been age appropriate activities such as playful rough housing, "arm-pit squawking" and participation in instructional group activities.

*Pam's transition to middle school*

As Pam was getting ready to leave Dashwood School and enter the sixth grade in the middle school, her teachers and her mother expressed concerns about Pam's maturity. They felt that she did not understand how a middle school differed from an elementary school and felt that she was less mature than typical middle school students. Her teacher, Mrs. Borden, described Pam's concept of the middle school,

Pam doesn't understand it. She doesn't understand the structure of it. I think she thinks she's going to be in the classroom and then she's going to go out on the playground. Just like she did with the equivalent of elementary school. Just a little bit different.

I think it is probably time to move on. She's been here awhile. I'm not sure about the placement, sixth grade [next year] she's too young.

Mrs. Wills, Pam's mother, accompanied the students on their middle school orientation tour. Pam appeared to be comfortable on the tour, asking about recess and the playground. Mrs. Wills related that Pam was looking forward to leaving Dashwood School. She said, "I think that she [Pam] is going to be pretty excited about it. She has been wanting this for, as I said, the last two years. But once we are there, we will see how it goes."

Pam's response to me when I asked how she felt about leaving Dashwood School and entering the middle school was "hmmm."

Because of Mrs. Wills' concerns about Pam's maturity in relation to other sixth grade middle school students, Pam was placed in a fifth grade classroom. However, Mrs. Wills continued to be undecided about the right public elementary school for Pam through the summer and into the fall.

During one of my early fall school visit Pam's teacher, Ms. Smith said Pam told her, "This will probably be my last day here." Ms. Smith said, "Why? Are you moving?"



Pam answered, "No, my mother says I need more work." Pam added that her mother wanted her to change elementary schools. However through the course of this study Pam has remained in her fifth grade class explaining that the class was full in the school her mother had wanted her to attend.

*1. How did Pam adjust to the school settings?*

*The Dashwood School class*

In relation to the other nine students in her class, Pam was considered by her teacher and her mother to be immature. Pam's school counselor organized behavior modification programs that rewarded her for completing work and staying on task.

Because of Pam's problematic behavior she was well known to the staff at the school. As a new staff member I asked why she had been admitted to the university medical center and was told that "she cried a lot and wouldn't get out of the car." On the other hand, Pam was the first student to hug me when I arrived at Dashwood School. She continued being a hugging and talkative child the entire time that I knew her as a student at Dashwood School.

*The fifth grade classroom*

Pam is one of sixteen fifth graders in a comfortable classroom with long tables instead of desks. One-half of the room is a reading area with a carpet, a large couch, an over stuffed chair, lamps, and book shelves. The class has a teacher and an aide. Ms. Smith, Pam's fifth grade teacher, describes Pam's role in the classroom,

She dresses like everybody else. She's aware of her appearance. She's always neat and clean. She talks like they do, she looks like they do, she fits in. Her math is right up with everybody else. She seems to lack some confidence in her language skills, I suppose, her ability to write.

In addition to her regular fifth grade classroom of sixteen students, Pam also has instruction with three other students in the language arts class each day for students with learning disabilities. This classroom is located in a small room off of the library. Each student has an individual desk and there is a teacher and a teacher assistant helping the students with their work.

As a student at Dashwood School, Pam's behavior had been a focus of attention. She had several behavior modification plans in effect to encourage her to stay on task. Pam had established a reputation as a student who refused to cooperate with teachers, was immature and had problematic behavior. When my interview questions concerned instruction, the Dashwood School teachers answered by responding to methods that were used to keep Pam focused on her work and indicated that she had not made much progress because her learning was hampered by her behavior.

After Pam's transition to the public school, the teachers responded to questions by focusing on instructional techniques used in the classroom. Pam was perceived to fit into the fifth grade classroom without any special characteristics. In addition, the learning disabilities teacher expressed surprise when Pam's mother informed her of Pam's previous behavior difficulties in school.

## *2. How did Pam react to structured and varied instructional techniques?*

### *Instruction at Dashwood School*

As a student in the structured Dashwood School environment, Pam had a lot of behavior problems. She argued with teachers, refused to do her work, yelled and left the classroom. Behavior modification plans, medicine and counseling were used to help control her behavior. Her teacher at Dashwood School, Mrs. Borden described the situation,

She's very manipulative and she likes things her way. If she sees it in writing that this is the way you will behave, this is your program, then

she lives up to that expectation. She may try it; she will try it just to the point where she really would have a major punishment or lose a privilege. Mrs. Wills told me that ‘the doctors had warned her that she [Mrs. Wills] needed to hold a tight line, because she [Pam] was so manipulative.’

She chooses not to do things. If she doesn’t want to do a certain assignment, she’ll do other things trying not to. So, we’re very structured, saying, ‘This is your first morning and I expect you to be working.’ We tell her exactly what behavior we expect from her.

The behavior modification plan that the Dashwood School counselor put together for Pam provided perimeters and structured focus to help Pam stay on task. Mrs. Borden described the program,

It’s like a three point program. “I’m telling you what I want you to do, because you’re not doing it.” And a minute later or thirty seconds later you say, “You still have not done it, this is the second time I’m telling you.” We’re giving her points for working every day, for staying on task, that’s another little thing we’re doing. We have a checklist and she earns prizes. She can earn lunch or dinner at McDonald’s. Now she’s earning Barbie dolls.

#### *Instruction in the fifth grade*

As a public school fifth grader, Pam reads independently, takes notes, reads newspapers and magazines, completes quizzes and writes in a journal. Ms. Smith said that Pam “had to learn to take notes off of the boards.” Pam has also had to get used to studying for quizzes and tests. Ms. Smith and Pam had a discussion about homework and studying which she related to me. The conversation which is quoted below includes

Ms. Smith's observations and judgments which she related to me as she discussed Pam's role in the class and her perception of Pam's academic abilities.

There's not a thing that we do that Pam couldn't do with practice. And she is an asset to this class.

She can write a sentence and she's working on writing a paragraph. Just as long as she's some place I can take her and take her a little farther. That's all I care about. She uses the couch, the chairs, the carpet. Most of the time she sits on the carpet. We have reading every day for about twenty minutes where everybody reads quietly. So she does read, I allow time for that.

She took a quiz Friday and they get a study sheet the night before and it's drawn directly from their notes. So, in other words, it sort of reinforces keeping the notes and reinforces watching the news and getting involved in discussion we have every day. But, if they have the notes as they come from the board, then they simply sit down with their study sheet and they match up what's missing. There's generally five or six notes each day and the test might have somewhere between ten and twelve questions with approximately twenty blanks. They simply have to find the event for that particular day and match it up with the missing word and then take the word from their notebook and put it in the space.

[Ms. Smith explained to Pam] You know, we're just really looking at the first one as a baseline, just to see how you do. And if you get one right, then we'll know the next week we can double our score by getting two right. Don't panic. She neglected to take it home with her. She and I worked on it, but she didn't take it and I think she was trying to protect herself from success this next time.

Did you take it home to study? She said, “No.” And I said, Why? She says, “Well I didn’t know when the test would be.” I said, Pam, you and I talked about this. As a class we talked about it and I told you two times in particular. As a teacher, I repeat myself all of the time. This is a very important quiz tomorrow. Make sure you study this. You and I stood here at my desk, and we filled in these answers. Let me see your study sheet. She had nineteen out of the twenty-one correct and she should have had all twenty-one actually. But I said, you know, if you didn’t take it home, you didn’t study, you didn’t set yourself up of success.

In the regular classroom Pam has not had special plans to encourage her to complete her work. Ms. Smith said that Pam’s behavior has been grade appropriate in the class. She has not yelled, refused to do her work or left the room without permission.

Ms. Smith’s interactions with Pam are task oriented as the teachers at Dashwood School were. However, the Dashwood School teachers were working within a behavior modification plan that focused on a tangible reward for the completion of classwork. The fifth grade teacher is focusing on task completion so that Pam will learn and succeed academically with the internal rewards of knowledge and success used as reasons for task completion. Pam’s behavior in fifth grade is described by her teacher as grade appropriate.

### *3. What relationship did Pam establish with her teachers?*

#### *Teachers at Dashwood School*

Pam was friendly and comfortable with her teacher at Dashwood School. She often inquired about other staff members and initiated conversations. Pam’s teacher, Mrs. Borden, describes Pam as,

Delightful, charming, she has a wonderful smile, just very appealing, but she has her moments when she's moody.

She has a great, great improvement in behavior from last year....She was refusing to get off the bus to come to school....She would scream at the top of her lungs. I mean, they physically had to carry her in.

