CASE STUDIES OF
LEARNING DISABLED HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETERS
IN A MARYLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT
by
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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
in
Special Education Administration
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February 1992
Blacksburg, Virginia
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(ABSTRACT)

While many follow-up studies have been conducted which examine the post-school status of special education students from a single point in time perspective, few can be found which provide an in-depth look into their lives in the years following school completion. The purpose of this study was to develop a detailed picture of the adult lives of selected learning disabled subjects to determine the impact of their disability on this post school years.

Three cases were developed, using an embedded multiple case study design (Yin, 1989). The main units of study were the learning disabled young adults. Sub-units of study included the experiences of the subjects in terms of their personal reflections on school, their levels of success in and beyond school, and the particular curricular and vocational choices made for these students. Other sub-units examined in the embedded design were the parents, teachers and employers of these students.

The main data sources for the study included in-depth interviews with subjects, as well as their parents, teachers and employers. Other data
sources included school records and classroom observations.

Data were mechanically coded and then sorted using The Ethnograph (Seidel and Kjolseth, 1988). An analysis of data led to the development of logic diagrams for each case which explicated the various facets of the causal condition, that is, the learning disability, and the phenomenon, that is, the transition process to adult life, for each subject.

Findings of the study include the compilation of a wide array of services which are offered by school systems to students with learning disabilities. Questions are posed, however, about the timeliness of these services, as well as the cohesiveness of the planning for individual students. Counseling around transition issues which includes the student and family appears to be an area which receives limited attention.

In the cases studied, the transition process appears delayed in all instances, but for different reasons. Continued study of the process for preparing service plans for individual students and the subsequent results will be useful to policy makers in determining what steps might be taken to increase the odds for success in adult life for the learning disabled.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this task could not have been accomplished without the support and encouragement of many people. My thanks seems meager in response to the assistance I have received from others.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the members of my committee: Dr. Philip R. Jones, Dr. Marvin C. Cline, Dr. Bonnie S. Billingsley, Dr. Susan B. Asselin, and Dr. Lorraine Costella. Dr. Jones has been an expert advisor throughout my program at Virginia Tech. Never too busy to respond to my requests, he has been the key person in shepherding me through this lengthy and complex process. Dr. Cline has been equally invaluable in providing guidance and most importantly, in urging me to stretch the limits of my thinking. His expertise and willingness to support my efforts as a student have been inspirational. Dr. Billingsley, too, has provided direction and assistance. Her expertise in the field of special education is so apparent. I have appreciated her probing questions and her unwavering high standards for students. Dr. Asselin has been another helpful committee member, sharing her insights in her area of expertise and providing thoughtful guidance. I offer special thanks to Dr. Lorraine Costella. She has been a mentor and a friend throughout the years of our
acquaintance. I have appreciated her gentle probing as I floundered through the rough spots during this laborious process. I will recall with fondness her words of wisdom, simple but so true: "Just do it."

Family and friends have, too, been of help. It is with great fondness that I dedicate this project to the memory of my father, Stanley Buczek, a man who truly valued academic study and would have been fully appreciated the nature of this accomplishment. While others have been helpful along the way, only my husband, Marius, truly understands the emotional process which unfolded as this project developed. Despite the repeated inconveniences to him and the personal sacrifices required in our family life, he never once complained. For all the extra tasks which he undertook so unselfishly in support of my work, I will be forever grateful. In remembering the accomplishment of this project, I will recall with fondness my old dog, Schnapps, who laid on my feet for days on end while I worked in isolation on the task at hand. Without knowing it, he offered a silent presence which helped me through it all.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................. iv

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION..................................................... 1
  Background........................................................ 4
  Problem Statement................................................. 8
  Purposes............................................................ 8
  Research Issues................................................... 10
  Definitions........................................................ 11
  Justification for the Study................................. 17