### *The fifth grade teacher*

When Pam began fifth grade she spoke primarily with Ms. Smith instead of with her peers. After the first few days she became more comfortable in the classroom and now speaks more with her classmates than with her teacher. Pam has also begun reading the *Goosebumps* series of books which are kept on the classroom bookshelves. Ms. Smith has read many of them and Pam asked Ms. Smith to discuss them with her. Ms. Smith related an example of their interaction,

She's reading *Goosebumps* right now. As a matter of fact, she came in last week with two *Goosebumps* books and she asked me if I had read either one of them. And one of them I was familiar with, I had read. And so she wanted to loan me the other one. I said, 'I don't know if I can read it right now, but I'll be glad to keep it on my desk and I'll read it when I get a chance and you can get it and read it whenever you want.' So, I looked at it some, I'm not a real big fan of some of those. I mean, anything to get them to read is great, but I read what I want when that happens, too. But, she said something about it today and I said, 'Pam, here, just keep it. When I get a chance to read it, I'll ask you for it.' And that wasn't a problem for her.

She discussed Pam's reaction to having her behavior corrected, "When you say something to her, [admonish] it's like, 'oh, man.' And I don't know what she's accustomed to, but it's not the end of the world and I had to point that out to her, too."

Pam described her fifth grade teacher positively,

Ms. Smith is really nice. She doesn't give us much homework.

She lets us get on the computers almost the whole day.

I ain't learning cursive because my teacher's not teaching me like she's supposed to. But my corner lady, near my house, she said that Ms. Smith, you don't learn nothing from her. But I don't believe that.

Pam's learning disability teacher found that Pam, like many of her other students, is eager for extra attention. She has found Pam to be pleasant and cooperative in the language arts class. The learning disabilities teacher was not aware that Pam had a history of behavior problems and had not observed any behaviors that indicated atypical fifth grade behavior. She said,

She [Pam] mentioned to me today that she felt like she needed to do math in here. So I think she might be feeling the pull to have the extra attention for the math, too. A lot of children would love to have the extra attention. I just don't know if she really needs the extra attention. I'll have to talk to her teacher.

She's done very, very well over all. I'm very pleased with her cooperation, her attitude, her maturity, she's been very responsible. When her mother was telling me all the problems that she's had and everything, I was just like, are you kidding me? Is this the same person? I was shocked. I couldn't hardly believe it. It's one of those great mind-boggling things. I couldn't believe it.

4. *What were Pam's relationships with her peers?*

*Peers at Dashwood School*

Pam's teacher at Dashwood School described her as young socially and as immature in relation to her classmates. Pam is not described as aggressive or argumentative with her peers, but she did not relate well to them. Mrs. Borden described her impressions of Pam socially,

She is very young, very, very young socially. Playing with Barbie dolls, wearing Pocahontas clothes, which are precious, she's a cute little thing, and she's little. But for her age it's a little inappropriate.

She doesn't have a friend. She really doesn't have anybody who is the same level she's on. Our other three girls are sophisticated compared to her. They've been kind to her and very nice to her, and whenever they are doing something where they can include her, they will; but when they start talking about boys and flirting and dressing, she could care less.

That's not an interest for her. She really doesn't have a friend here that I would call a close buddy; nor have I heard her talk about friends outside of school life.

During my interviews with Pam I inquired about her friends in and out of school. She mentioned a neighborhood girl who she referred to as "Big Heather." During the course of the interview, I discovered that "big" to Pam was a girl three years younger than she is. Pam also mentioned that her friends were characters on a video game that she did not own.

*Peers in the fifth grade*

On my first trip to visit Pam in her new classroom, she hugged me and said, "I have a friend and I have her phone number." She continued to say this to me during each



of our interviews. During my observations of her, I found that she talked easily with her classmates at their long table. She appeared to be relaxed during school programs when she sat on the floor in the middle of her class. When she moved between classes, she did so in the middle of the group or with one or two other students. Her dress and interests seemed to be comparable to theirs. Ms. Smith remarked,

She dresses like everybody else. She's aware of her appearance. She's always neat and clean. She talks like they do, she looks like they do, she fits in. She's one of the kids. She still talks to me, but she's added all of us. So, she's making friends.

During one of my interviews with Pam we discussed her friends in the classroom. She said, "I have friends. Joanna, Nicole and Amy or Amanda...one of them. One of them I give them my phone number to call me." Pam said that they had talked on the telephone, but had not gotten together outside of school. She described her classmates, "They're not wild and they just sit there calmly doing their work, like I do, and they are nice. Except three boys. They're like country."

### *An analysis of the three students' transition by research question*

1. *What are the education settings in each school and how does the student adjust to the differences?*

The two settings in this study were different by location, teachers, peers and instruction. According to Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper (1990) the degree of change between new and old settings affects the ease of transition. Dramatic changes in rules, norms or values make mastery of a new setting more difficult (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 146). Further, students who are separated from their neighborhood and/or regular class communities for support services become isolated and “cast into roles of dependency and passivity” (Buswell and Shaffner, 1992, p. 5). Even though a school is new to a student, the classroom is a place for participating in a social system and all students need to learn its social rules (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 230).

The three students in this study were moving from a traditional, structured environment to a middle school with teams, interdisciplinary studies and group interaction. All of them experienced some anxiety about the move. Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper (1990) addressed this anxiety as an expected part of the school change, “Children leaving the school appeared to experience an anticipatory reaction to the impending separation. Their cognitive awareness of the impending separation may have been enhanced by preparatory remarks and discussion by their parents and teachers (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 135).”

The adults involved with these three students had anxieties, concerns and opinions about the impending school change. Vicki, her teacher and her mother expressed concerns about Vicki's ease of assimilation into the new school. Vicki returned from the middle school introduction tour with a headache and worries about her ability to complete the work. Pam did not express any concerns about going back to the

public schools. Her mother stated that Pam was anxious to go to school with her friends. Joe had been a student at Dashwood School for one year and was anxious to return to a school with his friends. His mother was anxious about his participation in classes for students with learning disabilities.

Although Vicki and Pam had been students in the traditional classroom for three years, they adjusted positively to the new school atmosphere. Minuchin and Shapiro write that the attitudes of sixth-grade students in their first year at informal schools are comparable to those of students in traditional schools, but positive feelings about school were stronger for sixth graders in their second year, and most positive for those with three years of experience in the informal settings. They continue, the “atmosphere of open settings and the opportunity to choose activities make students in open classrooms more appreciative of their schools than students in traditional settings ( Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 217).”

All of the students have reported being happier in their new schools than they were in Dashwood School. Although Minuchin and Shapiro’s research reflects a longer adjustment period to a new school, these three students reflected positive adjustment to their new settings within the first six weeks of the school change. They expressed their contentment with their new schools through statements such as: Vicki, “I really like it here, the teachers are nice;” Joe, “It’s good. I like the subjects here. At least I don’t get pushed around all the time;” Pam, “I have friends. The teacher is nice.”

*2. How does the student react to the presentation of structured, sequential instruction in one school and to varied instructional techniques in another?*

These three students moved from a school for students with learning disabilities to a regular classroom. Jackson writes that being with regular education students will help students develop behaviors, attitudes and life skills such as social interaction, taking responsibilities, finishing a task, communicating needs, and developing friendships.

“Learning these skills in a natural setting is superior to learning them in simulation or isolation ”(Jackson,1992, p. 165).

In educational settings that tend to be more traditional such as that found at Dashwood School, “teachers generally teach to the whole class and students work individually; sharing information is seen as cheating. In open classrooms there is a considerable small group effort, and an emphasis on developing a cooperative work ethic” (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 219). Although the middle school is not an open classroom, varied instructional techniques are present in the middle school classrooms of each of the students. Vicki and Joe change classes and engage in interdisciplinary studies designed by the teachers of their middle school teams. Vicki sits at long tables in some of her classes instead of at an individual desk, she is involved in small group tasks and other instructional methods. Pam also sits at a long table in her fifth grade classroom, rather than at a individual desk. Joe is active in peer editing and many group projects in his middle school classes.

When students with disabilities have access to appropriate curriculum with supports and when teachers have appropriate training, there is greater probability of improved outcomes (OSERS, 1994, p. 2). All three students interact to some extent with a learning disabilities teacher. Vicki has access to educational modifications for students with learning disabilities and Joe and Pam receive language arts in a class for students with learning disabilities.

The classroom behavior of Vicki and Joe was the same in both school settings. They both worry about receiving good grades, completing required tasks and are quiet, hard working students. Pam’s behavior has not been the same in the fifth grade classroom as it was at Dashwood School. Minuchin and Shapiro write, “The classroom, the playground, and the home, as well as smaller units such as a math lesson, constitute different behavior settings in the child’s life. Behavior settings elicit and organize certain kinds of behavior (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 200).” Pam had entered

Dashwood School as a student with a learning disability of ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. “When a hyperactive child does not do his or her work, it is generally assumed that whatever is causing the hyperactivity is also contributing to the academic underachievement” (Gadow, in OSESRS, 1992, p. 38). Her attention to and completion of tasks was important to her teacher and her counselor. She was rewarded for task completion, staying at her desk and sustained periods of concentration.