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.................................. 18
  The Development of Follow-up Studies...................... 18
  Impact of Early Studies....................................... 19
  Follow-up Studies of Learning Disabled
    Population...................................................... 24
  Learning Disabled Students Who
    Pursue College............................................... 28
  Vocational Preparation Programs.......................... 30
  Factors Related to Successful
    Transitioning................................................ 33
  Outcomes........................................................ 36
  National Longitudinal Transition Study.................. 38
  Conclusions....................................................... 43
CODES: Final Iteration: .......................... 166
School Issues........................................ 166
Employment Issues................................. 169
Social Life............................................ 171
Learning Disability................................. 172
Student Thinking Process.......................... 174
Family Involvement................................ 175
Parent Perceptions.................................. 176
Independence Issues................................. 178
Adjustment Issues.................................. 179
Post-secondary School Issues...................... 180
VITA.................................................... 181
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table/Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Data Sources by Case</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Logic Diagram: Case 1</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Logic Diagram: Case 3</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Logic Diagram: Case 4</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Network of Services</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, the number of students identified as handicapped, and consequently served in special education programs, has increased dramatically. As reported in the Twelfth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act (1990), the number of disabled youth between ages 18 and 21 served in public school programs continues to increase, with the number of handicapped students served in all educational programs growing by more than two percent last year. This increase represents the largest growth within the last decade.

With procedures for the identification of disabled children now in place, focus has shifted to the examination of the outcomes of the extensive and costly programming now provided to special needs youth. One method for examining outcomes for students has been to conduct follow-up studies which examine the post-school status of disabled young adults in terms of their employment experiences (Halpern, in press).

Early follow-up studies focused primarily on the investigation of the life status of the retarded (Kokaska, 1968). With the inclusion of extensive programming for students with many other handicapping conditions, more recent researchers have broadened their focus to include young adults with other disabilities (Robinson, 1987).
Follow-up studies have been conducted in different states, with varying findings (Hasazi, Gordon and Roe, 1985; Malevar, 1968; Mithaug, Harauchi and Fanning, 1985; Wise and Matthews, 1987). Most of these follow-up studies have solicited data which represent a single point in time perspective of the life status of the young disabled adult. In order to understand more fully the life experiences of these persons, it will be helpful to collect data which will provide insight into the several processes by which these students interact with and respond to various kinds of experiences. Such patterns of processes are different from student to student so that several students are needed to get a broad picture.

The nature of programming for the disabled student varies greatly even within single school jurisdictions. Students might attend comprehensive high schools where they receive special education services and vocational classes on site. Some students attend comprehensive high schools for part of the day, and then attend Vocational-Technical Center where they receive specialized vocational training. Yet others might attend special education centers with vocational training classes on site. Another program variation might be attending a comprehensive high school and participating in work-study programs. It will be helpful to consider these different program variations in studying the life outcomes of students who have been identified as disabled and who have participated in varying school programs.

The broad purpose of this study will be to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of learning disabled students who
have exited the public school system and entered the world of work. This issue will be examined in terms of the kinds of educational experiences afforded these young adults and their subsequent experiences in the work force. Their level of satisfaction in terms of education, employment and life status will be explored in depth.

Gaps in service delivery systems in and beyond school will be explored. The impact of such gaps will be related to the life outcomes of the particular students studied. Issues identified in previous follow-up studies will also be examined in terms of the lives of the subjects.
**Background**

A critical objective of special education is to provide educational experiences which will enable students to become productive citizens upon completion of their school years. Special educators are charged with modifying educational programs in a manner which will enhance the learning of needed skills for success in post-school life.

Several key factors are related to the accomplishment of this goal. First of all, it is essential that special educators be aware of programs which lead to successful employment for handicapped young adults.

Vocational education has long been identified as a program which holds a key role in preparing many handicapped students for the world of work. The value of vocational education to the handicapped learner was recognized by Congress in its enactment of several laws which have targeted the vocational preparation needs of the handicapped.

The 1968 Amendments to the Vocational Education Act of 1963 recognized the special needs of the handicapped and permitted the use of federal funds to serve this population. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, addressed the needs of handicapped youth by continuing the mandate established in the 1968 legislation that at least ten percent of every state's allotment for targeted populations be utilized to serve handicapped students (Apling and Irwin, 1988). In 1989, re-authorization hearings on the Perkins Act were held. As a result of these hearings, Congress re-authorized the Perkins legislation for five years and renamed it as the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act. The amendments of 1990 reorient the previous legislation toward improvement
of vocational education and focus particularly on the areas of disadvantaged, handicapped, and limited English-speaking students. Distribution of funds to local education agencies is contingent upon numbers of students served in these categories. It is very likely that more disabled students than ever will be enrolled in vocational education programs in the future. Clearly, policy-makers need to know the impact of vocational education programs on the post-school employment status of special education completers.

While many educators identify vocational education as essential programming for the handicapped student, some enter the debate on the side of broader-based career education, focusing on work-related skills as the more critical component (McMurrin, 1973). With the prevalent trend of changing careers at many points in life, many wonder about the value of investing heavily in training in one single skill area when it is likely that a student will not pursue this career path. To this end, it is argued that a variety of supervised work experiences are of greater value to handicapped students than training in a specific field. It would be helpful to know under which conditions the various types of work preparation experiences have resulted in more favorable outcomes for handicapped young adults.

Another key factor which has impacted the nature of programming for special needs learners has been the trend toward inclusion of the handicapped in programs previously reserved for normal learners. Referred to as the “Regular Education Initiative”, a movement toward accomplishment of the last restrictive environment charge of P.L. 94-142 has rather
dramatically impacted the face of special education programs in school systems (Davis, 1989). Many programs which isolated the moderately and severely handicapped in special school buildings have been disbanded in favor of programs which include these students in partial or full day programs within neighborhood schools. With this changed attitude toward the ability of the handicapped to be integrated in regular school programs, views, too, have changed on the appropriateness of including such students more extensively in work preparation courses and experiences. It is useful to investigate how such inclusion has changed the expectations for the life outcomes for handicapped students.

Another trend which has begun to impact the post-school status of special needs learners is the focus on the planning of the transition for students from school to the world of work. Presented in 1984, as a policy by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U.S. Department of Education, the transition model was studied by school systems and incorporated as a program component in most states. In this model, a specific plan was developed for each student which identified career goals and individual needs which a student might have after exiting school. In many instances, community agencies participated in formulating the plan so that needed services were in place prior to the student's leaving school. The intent of the process was to formalize a system for helping students to bridge the gap between school and independent living beyond school (Will, 1984).

The level of implementation of transition plans varied greatly from region to region. With the passage of the Education of the Handicapped
Act Amendments of 1990 known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, transition planning for disabled students no longer become optional. Transition services must now be identified in the Individual Education Program no later than when the student turns sixteen years of age. Such services must be reviewed annually. Interagency responsibilities must also be stated in the plan. Another aspect of this provision in the law is the requirement that the educational agency convene to identify an alternative plan to meet the transition objectives should another agency fail to provide the identified services.

Questions exist as to the impact of the transitioning movement initiated more than five years ago largely as an optional service. In the future, it will be worthwhile to consider how transition planning as mandated by the 1990 legislation impacts the lives of the disabled as they enter their adult years.

While data which have been collected in follow-up studies through the years have been helpful in formulating some conclusions about the needs of disabled learners, the field of special education has been a dynamic one, with substantial developments, including those discussed above, occurring since 1975 in particular. It is only now that graduates are exiting the schools after having experienced extensive special education programming, which often has included vocational education components. Recent graduates, too, have participated in programs which reflect a level of knowledge about special education practices which was not known in previous decades.
It is most important to continue to study the life outcomes of special education completers to determine how evolving trends are impacting the post-school employment status of youth with disabilities.

**Problem Statement**

Rich descriptions of the life experiences of individual learning disabled students who exited the public school system have not been reported in the literature. This study will attempt to fill this void. The subjects for the study will be selected learning disabled students who have completed secondary school programs in the Frederick County (MD) Public Schools.

**Purposes**

The purposes for the study will be:

-- to describe the educational experiences of a selected set of learning disabled students who completed programs in the Frederick County Public Schools

-- to describe the perceptions of these students about their personal school experiences

-- to describe the adjustments of these students from school to post-school life

-- to describe the perceptions of these students of the impact of their learning disability on their current life status
-- to provide a description of the attitudes of other relevant adults
about the school and life experiences of the learning disabled school
completers.
Research Issues

The main issue to be addressed in this study will be why some learning disabled students who complete their educational program may not be ready, willing, or able to enter or to remain in the world of work. This might be the result of a failure on the part of the school system to adequately prepare these students, a lack of support systems in the world of work, or some combination of these factors and other unknowns. This study will attempt to isolate such factors.