However, when Pam changed schools, her teachers were not aware that she was a student with a learning disability on the basis of ADHD. They expected her to stay in her seat, concentrate and complete tasks. Her classroom teacher discussed Pam’s behavior and learning as typical of a fifth grader. Her language arts teacher said she was “shocked” to learn from Pam’s mother of Pam’s behavior and learning difficulties at Dashwood School and in her previous experience as a public school student.

3. *What is the student’s relationship with the teachers in each school?*

Teachers are perceived differently by individual students (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 230). All of the students in this study were in the same classroom at Dashwood School and each of them viewed the teacher uniquely and were described differently by the teacher. Minuchin and Shapiro address the differing views,

Teachers are generally attached to students who are achieving, conforming and make few demands, while they reject children who make many demands considered illegitimate or who tend to be behavior problems. In rating scales, teachers prefer students described as rigid, conforming and orderly and rated last those described as independent, active and assertive (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 226-227).

Vicki has been described by her teachers at both schools as “precious.” She is a hard worker who quietly completes tasks which are required of her. Although she does

not report that she has replicated the close relationship that she had established with a teacher assistant at Dashwood School, her teachers all reflect the same values about her. They find her to be responsible and a hard working student.

Pam's teacher at Dashwood School described her as "manipulative." This might reflect the teacher's perception of Pam's tendency to act independently. For example, in the classroom, Pam often refused to do work and would leave the classroom when she was upset about an occurrence. This behavior can be frustrating for a teacher. Gadow describes this as, "If a child is not learning or refuses or forgets to do his or her work, this can be a source of frustration for teachers" (Gadow, in OSERS 1994, p. 37).

The three students did not have the same relationships with their teachers in both schools. Initially, the students interacted equally with their teachers and their peers. However, over the six week period of transition, they had moved to interacting with their peers more than they did with their teachers.

Children in the middle years are involved equally with teachers and peers.

Teachers represent authority and leadership, establishing the climate of the classroom, the conditions of possible contact among class members, and a set of relationships with individuals and the class as a group.

(Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 199)

For example, initially Vicki relied on her middle school teachers to repeat directions to her and to offer her support. However, she soon began interacting more with her peers and began to rely on the homework hotline for answers to her academic questions. In addition, Pam's teacher described her early classroom interactions as primarily teacher focused and having progressed so that her interactions became evenly distributed between teacher and peers. However, Pam believed that she interacted more with her peers than she did with her teacher.

Joe's teachers at Dashwood School and at the middle school have described him as "arrogant." At Dashwood School he did not initiate conversations with his teacher, but he did choose to eat lunch with her, rather than sit with his peers. At the middle school, Joe purposely went to class early in the morning in order to talk with his language arts teacher. Although Joe appears to have established different relationships with these teachers, he is described in the same way by them. A characteristic of a student with a learning disability can be social unease. When this occurs students are more comfortable with adults than with their peers (Levine, 1994, p. 226).

Although Joe has been described as "arrogant" by both of his teachers of learning disabilities, his subject area teachers described him as a "quiet student." During my observations and interviews with Joe, he did not appear to be arrogant. He did appear to be shy and uncomfortable around his peers.

#### *4. What is the student's relationship with peers in each school?*

All of the students in this study told me that they recognized another student in their new school. They knew at least one person from church, neighborhoods or sport teams. Supportive peer relationships are sometimes available during the transition period, and one would expect this availability to make adjustment to the new school less problematic (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 144). The three students did not report having a close friend in their classes, but they did say that they recognized other students in the halls of the school.

Students changing schools are generally concerned about how peers will accept them, relatively few worry about the school work or other aspects of moving (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 137). "Boys report more frequent incidents of rejection by peers through self-reports of having been teased or picked on in a mean way and having been hit or threatened in a mean way" (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 138). Even though Joe had neighborhood friends in the public school,

he worried about his relationship with older students in the new school. However, Vicki and Pam did not seem to be concerned about this aspect of the school change. Vicki did report being concerned about the school work and Pam was looking forward to being in school with children from her neighborhood

Joe has been described by his teachers at both schools as looking sad during the school day. Vernberg and Field have found that “depressive symptoms make children appear less desirable as friends and more likely to be rejected by peers (Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper, 1990, p. 141).”

Buswell and Shaffner write that the first step toward meeting students’ needs for friendship and belonging is full school inclusion in regular classes in the same school where typical kids in their neighborhood attend. They continue, “Although friendships cannot and should not be forced, positive relationship need to be intentionally facilitated for students with and without disabilities to get beyond the barriers and to grow to know, respect, and appreciate each other as individuals” (Buswell and Shaffner, in OSERS 1992, p. 5).

The three students appear to have adjusted to being in classes with students who do not have disabilities. Vicki has made girlfriends, has boys who would like to be her boyfriend and attends school sponsored social functions. Pam greeted me during each of our interviews at her fifth grade classroom by saying, “ I have a new friend and I have her phone number, too.” She later remarked that the students in her classroom were nice and “just like me.” Joe interacts with his peers more than he did with his classmates at Dashwood School. He initiates conversations and engages in playful rough housing with them. He is also on a recreational league sports team with some of his middle school classmates.



## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

*“No child has been ‘cured’ of a disability but in one small part of the world, people are recovering from the ills of separation and being restored to the good health of togetherness.”*

*H. James Jackson*

I began this study from the students’ life history perspective and a view that changing school settings is a natural phenomena in today’s educational system. The study developed from the students’ life histories to focus on the adjustment issues identified by Vernberg and Field in Fisher and Cooper (1990) as integral to all students who change school settings.

I suspected that these three students’ adjustment would be affected by their learning disabilities. They had attended Dashwood School as a result of not having positive public school experiences, and their learning difficulties had resulted in their separation from their peers and being educated at Dashwood School. I reasoned that the learning disabilities would once again affect their ability to perform well and blend into the public school classroom.

I was also interested in their ability to transition to the different schools. One setting, Dashwood School, was a structured school of ninety students. The elementary and middle schools to which they transferred consisted of several hundred students, many different teachers, classes and peers. The two female participants, Vicki and Pam, had been at Dashwood School for three years and had forgotten many details about the public school. Joe had been a student at Dashwood School for one year and was comfortable and eager to return to the public school setting. I wondered how all three of them would adjust to the differences.

There were implications for educational practice based on the findings of the case study. For instance, if the students had experienced loneliness and had difficulties

making friends, a peer mentor program could be developed for them. If they reported having difficulty following directions or keeping up with the academic work load, then study skills could be taught during the spring semester at Dashwood School, or a tutoring support system could be initiated.

I was surprised by what I found. I did not foresee that the students would respond so differently to teacher expectations and the learning environments or that they would appear to be happy and adjusting normally during the first six weeks of school. Minuchin and Shapiro (Mussen, 1983) write that students usually need one year or more to report being happier in a less structured environment. These three students reported being happier during the first six weeks that they were students in the new schools. I also did not foresee that the students would respond so differently to teacher expectations and the learning environments.

From this study, I have discovered that test results should be one part of the data used when making decisions about a student's schooling and that test results may be perceived and used by adults in different ways. Each person views and interprets a child's strengths and weaknesses from his own perspective. For example, Vicki's Dashwood School teacher wrote on her final report that Vicki "knew her phoneme/grapheme relationships." However, within a week an audiologist tested Vicki and wrote that she "needs more work on her phoneme/grapheme relationships." Each person tested the same skill, but found vastly varying results.

Even though test results may indicate that students may be classified as students with a learning disability, they are unique individuals with different strengths, weaknesses, reactions and perceptions. For instance, Vicki was diagnosed by an audiologist as having Central Auditory Processing Disorder, although everyone on her Child Study Committee did not agree with this distinction. It may be that she is not a strong auditory learner, but learns visually, kinesthetically or tactually. Additionally, she

has a low average cognitive level which could impact her ability to learn and retain information.

Another example of the importance of viewing test results as one facet of an individual's complexity is Joe's diagnosis as a student with a Written Expression Disorder and difficulty sequencing. His writing varies in quality from disjointed to well-organized when he is writing his opinions or judgments. In addition, Joe loves science and math. It could be possible that his development has been uneven reflecting more growth in the subject areas of math and science that are interesting to him and less in spelling and writing.

The students established different relationships with their teachers in the two school settings. Vicki had become dependent on the teacher assistant at Dashwood School for emotional and academic support. In the middle school, she obtained academic support from the homework hotline. But, during the first six weeks of school, she had not established an emotional support relationship with another teacher. As a result, Vicki continued to need support from the teacher assistant at Dashwood School after she moved to the middle school. Research has reflected a need for emotional support during pre-adolescence. Vicki does not have an emotionally supportive family due to the mental and physical difficulties of her twin and older sister which usurp a lot of her mother's time. As a result, she maintained the relationship with the teacher assistant who listened to her feelings and provided her with emotional support (Balk, 1995, p. 324)

I was also surprised that two of the students were described similarly by teachers at the different schools. Both teachers used the word "arrogant" to describe Joe. Vicki was described by her Dashwood School teachers as "precious" and by her middle school language arts teachers as "we think the world of her." I was surprised that the descriptions of the students would be so much alike and that the teachers were able to learn so much about them during the first six weeks of the fall semester.