Perceptions of learning disabled school completers about their school programs and post-school experiences will be explored in connection with the present life situation of the young adult. Perceptions of other relevant adults, to include parents, employers, or school personnel will be included.

The research method will be inductive. Broad questioning sequences will be used to guide personal interviews. However, these guides will only be used to provide loose structure to the interviews. The questioning guide identifies areas to be covered. It is not intended that questions be asked in any specific sequence. The order of topics will emerge as the conversation between the interviewer and the subject develops. Specific questions for individual subjects will be developed as the study progresses.

Subjects will be selected who have exited school at least one year prior to the time of their interview. It is felt that the passage of this period of time following exit from school might allow for the occurrence of an adjustment phase which is quite normal for many school completers.
Definitions

career education: The totality of experiences through which one learns about and prepares to engage in work as part of a way of living, encompassing both paid and unpaid efforts. (Hoyt, cited in Brolin and Loyd, 1989).

comprehensive high school: A secondary school which offers, under a single administration and at a single site, an educational program which is both academic and vocational. The comprehensive high school serves almost all students residing within a specific geographical area. (Conant, 1967).

handicapped students: According to the Code of Federal Regulations, handicapped students include those evaluated in accordance with 300.530-300.534 and subsequently identified as mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically handicapped, other health impaired, deaf-blind, multi-handicapped, or as having specific learning disabilities, and who, because of those impairments, need special education and related services. The 1990 amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act (P.L. 101-476) include autism and traumatic brain injury as separate categories. In this study, the terms disabled students, special needs students, special education students, and handicapped students will be used interchangeably. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) renames the Education of the Handicapped Act and replaces the term “handicapped” with the term “disabilities” throughout the law.
**Individual Education Program:** A written description of the special education needs of the student and the special education and related services to be provided to meet those needs. The goals, objectives, activities and materials shall be adapted to the needs, interests, and abilities of each student. (COMAR 13A.05.01.06D) The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (1990) adds that the Individual Education Program must now include a statement of the needed transition services for students beginning no later than age sixteen and annually thereafter (and when determined appropriate for the individual, beginning at age fourteen or younger), including, when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or linkages (or both) before the student leaves the school setting.

**Levels of Service:** Maryland uses a model of a continuum of special education services. Levels of special education services for handicapped students are described in terms of the intensity of services, with Level 1 being the least restrictive placement and Level 6 being the most restrictive placement. (COMAR 13A.05.01.06E)

**Level 1:** The student is served in a regular education classroom for the entire day. The special education teacher provides direct or indirect instructional consultation services, and/or special materials or equipment as needed for the support of instruction.

**Level 2:** The special education students receives services through the special education program for a period of time not to exceed an average of one hour daily.

**Level 3:** The student receives special educational services for a period
of time not to exceed an average of three hours daily.

**Level 4:** Special education services are provided in a special classroom within a general education facility. Students receive most or all of the basic educational program within this class.

**Level 5:** Students receive special education services in a comprehensive special education setting, sometimes referred to as a center school. Which includes special equipment and related services. These services are provided for the entire day in a special wing or day school.

**Level 6:** A Level 6 special education program includes a comprehensive special education program, special equipment, related services and twenty-four hour personal care. (COMAR 13A.05.01.06E)

**Life tasks:** Set of issues that confront most adults in a particular sequence as they age. Life tasks of young adulthood include separation from the family, formation of a partnership, beginning of a family, and creation of an individual life pattern to include choosing a career.

(Bee, 1987)

**Specific learning disability:** A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to 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.
**Supported Employment:** A supported work approach to competitive employment which includes structured assistance in job placement and one-to-one job site training and follow-up by a job coach who is readily accessible for individualized assistance. (Wehman, Moon and McCarthy, 1986)

**Transitioning Services:** A coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Individual with Disabilities Education Act, 1990)

**Vocational Education:** Organized educational programs offering a sequence of courses or instruction in a sequence or aggregation of occupational competencies that are directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid employment in current or emerging occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. These programs must include competency-based applied learning that contributes to an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order
reasoning, and problem solving skills. Work attitudes, general employability skills, and the occupational-specific skills necessary for economic independence as a productive and contributing member of society. This term also includes applied technology education. (Federal Register, 1991). The Code of Maryland Regulations includes the following list of broad courses which might be included as part of the vocational education program in a school district: agriculture, distributive education, health occupations education, home economics, office occupations, technical education, and trade and industrial occupations.

**vocational education completer**: A student who has successfully acquired four or more Carnegie units in a single vocational area.

**vocational education limited concentrator**: A student who has accumulated four or more credits in different occupational areas. (Wise, 1987).

**vocational education sampler**: For purposes of this study, a vocational education sampler will be defined as a student who has earned between one and four credits in occupational areas.

**Vocational Rehabilitation**: Federal program for handicapped adults which is administered by the individual states. In Maryland, the State Board of Education accepts and administers federal funds on a matching basis for the stated purpose of helping disabled persons overcome employment handicaps. (COMAR 13A.05.02.01b)
**Vocational-technical center:** A secondary school program which provides training in specific vocational and technical skills at a specialized site. Students generally attend this center for part of every day. (Conant, 1967) In many jurisdictions, these centers have now been renamed Career and Technology Centers. For purposes of this study, these terms will be used interchangeably.

**Work study program:** A secondary school program which includes a specified time period when a student leaves the school premises to work on a job site, which is approved by the local school system, under the supervision of a work study coordinator. (COMAR 13A.03.02.03G)
Justification for the Study

The field of special education has experienced dramatic changes in focus and in programming priorities over the past fifteen years. The high costs associated with special education programming have been tolerated in the past with limited scrutiny of the actions taken by those doling out the resources needed to establish public school programs for disabled students. With the implementation of programs accomplished, focus is now shifting to the accountability aspect of special education programs.

The question of what happens to the handicapped student upon completion of school has been examined in the past. In light of the dynamic nature of the field of special education, it is most important to continue to study the lives of handicapped young adults in terms of what school experiences they have had and what their lives are like following their exit from school.

Many formats have been used to study these subjects. Most data have been gathered through the use of surveys, providing a wide range of useful information about handicapped young adults. Less in-depth information, which can provide greater insight into the life experiences of these persons, is available. Such information will be most helpful in acquiring a keener understanding of how young handicapped adults transition to post-school life. Policy makers will benefit from the acquisition of such knowledge to facilitate the implementation of programming which will more successfully prepare special needs students for life beyond school.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Development of Follow-up Studies

The status of handicapped youth who leave school remains a topic of intense interest to educational researchers. While follow-up studies are not new to the literature, the nature of the research has taken a turn towards developing a fuller understanding of the course of events which occurs when a handicapped young adult exits school and begins on the road toward independence as an adult.

The enactment of P.L. 94-142 in 1975 is considered a benchmark event for the development of programming for handicapped students. A review of the literature of follow-up studies reveals that such studies were conducted on students who exhibited learning problems prior to that date. Horn, O’Donnell and Vitulano (1983) present a historical review of follow-up studies, citing nine which were conducted prior to 1975. Most noteworthy are studies conducted by Silver and Hagin in 1964 and 1966 which followed disabled readers for time spans of ten to thirteen years, finding that those with diagnosed neurological impairments continued to have difficulties in reading and showed little improvement. The work of Rawson (1968) also is of importance when reviewing early studies in that this researcher followed a small sample of severely dyslexic students through adulthood for a period of seventeen to thirty-five years. Her findings showed that many of these students were successful vocationally, but continued to demonstrate difficulties in reading and spelling throughout their adult years.
In the period following the enactment of P.L. 94-142, interest continued in examining the impact of programs for the handicapped. With the nature of secondary school programs for the handicapped changing to include greater focus on the inclusion of vocational programming (Appling, 1988), researchers began examining the life status of handicapped young adults in conjunction with the specific type of disability manifested by the subject and the particular school programs which the person experienced. Mithaug, Horiuchi and Fanning (1985), Hasazi, Gordon and Roe (1985), Malevar (1986), Wise and Matthews (1987), and Wehman, Kregel and Seyfarth (1985) conducted follow-up studies which focused on sample populations of entire states. Studies of a similar nature were conducted in more limited geographical areas (Robinson, 1987). The results of these and other follow-up studies were an important beginning in the creation of a focus for examining the impact of school programs for the handicapped.