Joe's teachers at both schools regarded him similarly, but he was more open with his middle school teachers. Joe continued to be comfortable conversing with adults and sought his language arts teachers for conversation. At the same time, he was developing relationships with his peers. Joe's interactions reflect research which indicates that typical young adolescent behavior develops towards the establishment of equal relationships with adults and classmates (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 19). His behavior is also reflected in literature that contends that many students with learning disabilities interact more with adults than with peers (Levine, 1994, p. 226).

Pam's relationships with her teachers varied. She did not complete tasks for some teachers and worked readily for others. Although Pam's reactions to the different teachers is complex, she may have related more comfortably to one teacher more than to another. The variations in relationships is addressed by Aspy and Roebuck as "Kids don't learn from people they don't like and Kids do learn from people they like" (Aspy and Roebuck, 1977, p. 1).

Pam refused to get off the bus or to enter Dashwood School before she was hospitalized for Separation Anxiety Disorder and Opposition Defiance Disorder. At the hospital, the doctors found her to be a cooperative student. She has also been agreeable in her public school fifth grade classroom where her teachers view her behavior as typical behavior and react to it as though it is normal whereas, at Dashwood School her teachers regarded her as a student with atypically problematic behavior. It is also possible that Pam did not like her teacher or Dashwood School and refused to cooperate because she was not happy as a student there.

It is surprising that Pam's behavior changed as much as it did in the two school settings. Pam's behavior difficulties were contextualized in Dashwood School where they were acknowledged, expected and focused on for remediation by teachers and counselors. Her mother expressed surprise that her behavior patterns did not continue when she changed schools because she had come to regard them as a part of Pam's

school actions. Her middle school teachers did not realize that Pam had a history of behavior difficulties and did not report behavior problems to me or to Pam's mother.

Although students usually are happier in less structured school environments, it usually takes them awhile to adjust to the difference in the schools. The first year the students are adapting, the second year, they are a little happier and by the third year they report being much happier in the new school (Minuchin and Shapiro in Mussen, 1983, p. 217). However, the three students in this study reported being happier in the less restrictive environment within the six week course of this study

It is difficult to define why the students reported being happier so quickly in the new schools. The new schools were less restrictive and also utilized various instructional methodologies as well as interdisciplinary studies. The importance of subject matter and student involvement is addressed by Seymour and Seymour as, "Learning should be an active, participatory affair. It's not enough just to tell children things. They need to know how to interpret what they hear and how to relate it to what else they know" (Seymour and Seymour, 1992, p. 69-70). Good and Brophy write that "The potential for expectations effects (especially for undesirable effects of low expectations) is greatest in classrooms that feature uniform rather than multiple goals, a narrow rather than a broad range of activity structures" (Good and Brophy, 1987 p. 136). The students' reactions to the different instructional methodologies may help to explain their adjustment to the public school setting.

The two schools constituted different social contexts for learning with Dashwood School being a separate, private facility for teaching students with learning disabilities. In *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Dewey writes, "schools ...[are] social enterprises in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility" (Boydston, Ed., 1991, p. 34). The importance of the social context for learning is further addressed as,

Interaction patterns also differ according to whether the setting is private and oriented primarily toward teaching the material to individual students or public and oriented primarily toward group recitation, review, or performance of skills taught previously. Finally the most important context factor is probably the nature of the learning environment that the teacher establishes (Good and Brophy, 1987, p. 136).

Vygotsky also addresses the importance of the cohort group in learning. He writes that “students in a group initiate learning that has its beginnings in the social interaction of the group” (Moll , 1994, p. 287). The changing social settings inherent in this study would comprise different interactions between students. Further, the move to a school that groups students with and without learning disabilities together allows the students to interact with peers who are more competent in academic areas which are difficult for them. This allows “more competent peers,” as well as adults to aid the student’s development (Moll, 1994, p. 155). Vygotsky refers to the zone of proximal development as the students’ optimum instruction level which encompasses the skills that the students have with the guidance of a more experienced or knowledgeable guide. These guides may be peers or adults who provide approaches to problem solving (Rogoff, 1990, p. 14; Moll, 1994, p. 155).

This case study has concluded with more questions than it has answered. I can not explain why the three students have adapted so easily to their new environments. They have moved to three different schools in two school districts. They have all maintained their personalities and have found ways to have their educational and emotional needs met. It seems that the students are unique individuals in both settings. They have not fundamentally changed. Joe tends to be introverted, while Vicki is friendly and outgoing in both settings. Pam’s behavior is not regarded as atypical in her

fifth grade classroom. Because she has had the intervening summer to mature and has been in continuous family counseling, her behavior may have changed from Dashwood School or it may be perceived differently by different teachers.

Implications for education practice which might be derived from this study have to do with the middle school teaming concept and instructional practice. The middle school teaming concept seems to help the students feel comfortable in their new schools. This is reflected by the adjustment experienced by Joe and Vicki which included being at ease with their classmates and class settings. The instructional techniques of peer editing and group projects are helpful to introverted students who need structured social situations in order to learn how to interact with others. This is evidenced by Joe's experience in Dashwood School and the middle school. In Dashwood School, Joe did not interact with his peers. In the middle school Joe was in a language arts class with seats placed in a circle and a lot of peer editing, group work and interaction. Joe has been able to interact and initiate conversations in this setting. His ability to converse with the other students carried over to before and after his language arts class. His teachers in his other, more traditional classes described Joe as quiet. The instructional techniques which foster student interaction appear to enable Joe to interact appropriately with his peers in that and associated settings.

The results of this study have been surprising and confounding, calling for the need for additional research. A number of assumptions parents and educators make about the capacity of students with learning disabilities to adjust and succeed may need to be revisited. For example, Pam's behavior had turned completely around, and she was making friends in her new classroom. She was still experiencing difficulty completing work, but her teacher was encouraging her to do well for her own sense of completion and growth as an individual. Joe was interacting with his peers in the middle school, initiating conversations with them and with this teacher. His Written Expression Disorder seemed to be sporadically present, and he was succeeding academically. Vicki

was getting along with teachers and students and was doing well academically without the dependence on the teacher assistant that she had at Dashwood School.

The results of this case study are complex, just as the lives of the participants are complex. There are complex family relationships, peer relationship issues and learning difficulties. There are individual reactions and perceptions to events, others and instruction. These specific and unique situations are not easily definable. Additionally, the individuals in the study may have had intervening events over the summer which affected their reactions to school and to others. The study is also impacted by the continuing maturation of young adolescents as they change in their growth and development towards adulthood.

The settings, teachers and peers varied greatly in the two schools. The public schools constituted a democratic, interdisciplinary educational approach which contrasted with the narrow approach used at Dashwood School. The students adjusted and learned in both settings.

#### *Implications for further studies*

Further studies could be conducted that used two groups of students. One group would have diagnosed learning disabilities while another group would exhibit similar characteristics or behaviors that are not diagnosed. A case study might follow them through part of their schooling looking at the differences in their experiences, classes and interactions. A comparison need is noted by Shapiro and Lentz concerning data regarding school change of students with and without learning disabilities, “There is a weakness in the existing literature, such as the failure to include sufficient comparison groups of youth’s without disabilities” (Shapiro and Lentz 1991, p. 48).

Other studies might pursue more thoroughly the differences in how professionals choose, use and interpret test results. There are many tests available to professionals



which test comparable abilities. Further studies might explore how a particular test is chosen and how the results are interpreted. A study might be conducted with several different professionals such as a principal, psychologist, audiologist, and teacher choosing tests, assessing test results and making recommendations on the basis of how they interpreted answers.

The perception of behavior problems such as Opposition Defiant Disorder might be studied to identify behaviors as age appropriate or atypical. This might be done by having diagnosed students observed by other professionals and parents who are unaware of the diagnosis. As they observe the student in a classroom setting, the adults can use the *DSM* criteria as a guide as to whether or not they perceive the observable behavior to fall into the psychological categories.

Studies might compare whether adolescent males with learning disabilities experience any more social unease than eleven year old boys without learning disabilities. This study would involve two groups of eleven year old males, one group with learning disabilities and one group without. Their comfort in social situations might be assessed through observation, interviews and questionnaires.

Further studies might assess whether the experiences of these three students are unusual or why these students adapted to their new environment so quickly. An extension of this study might follow these three students through middle school. It might look at the same issues to find if the success that they were experiencing during the first six weeks of their middle school continues throughout middle school.