**Impact of Early Studies**

While the outcomes were mixed and often confusing, the resulting information did open up newly focused discussion on the appropriateness of the types of school experiences being offered handicapped students. Edgar (1987) proposed a total change in emphasis of programming from academics to vocational studies, citing the high rate of drop-outs from secondary programs and the poor employment histories of both drop-outs and special education completers. Madeleine Will (1984), Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, added much fuel to the discussion in citing the disappointing findings of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Bureau of the Census who reported that in the early
1980's, between fifty and eighty percent of adults with known disabilities were unemployed. In response to this information, Will issued directives which would lead to the development of specific actions to help handicapped students bridge the gap between school and work. Bellamy (1985), Halpern (1985), Stodden and Boone (1987), Wehman, Moon and McCarthy (1986), and Neubert. Tilson and Ianacone (1989) discuss the types of transition services resulting from the initiative and the impact of those services on the lives of young adults. With varying programs emerging, it became clear that great differences existed in the range of transition services available to youth. Fairweather (1989) discusses these variances, noting that although vocational programming is offered to students in most school districts, small local education agencies have limited resources in terms of educational and vocational programs, community agencies and employment options, considerably restricting the possibility of successful transition planning for handicapped students.

Dowdy, Carter, and Smith (1990) found the adequacy of transition planning for learning disabled students to be questionable. Subjects in their study were 160 students, half of whom were learning disabled. They reported that both the learning disabled and non learning disabled students indicated that their parents most often provided guidance with career planning. Little assistance was provided to the learning disabled students by special education teachers, vocational teachers, or counselors. In fact, friends provided as much help as these school personnel. More of the learning disabled students than the non learning disabled were aware of services which could be provided by the Division
of Vocational Rehabilitation. Even so, less than 50% of the learning
disabled students had any information about this agency. The learning
disabled group indicated a desire for transition assistance not only with
career decisions, but also in areas related to finding and maintaining
employment, as well as independent living skills.

The focus of transition planning initially centered on the most
seriously disabled. Wehman, et al. (1986) present arguments supporting
the critical need to redefine transition programming afforded the severely
disabled to include alternatives to sheltered activity centers. Options
like supported competitive employment, sheltered enclaves and mobile work
crews are presented. The essential components of such programs are cited
as remuneration to the employee, integration opportunities in the
community, and on-going support to the individual. Outcome-oriented
transition planning for severely handicapped youth in an urban Virginia
school system is described by Moon, Diambra and Hill (1990). Once again,
their focus is on placement of the handicapped in meaningful, competitive
work situations, with adequate planning and on-going support as critical
to the success of the employment.

A model for providing successful employment matches for special needs
youth has been described by Ehrsten and Izzo (1988) as train-place-train.
They describe the critical components of this placement method as
preparing the individual through appropriate training experiences in
school and in the community, orienting the employee to the job site, to
include a critical orientation for co-workers, and the fading out of
services as the employee becomes completely integrated at the job site.
At this final stage, only follow-along or consultative services are offered. Such a carefully planned system of transitioning services can be most beneficial in facilitating success on the job for employees with disabilities.

While continuing problems of the more severely disabled who enter adulthood have been long recognized and recently have been addressed through more intense transition planning and services, there is growing evidence that life adjustment problems persist for the learning disabled, continuing throughout adulthood. Malcolm, Polatajko, and Simons (1990) studied 80 learning disabled adults in Ontario. Their average age was 29.4 years. Problems were reported by 83.8% of the subjects in life skill areas, including organization, banking, and time/home management. In this sample, 34.6% of the respondents were unemployed, in marked contrast to the 4 to 5.5% unemployment rate in that region at that time. Seventy-five percent of the subjects reported difficulties with written communication and 57.5% indicated verbal communication as an area of continuing weakness.