These three children are continuing in their individual paths to grow, learn and experience as they progress through school. It would be simplistic to believe that these three children have been “cured” of the disabilities that hampered their early development. However, their transition back to the public school has been carried out with a gratifying degree of success through the efforts of parents, teachers and in no

small part to their own initiative and personal drive. Perhaps the new schools helped in some small way to restore their “good health of togetherness” (Jackson 1992).

## Appendix

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## Appendix A

### Definitions of Terms Used in the Study

These definitions reflect the use of the following words in this study.

**Ability Level:** Demonstrable knowledge or skill; includes aptitude and achievement.

**Achievement Level:** Acquired ability, such as school attainment in spelling.

**Advanced Reading Deck:** See Initial Reading Deck.

**Behavior Modification:** Plans to reward selected behavior which include reinforcement and shaping to modify behavior.

**Bender Gestalt Test:** Perceptual Motor Test.

**Binaural fusion:** Ability to synthesize sounds into one word.

**Child Study Committee:** Committee which annually reviews a student's progress. It consists of the student's teachers, school psychologist, parents and school administrators.

**Chronological Age:** Age in years and months.

**Cognitive Processes:** Mental Processes hypothesized to occur during perception, learning and thinking.

**Cohort Groups:** Group of children who participate in the same classes or activities together.

**Cooperative Learning:** a teaching arrangement in which students work in groups to work toward common academic goals.

**Decoding:** The listener extracts meaning and information from word units that are heard.

**Developmental Test of Motor-Integration:** Measures perceptual motor development, similar to the Bender Gestalt.

**Eligibility Committee:** A committee which administers a comprehensive re-evaluation of a student every three years.

**Encoding:** The speaker converts meaning into word units.

**FM System:** A system consisting of a microphone and earplugs which is designed to block out extraneous noise and to amplify the teacher's voice for the student.

**Gates MacGinitie Reading Test:** A test designed to provide a general assessment of reading achievement; consists of vocabulary and comprehension questions.

**Graphemes:** The smallest unit of writing.

**Hyperactivity:** Refers to excessive activity or mobility.

**IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

**IEP ( Individualized Education Program):** A management tool designed to ensure that handicapped students are provided special education and related services appropriate to their special learning needs.

**Instructional Modifications:** Changes in instruction which help the handicapped student learn in the regular classroom. (see Appendix)

**Interdisciplinary Studies:** Coordinating reading, math and subject area information into units.

**Initial Reading Deck, Advanced Reading Deck, Spelling Deck:** Color-coded cards of vowels, (yellow) consonants (green) and spelling (coral). The child uses the green and yellow cards to develop and enhance recall; the teacher uses the coral cards to teach spelling of specific sounds. These cards are part of the Orton-Gillingham curriculum.

**Kaufman Test of Achievement:** A norm-referenced test with subtests in math, reading and spelling.

**Key Math Test:** Identifies hierarchies of concepts and skills in basic concepts, operations and applications.

**Language Processing:** The ability to hear, understand and produce language.

**LRE (Least Restrictive Environment):** A term referring to the education of handicapped students in the regular educational environment. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped students from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes is not educationally beneficial to the student.

**Literacy Passport Test:** A state law requires that this reading, writing and math test be passed in order to be awarded a standard high school diploma.

**Morpheme:** Smallest meaningful unit of speech.

**Multi-Sensory:** Integration of visual, auditory and kinesthetic modes of learning.

**Owen's ADD Behavior Rating Scales:** Teachers and parents complete regarding a child's behavior.

**Perceptual Age:** Age equivalency of perceptual motor ability.

**Perceptual Motor Skills:** Refers to motor coordination, eye movements, use of left and right sides of the body.

**Phonemic Synthesis:** The ability to blend sounds into words.

**Phoneme/Grapheme Relationship:** Sound/symbol relationship.

**Phonics:** A method of teaching reading in which the key units taught are letter-sound correspondences.

**PIAT (Peabody Individual Achievement Test):** Provides a measure of achievement in mathematics, reading, spelling and general knowledge

**Psychological Test Reports:** A battery of tests examined by the Child Development Committee which consist of social-cultural reports, medical examinations, cognitive levels, grades, teacher reports.

**Raven's Matrices:** A non-verbal indicator of cognitive level; which measures visual discrimination through the ability to analyze a visual pattern.

**Reading Recovery:** A small group remedial program that combines reading and writing.

**Self-contained School:** A school with a homogenous population of students; the "most restrictive environment."

**Semantic:** Word meaning.

**Sequential Processing:** Putting words, thoughts and numbers in order.

**Short Term Memory:** Information remembered for a short period of time.

**Socio-Cultural Assessment:** Part of the child study committee's data which describes the child's family and home.

**Sound/Symbol Relationship:** The phoneme/grapheme relationship.

**Special Services:** Services offered through a school's special education department.

**Specific Learning Disability:** 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, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (State Definition/Regulations of Specific Learning Disability)

**Spelling Deck:** see Initial Reading Deck.

**Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test:** An intelligence test which yields composite, verbal and nonverbal reasoning scores.

**Syntactic:** Form, structure and word order of a sentence.

**Teams:** An instructional organization, integral to the middle school concept, in which the same teachers and students are clustered together. Teachers are able to cooperate and plan instruction together with flexibility.

**Temporal Staging:** Use of steps in a process; putting time in perspective; use of time.

**Visual Aural Digit Span Test:** short term sequential memory test which looks at the auditory and visual channels.

**Visual Motor Integration Skills:** the ability to integrate vision with movement of body parts.

**Visual Perception:** ability to understand the meaning of visual stimuli.

**Visual Sequential Memory:** Memory of letter patterns within words.

**Wellbutrin:** An anti-depressant drug.

**WISC Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children:** individually administered intelligence test that compares a student with others of the same age.

**Full Scale IQ:** Found by totaling ten subtest scores and converting the score into one single score.

**Verbal IQ::** Subtests include information, similarities, arithmetic, vocabulary, comprehension and digit span ( auditory short-term memory for random numbers)

**Perceptual IQ:** Subtests include picture completion (visual long-term memory and visual alertness to elements of a picture); coding (psychomotor speed anticipating consequences of social situations); block design (nonverbal (from WISC, 1993, test manual)

**Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement:** A test which consists of 52 optional subtests divided into cognitive, achievement, interests and independent behavior sections. The subtests are: picture vocabulary, spatial relations, memory for sentences, visual-auditory learning, blending, quantitative concepts, visual matching, antonyms-synonyms, analysis-synthesis, numbers reversed, concept formation, analogies, letter-word identification, word attack, passage comprehension, calculation, applied problems, dictation, proofing, science, social studies, humanities, reading interest, mathematics interest, written language interest, physical interest, social interest, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, social interaction, language comprehension, language expression, eating and meal preparation, toileting, dressing, personal self-care, domestic skills, time and punctuality, money and value, work skills, home/community orientation. (from the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement Manual)

**WRAT (Wide Range Achievement Test):** A tool to study the development of reading, spelling and math skills.



## **Appendix B**

### **Articulation Disorder/Auditory Receptive Language**

Articulation refers to speech production. Auditory Receptive Language refers to the ability to understand verbal language (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 133). If a student has difficulty producing speech sounds, they are said to have difficulty with articulation. For instance, a student may difficulty producing the “s” and “f” sounds. In this case a speech therapist would work with the student in order to help them distinguish between letters when they hear and produce them. The speech therapist would also help the student to learn how to position the mouth and tongue in order to clearly produce the letters (Perkins , Personal communication November, 1996).

Students with speech difficulties often have difficulties understanding the receptive spoken or printed symbols of the language. They have an inability to follow oral or written directions and an inability to understand multiple meanings of words. These difficulties impact their ability to function in a classroom because they are expected to respond appropriately in conversation and to follow directions and to also know what is expected of them. (Sutaria, 1985, p. 140)

Speech therapy can also focus on expressive and receptive vocabulary and on pragmatic language skills. Expressive vocabulary refers to the student’s ability to use a vocabulary word appropriately in speech. Receptive vocabulary focuses on the student’s understanding of a word which is spoken by others and on an understanding of the printed language symbols. This is particularly important because many students have difficulty understanding that words can have multiple meanings. Therefore, the speech therapist works with students to help them understand that a word’s meaning can be impacted by the context in which it is spoken.

Pragmatic language has to do with the cause and effect of language. A student needs to become aware of how their speech affects others. This entails the perceptions of

words and intonations. A speech therapist may also address these issues in speech therapy (Bernthal and Bankson, 1988, p. 5). Auditory receptive language disorders are associated with hyperactivity, preservation, disinhibition, distractibility and poor sustained attention to tasks (Sutaria, 1985, p. 140).

## Appendix C

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity disorder, ADHD, Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, is a diagnosis used by the American Psychiatric Association and listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*. It describes behavior which is found in three to five per cent of school-age students and includes the characteristics of inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity (Wodrich, 1994, p. 7). The characteristics of ADHD refer to those behaviors that are not typical characteristics in adults or students of a comparable level of development.

Inattention refers to the inability to concentrate in academic, social or occupational situations long enough to perform a task. These individuals, with the characteristics of inattention, often appear as if their mind is elsewhere, have difficulty completing tasks, and are easily distracted by movement or noise.

Hyperactivity refers to excesses in “purposeless, poorly directed physical movement” (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1994, p. 79).

School-age students who have hyperactive characteristics,

have difficulty remaining seated, get up frequently, and squirm in, or hang on to the edge of, their seat. They fidget with objects, tap their hands, and shake their feet or legs excessively. They often get up from the table during meals, while watching television, or while doing homework (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1994, p. 79).

Impulsivity means that individuals have difficulty controlling or regulating their impulses (Wodrich, 1994, p. 8). The characteristic of impulsivity refers to an inability to await one's turn, frequently interrupting, grabbing objects and banging into others and clowning around. These characteristics are usually more pronounced when individuals

are supposed to be concentrating on a task at home or school. It is usually much less severe when the individuals choose an activity which is enjoyable to them.

When a person has diagnosed ADHD, there are often other conditions present as well. “These may include learning disorder, depressive disorder (including bipolar disorder), anxiety disorder, Opposition or conduct disorder and movement disorder (including Tourette Disorder)” (Busch, 1993, p. 13).

Students who have been diagnosed with ADHD may have difficulty in school because they tend to be disorganized, fail to complete assignments or lose their work. In addition, students with ADHD often have learning disabilities. They may also have disorders of memory, language, or visual perception that inhibit them from learning to their potential (Wodrich, 1994, p. 21). Additionally, students who have difficulty restricting their impulses and physical movements often have behavior and conduct problems which negatively effect their ability to learn.

ADHD is caused by genetics, malnutrition, head injury and thyroid disorders. Its biological basis is an inability of the central nervous system to produce enough of the neurotransmitter family, catecholamine. The specific neurotransmitter that are important in the attentional systems are norepinephrine and dopamine (Busch, 1993, p. 11). A diagnosis of ADHD is made by the physician or psychologist. There are many different measures which are used to aide in diagnosis. For instance, a physical and neurological examination generally consists of evaluating reflexes, coordination, visual movement and acuity, speech-language, and thought patterns to determine if brain or nervous system disease or disability exists (Wodrich, 1994, p. 86). In addition, observation, parent, student and teacher interviews and behavior checklists are used. Through a combination of these sources of information, the problem can be identified and then a plan of intervention can be put in to place to help the students function at home and in the classroom.

Medicines are often prescribed for those with ADHD. They are designed to increase or decrease the action of the neurotransmitter. The most commonly prescribed medicines are ritalin, methylphenidate; dexedrine, dextroamphetamine a stimulant which is closest in chemical structure to catecholamine, and cylert, magnesium pemoline.

When these medicines do not help the disorder, antidepressants which inhibit the uptake of norepinephrine are sometimes prescribed. Some of these medicines are Tofranil, Norpramin and Wellbutrin.

A student who is diagnosed with ADHD is considered handicapped under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This act requires that schools make accommodations which allow the student to be involved in tasks and activities that students without ADHD participate in. For example, accommodations would include modified homework requirements, provision of readers, provision of taped textbooks, changes in the way tests are given, provision of a teacher's aide, or seating in the front row of the classroom.

Students diagnosed with ADHD learn through the same instructional strategies that are successful with all students. However, consistent classroom routines and a clear system of positive and negative consequences for behaviors are important for the classroom management of ADHD students (Braswell, Bloomquist and Pederson 1991, p. 41). Clear behavior management systems can be developed by having clear and brief, visual reminders of classroom rules posted around the classroom. Behavior modification plans are often used to help manage ADHD children's behavior. These can be developed and implemented entirely within the confines of the classroom, between the school and the home or through the planning of a psychologist. Plans that are put into place entirely in the classroom consist of reinforcement systems such as individual point totals, row totals or good behavior plans. These programs can be developed for rewards which are hourly, daily, weekly or a combination of frequencies (Braswell, Bloomquist and Pederson 1991, p. 46). Systems which are developed between the school and the home often include frequent conferences and the use of daily or weekly notes.

Physicians are often involved in planning behavior modification plans that are used in conjunction with the stimulant antidepressant medications. These behavior modification plans often involve both behavior in the classroom and in the home. Children are usually involved in the design of the program, setting the goals, defining progress and selection of incentives (Busch, 1993, p. 16).

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, lists the following Diagnostic criteria for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:

A. Either (1) or (2):

(1) six (or more) of the following symptoms of inattention have persisted for at least six months to a degree that is maladaptive and inconsistent with developmental level:

Inattention

- (a) often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities
- (b) often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities
- (c) often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- (d) often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the work place (not due to opposition behavior or failure to understand instructions)
- (e) often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- (f) often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork or homework)
- (g) often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g., toys, school assignments, pencils, books, or tools)
- (h) is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- (I) is often forgetful in daily activities

(2) six (or more) of the following symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity have persisted for at least six months to a degree that is maladaptive and inconsistent with developmental level:

Hyperactivity

- (a) often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat

(b) often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected

(c) often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate (in adolescents or adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)

(d) often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly

(e) is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"

(f) often talks excessively

#### Impulsivity

(g) often blurts out answers before questions have been completed

(h) often has difficulty awaiting turn

(I) often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

B. Some hyperactive-impulsive or inattentive symptoms that cause impairment were present before age 7 years.

C. Some impairment from the symptoms is present in two or more settings (e.g. at school (or work) and at home).

D. There must be clear evidence of clinically significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning.

E. The symptoms do not occur exclusively during the course of a Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Schizophrenia, or other Psychotic Disorder and are not better accounted for by another mental disorder (e.g. Mood Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Dissociative Disorder, or a Personality Disorder).

*DSM-IV*, 1994, p. 83



## **Appendix D**

### **Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAP)**

Central auditory processing refers to the manipulation and utilization of sound signals by the central nervous system. The processing of sound occurs when it enters the ear canal, but central auditory processing begins at the brainstem. It is closely related to peripheral hearing (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 4).

Lasky and Katz explain central auditory processing as,

The ascending auditory system directs the auditory information through a complex array of nuclei, sections of nuclei, layers of these sections, and various cells within these layers. The results from these processes reach Heschl's gyrus of the temporal lobe via the auditory radiations. At this point the information is scattered to many parts of the brain. A complex efferent system serves higher centers in affecting and controlling lower levels (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 4).

There is controversy concerning the meaning of auditory processing. The differences in opinions exist between different audiologists and sometimes between educators. For instance, some audiologists consider auditory processing to be a part of learning. These audiologists believe that information about language is in the mind of the listener and that very little word meaning can be gleaned from the acoustic signal. Because auditory processing involves understanding and perceiving language through our knowledge, studies show a high correlation between performance and language knowledge (Lasky and Katz, 1983, pp. 33-36).

Other audiologists, who focus on the linguistic and cognitive aspects of language processing, believe that auditory processing is either nonexistent or unimportant (Lasky and Katz, 33). These audiologists stress the importance of processing the information

contained in the acoustic signal prior to its linguistic interpretation. (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 36)

Further, some language processing advocates say there is no such thing as signal processing of language separable from higher order processing and some auditory processing advocates consider language processing as building basically on processing skills. (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 39)

Students with central auditory processing problems often have difficulty in comprehending integrating and remembering auditory information. They may have problems selecting and attending to auditory signals in the presence of distraction. These difficulties and the subsequent frustrations are most often observed when the student must process language in a teaching-learning environment. They seem to increase as the language becomes more complex and less familiar and as the task becomes more challenging (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 243). The students do not seem to know how to listen, learn and judge what they know (Lasky and Katz, 1983, p. 244).

The listening environment in the classroom may include competing auditory stimuli of one to three persons speaking simultaneously. This may disrupt the student's attention to relevant stimuli. In a classroom, students must wait to be called on, thus requiring a delayed response and use of memory. There is the presence of other students in the classroom which may create a more fearful social environment. In addition, a speaker alters the rate, intonation, redundancy and other variables differently in a group than with one listener.

Often a student identified with CAP will be urged to attend a school with a quiet environment. They may also use an auditory trainer such as an FM system. These systems require that a teacher wear a microphone which amplifies her voice through an FM earphone worn by the student. The earphones block out extraneous classroom noise and amplify the teacher's voice.

## **Appendix E**

### **Dyslexia**

"Dyslexia implies difficulty-not in reading-but in the use of words: how they are identified, what they signify, how they are handled in combination, how they are pronounced, and how they are spelt." (Pavlidis, 1981, p. 2)

Specific Developmental Dyslexia is learning disability which initially shows itself by a difficulty in learning to read, and later by erratic spelling and by lack of facility in manipulating written, as opposed to spoken, words. The condition is cognitive in essence, and usually genetically determined. It is not due to intellectual inadequacy or to lack of socio-cultural opportunity or to failure in the technique of teaching, or to emotional factors, or to any known structural brain lesion. It probably represents a specific maturational defect which tends to lessen as the child grows older and is capable of considerable improvement, especially when appropriate remedial help is offered at the earliest opportunity.

(quote by Critchely 1978 in Pavlidis, 1981, p. 103)

Dyslexia is a medical diagnosis of language processing difficulty. Its symptoms include the confusion of correct orientation of letters and numerals, reversals, inversions and rotations. It includes a general naming deficiency, impairment of short term memory for verbal material and impairment on tasks requiring perception of verbal material. It can be called by different names. For instance, a child with the above symptoms might be called a student with dyslexia, language disorder, special or specific language problems, perceptual disturbances, educationally handicapped or neurologically handicapped, brain-injured or to have term minimal brain dysfunction.

Dyslexia, originally referred to as congenital word-blindness, was identified at the end of the nineteenth century. Dr. Grace Fernald's was the first to address the difficulty educationally. Her auditory-kinesthetic method of instruction evolved with Helen Keller and culminated in the publication in 1921 of an article which they wrote together, "The effect of kinesthetic factors in the development of word recognition in non-readers," for the *Journal of Educational Research*. Some of Fernald's ideas were incorporated in the later work of Samuel Orton (1937) and Gillingham and Stillman (1969). Orton suggested that dyslexia might be a peculiarity of brain organization rather than a defect or dysfunction.

### *Etiology of Dyslexia*

Language processing is a complex process that involves intersensory integration of visual and auditory data. Reading requires the integration of visual-spatial and auditory temporal patterns. Speech requires a person to hear, to analyze, then to duplicate and finally to associate with meaning.

The cause of dyslexia is thought to be a neurological impairment of all of the brain processing mechanisms to work together. For example the right hemisphere of the brain supports verbal and written language comprehension, while the left side of the brain supports speech. When messages do not flow smoothly from one portion of the brain to another, there is an important interruption in the ability to understand and produce language.

Dyslexia has been found to run in families with 88% of dyslexics having another person in their immediate family with a reading disability. Seventy-nine per cent of all dyslexics have a family history of dyslexia. It is more common in boys with the proportions being three or four boys to one girl. Generally their most difficult subject is spelling, followed by reading. They usually do better in math and science, have difficulty reading other people's handwriting and rarely read for pleasure.

There are four separate dyslexia syndromes which are associated with neurological impairment. They center on difficulties with processing in the temporal lobe, left frontal lobe, the right hemisphere region of the brain or brain damage or injury. Deficits of the left temporal lobe contribute to language disorders in 60% of the cases of dyslexia with language disorders which result in poor comprehension of spoken language, disorders of imitated speech and/or disorders of sound discrimination. Deficiencies in the motor centers of the left frontal lobe account for 10% of the dyslexia cases where the most prominent disability is articulatory and graphomotor discoordination. These students have problems in sound blending and in visuomotor skills, but have normal receptive language functions. Another 10% of dyslexia cases are caused by brain damage or injury. This generally results in sequencing difficulties which affect right-left orientation and causes dyscalculia. A disorder of the right hemisphere parietal or temporal regions causes a visuospatial-perceptual disorder. These students perform poorly on tasks of visual pattern recognition and visual retention. They usually have performance scores below their language score on the WISC. Another 15% of the dyslexic cases are thought to be mixed and unclassified (Pavlidis, 1981, p. 53).

**Appendix F**  
**Instructional Modifications for**  
**Classroom, Literacy Passport and/or State Testing**

1. Use of audio cassette tapes
2. Braille
3. Large Print
4. Testing and quizzes given orally
  - a. Oral administration of test items
  - b. Oral administration of directions
5. Proctor recorded answers/dictation
6. Braille writer/Typewriter, etc.
7. Use of calculator
8. Use of spell checker
9. Interpreted/signed directions
10. Answers in test booklet
11. Extra test time/sessions
12. Test in small groups
13. Test in one-to-one situations
14. Mark student's correct or acceptable work, not mistakes
15. Make arrangements for homework assignments to reach home with clear, concise directions
16. Reversals/transpositions of letters and numbers should not be marked, but pointed out for correction
17. Recognize and give credit for student's oral participation in class

18. Provide extra assignment time
19. Student should be allowed to tape classroom lectures/discussions after informing the teacher
20. Student should be allowed to copy another student's class notes
21. Student should be provided a carbon copy of another student's class notes
22. Utilization of peer tutoring
23. Avoid placing student under pressure of time or competition
24. Accept homework papers typed by the student or dictated by him and recorded by someone else, if need be
25. Do not return handwritten work to be copied over
26. Quietly repeat directions to student, after giving to the class; then have student repeat and explain directions to the teacher
27. Student will dictate answers to questions on cassette
28. Accompany oral directions with written ones for student to refer to (on blackboard or paper)
29. Do not require lengthy outside reading assignments
30. Student should be permitted to use cursive writing
31. Other

*Instructional Modifications which are Classroom Only:*

Tentative criteria for evaluation of student.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Student is on same grading system as other students
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Student is on same grading system with these exceptions:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Student is on pass/fail system
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Student is on an attendance pass/fail system
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Student will receive credit (cr.) if the work is commensurate with his/her ability; if (f.) effort is not present
- (Special Education Department: City Schools)

## **Appendix G**

### **Opposition Defiant Disorder**

Opposition Defiant Disorder refers to a recurrent patterns of negativistic, defiant, disobedient and hostile behavior toward authority figures that persists for at least six months. In order to be classified as Opposition Defiant Disorder, the behavior must occur more frequently than is age appropriate. The defiance must also lead to significant impairment in social, academic or occupational functioning. The characteristics of this disorder include: losing temper, arguing with adults, defying or refusing to comply with requests or rules of adults, deliberately doing things that will annoy other people, blaming others for own mistakes or misbehavior, being touchy or easily annoyed by others, being angry or resentful, or being spiteful or vindictive (Horne and Sayger, 1990, p. 91).

Many times a person with this disorder will have negativistic and defiant behaviors. These might express themselves as stubbornness, resistance to directions and an unwillingness to compromise, give in or compromise. It may also be shown by a deliberate or persistent testing of limits, usually by ignoring orders, arguing and failing to accept blame for inappropriate behavior.

The onset of aggressive, antisocial behavior associated with this disorder usually begins before a child is six years old. A large majority of the children do not resolve the behavior patterns and continue to have behavior problems throughout childhood and adolescence. Many times their behavior results in incarceration when they are adults (Horne and Sayger, 1990, p. 9).

Although Opposition Defiant Disorder includes some features in Conduct Disorder (disobedience and opposition to authority figures), it does not include the persistent pattern of the more serious forms of behavior in which either the basic rights of others or age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated. Opposition Defiant



Disorder is also less serious than Conduct Disorder because it does not include persistent aggression toward people or animals, destruction of property , theft or deceit.

The Disorder is often compounded by other problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder and family dysfunction. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is common in children with Opposition Defiant Disorder. Learning Disorders and communication disorders are also associated with the behavior problem (Horne and Sayger, 1990, p. 92).

It appears to be common in families with mood, ADHD, antisocial personality or a substance-related disorder. In addition, mothers with depressive disorder and marital discord have been associated with a high incidence of children with opposition behavior (Horne and Sayger,1990, p. 93).

Diagnostic Criteria for 313.81 Opposition Defiant Disorder

A. A pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior lasting at least 6 months, during which four (or more )of the following are present:

- (1) often loses temper
- (2) often argues with adults
- (3) often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules
- (4) often deliberately annoys people
- (5) often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- (6) is often touchy or easily annoyed by others
- (7) is often angry and resentful
- (8) is often spiteful or vindictive

(Consider a criterion met only if the behavior occurs more frequently than is typically observed in individuals of comparable age and developmental level.)

B. The disturbance in behavior causes clinically significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning.

C. The behaviors do not occur exclusively during the course of a Psychotic or Mood Disorder.

D. Criteria are not met for Conduct Disorder, and, if the individual is age 18 years or older, criteria are not met for Antisocial Personality Disorder.

*DSM-IV*, 1994, p. 93-94

## **Appendix H**

### **The Orton-Gillingham-Instructional Methods**

The Orton-Gillingham instruction method is an alphabetic phonic approach to teaching language skills using the multi-sensory involvement of eyes (visual), ears (auditory), and muscles (kinesthetic). It is an alphabetic method of teaching which concentrates on fusing smaller units (letters, sounds and syllables), into more complex wholes (words).

The Gillingham method is geared to students who have been unable to acquire reading and spelling skills using traditional school methods. The method was originated by Samuel Orton (1879-1948), a psychiatrist who worked with theories of language processing. As a psychiatrist, he specialized in language disabilities and also directed research at the New York Neurological Institute. Orton established the cerebral dominance theory as a possible cause of language processing difficulty by observing that motor preferences of his patients were on the left side or that they were ambidextrous. He reasoned that failure to establish dominance might be a primary factor in their language learning difficulty. Orton also worked with word-blindness which he correlated with delayed onset of speech, defective articulation, immature language, clumsiness, directional confusions, and a lack of unilateral dominance. He noticed that his patients confused lower case letters such as “b” and “d” and “p” and “q.” They would transpose words such as “was” and “saw” or “not” and “ton.” This tendency to transpose letters was also evident within words such as “gary” for “gray.” His aim was not to change his patients, but to devise a regimen that would enable each of them to function well, making the best possible use of their abilities and strengths. For instance, he advocated working with the patient’s auditory and kinesthetic modalities in order to fortify the fallible visual one (Pavlidis, 1981, p. 271).

He and Anna Gillingham worked together to find instructional approaches which would help those students Orton had identified as having language processing difficulties. “He found out the possibilities; she found ways to achieve goals with pupils” (Rawson, 1988, 127). In 1932, Anna Gillingham and Bessie Stillman published *The Gillingham-Stillman Manuals* which directed other teachers in the use of their structured methods.

As their instructional methods were being developed, they drew from the work of Dr. Grace Fernald. She had discovered the auditory-kinesthetic method which evolved with the education of Helen Keller. Dr. Fernald describes her multi-sensory approach as:

A word, written cursive script, is traced over with the pupil’s forefinger (not with a pencil). As he traces, the pupil slowly enunciates the word at which he is also looking, thus creating a multi-sensory image. The tracing is repeated until the kinesthetic image is firmly established and available for word recognition and writing” (Fernald 1943 in Rawson 1988).

The Orton-Gillingham instructional methods developed into a structured, formal and systematic program. The multi-sensory teaching technique establishes sound-symbol associations and systematically builds up words from letters. Its aim is to establish decoding and encoding skills which are based on the relationship between sounds and symbols.

## **Appendix I**

### **Separation Anxiety Disorder**

Students with Separation Anxiety Disorder are upset and fearful about separation from a parent to a degree which is not developmentally appropriate. Sometimes the students are described as demanding, intrusive and in need of constant attention. However, a student could have this Disorder and be conscientious, compliant and eager to please. When the students are upset about being separated from the parent, they may show anger or hit out at someone who is forcing the separation. They may also voice many physical complaints (*DSM-IV*, 1994, pp. 111-113).

In Separation Anxiety Disorder, going to school is the predominant symptom. A student can be fearful enough of separation that the fear causes the student to panic.

Going to school is the predominant symptom of Separation Anxiety disorder. It is not only the student's major source of distress, but the one that attracts the most attention. The panic attacks are severest in the school where the student's shrieking may literally interfere with teachers conducting their routines (Gardner, 1985, p. 6).

The student might complain that the teacher is mean, their classmates are bullies, the school is boring, the work is too hard or the work is too simple. Often these students also have a variety of physical complaints such as headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, stomachache or low-grade fever. Often the students are described as being demanding, coercive and manipulative. When a family member or someone from the school staff does cajole them into going to school, the student might threaten, "If you make me go to school, I'll jump out of the window" (Gardner, 1985, p.10).

Students with Separation Anxiety are fearful. Often they are not sure of what they are afraid of, they might say, "I don't know what I'm afraid of; I'm just scared"

(Gardner, 1985, p. 8). Other times, the students will verbalize fears of animals, monsters, the dark, muggers, burglars, kidnappers, car accidents, plane travel or other situations which they believe could hurt them or their family (*DSM-IV*, 1994, p. 111).

Students with this Disorder often come from close-knit families. Often the mothers have fears themselves. The mother may be overprotective and have an over dependent child which manifests in the student's anxiety about their separation. Often the message which the mother projects is, "The world is a dangerous place and only I can protect you from the calamities that may befall you if you venture into it" (Gardner, 1985, p. 13).

## Diagnostic Criteria for 309.21 Separation Anxiety Disorder

A. Developmentally inappropriate and excessive anxiety concerning separation from home or from those to whom the individual is attached, as evidenced by three (or more) of the following:

(1) recurrent excessive distress when separation from home or major attachment figures occurs or is anticipated

(2) persistent and excessive worry about losing, or about possible harm befalling, major attachment figures

(3) persistent and excessive worry that an untoward event will lead to separation from a major attachment figure (e.g. getting lost or being kidnapped)

(4) persistent reluctance or refusal to go to school or elsewhere because of fear or separation

(5) persistently and excessively fearful or reluctant to be alone or without major attachment figures at home or without significant adults in other settings

(6) persistent reluctance or refusal to go to sleep without being near a major attachment figure or to sleep away from home

(7) repeated nightmares involving the theme of separation

(8) repeated complaints of physical symptoms (such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, or vomiting) when departure from major attachment figures occurs or is anticipated

B. The duration of the disturbance is at least 4 weeks.

C. The onset is before age 18 years.

D. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, academic (occupational), or other important areas of functioning.

E. The disturbance does not occur exclusively during the course of a Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Schizophrenia, or other Psychotic Disorder and, in adolescents and adults, is not better accounted for by Panic Disorder with Agoraphobia.

Early Onset: if onset occurs before age 6 years.

*DSM-IV, 1994, p. 113*



## **Appendix J**

### **Specific Learning Disability**

Specific Learning Disabilities refers to the educational consequences of learning difficulties (Sutaria, 1985, p. 22). Each individual with learning disabilities has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. As a result there are a variety of problems which a student could have, but not a set which is found in all students with learning disabilities (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 8). A student with learning disabilities may require new ways of learning concepts and skills. An integrated approach to learning which emphasizes kinesthetic and tactile stimulations along with visual and auditory presentations is frequently suggested as a method for teaching students with learning disabilities.

Students with learning disabilities are generally defined as students who are underachievers. This is determined by a discrepancy between expected and actual achievement in terms of the student's chronological age, cognitive age and actual level of classroom achievement. Tests which are used to determine this discrepancy include standardized achievement and intelligence tests, reading, math or written expression. In order for a discrepancy to be considered substantial the learning problems must interfere with achievement and activities that require reading, math or writing. Usually a discrepancy of more than two standard deviations between achievement and intelligence with correlated with a learning disability (*DSM-IV*, 1994, p. 46).

Students with learning disabilities are also generally defined by difficulties with listening, thinking, reading, writing, spelling and math. The older student with a learning disability is often two or more years behind in academic abilities, but a younger student might be experiencing severe problems in beginning to learn (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 29).

## **Appendix K**

### **Written Expression Disorder**

The *DSM-IV* describes the essential feature of the Disorder of Written Expression as,

Writing skills that fall substantially below those expected given the individual's chronological age, measured intelligence and age-appropriate education. The disturbance in written expression significantly interferes with academic achievement or with activities of daily living that require writing skills. There is generally a combination of difficulties in the individual's ability to compose written texts evidenced by grammatical or punctuation errors within sentences, poor paragraph organization, multiple spelling errors, and excessively poor handwriting. Tasks in which the child is asked to copy, write to dictation, and write spontaneously may all be necessary to establish the presence and extent of this disorder (*DSM-IV*, 1994, p. 52).

A major difficulty experienced by the student with written expression problems is the inability to organize thoughts into the proper form for written communication. Many students who can orally articulate their thoughts concisely are totally unable to communicate in a logical writing style.

Some students may have difficulty categorizing or classifying ideas in the proper sequence. This results in disorganization with thoughts scrambled throughout paragraphs and even within sentences. Many students with written expression difficulties are also confused by the rules of grammar and grammatical order (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 186).

There are several steps which students must use in order to compose a piece of writing. First, they need an idea. The ideas must be arranged so that they flow naturally one to another. The students need to be able to hold their ideas in their mind while they are writing. The students also need to have enough words in their vocabulary to enable them to express their ideas. Finally, students need to be able to spell and construct sentences and paragraphs (Sutaria, 1985, p. 335).

Instructional methodologies used for teaching students with Written Expression Disorder include building upon sequential ideas and improving the written expression of ideas. Some teachers adapt traditional English and grammar programs by combining reading, oral language, and spelling with activities in written expression (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975, p. 195).

Diagnostic Criteria for 315.2 Disorder of Written Expression

- A. Writing skills, as measured by individually administered standardized tests (or functional assessments of writing skills), are substantially below those expected given the person's chronological age, measured intelligence, and age-appropriate education.
- B. The disturbance in Criterion A significantly interferes with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require the composition of written texts (e.g. writing grammatically correct sentences and organized paragraphs).
- C. If a sensory deficit is present, the difficulties in writing skills are in excess of those usually associated with it.

*DSM-IV, 1974, p. 53.*

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**Publications**

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