Gerber et al. (1990) report on a study of 133 learning disabled adults whose average age was 42.1 years. A most interesting finding in their work was the discovery of an overwhelming trend showing that subjects rated their problems as getting worse with increasing age. Items studied included academic skills like speaking, reading, writing, spelling and mathematics, as well as perception, coordination, impulsivity, distractibility, hyperactivity, and attention span. For each of the items, about 25% of the subjects reported difficulty which was increasing
with age. The authors speculate that the increasingly complex demands of adult life, the aging process, or other as yet unknown factors might be causes for these perceptions by learning disabled adults. It is apparent that learning disabilities remain problems for adults. It is only now that large numbers of the learning disabled who were identified at school age have entered adulthood. Undoubtedly, further investigation into how these people function as adults will be conducted, shedding more light on this topic.

Programs like supported employment have gained credibility in more circles as essential to the successful employment of the severely handicapped. With the transitioning needs of learning disabled youth only recently being acknowledged, supported employment is now being considered as a possible vehicle to ensure success for the learning disabled young adult. Siegel and Gaylord-Ross (1991) studied the employment histories of learning disabled youth and identified a successful job match as the most important component in their profile. They noted that when such a job match does not exist, it is critical that adjustments at the workplace be made if the person is to succeed. On-going support for the individual at the job site might make the difference between one who remains employed and one who becomes an unemployed statistic. These authors suggest that critical factors like a job match procedure and on-going adjustments at the work site need to be included in a program of vocational support services for the mildly handicapped individual to increase likelihood for success in the world of work.
Follow-up Studies of Learning Disabled Population

Follow-up studies of the learning disabled have shed some light on specific adjustment experiences of this particular population. In a follow-up study of ninety learning disabled students who exited the Chicago school system, Messerer and Meyers (1983) found that while most felt that vocational and special education classes taken in high school were helpful to them in life beyond school, a significant number cited the need for more specific training in job skills and assistance in coping with tasks required in every day life, like handling a checking account. These sentiments were echoed by participants in a Colorado follow-up study conducted by Mithaug et al. (1985) who expressed a need for further training in social and independent living skills. In expressing their perceptions of high school experiences, these subjects responded favorably about efforts made by their special education teachers. Reactions to their regular education experiences fell at the opposite end of the spectrum. While a high percentage of these graduates were employed, their wages were generally at the minimum level.

Sixty-four learning disabled from a metropolitan school district in the Southwest were contacted within a four year period after their completion of high school to assess their status in terms of employment, residence, and social adjustment (Haring, Lovett and Smith, 1990). Their unemployment rate of 31% was far in excess of the national rate of youth joblessness at that time. Gender was found to be a significant variable. Sixty-one percent of the women surveyed were unemployed, as compared to 24% of the men. Unemployment rates were higher than the national average.
in this particular geographical region at that time, with employed subjects generally receiving low wages and making minimal progress in terms of salary increases or promotions. While little success in employment or social and recreational experiences was reported, it is surprising that nearly 80% of the subjects expressed satisfaction with most aspects of their lives. The authors express concerns about the fact that while these particular subjects experienced intense support services in school, very limited community or vocational resources were accessible to them following their exit from school, perhaps contributing to their modest success in adult life. They dispute the assumption that a lack of post-school success is attributable to inadequate school programs, citing the lack of community follow-up services as having an equally significant negative impact on the progress of learning disabled school completers.

The work of Zetlin and Hosseini (1989) is most significant in that it provides an in-depth look at the lives of six minimally handicapped young adults in the year following their completion of secondary school. This work provides insight into the pattern of experiences not reportable through single point in time surveys. These researchers found that the subjects exited school with vague, unrealistic goals and experienced frustration after frustration as they wandered from job to job. Their parents were largely ineffective in assisting these students to focus on realistic plans. By the end of the year, the students and their families were frustrated and dissatisfied with the course of events. Self-esteem had been negatively impacted as the young adults dealt unsuccessfully with their futures in terms of employment and independent living. The authors
cite concerns for the lack of transitioning services for mildly handicapped youth, as well as the resistance of these youth in requesting any assistance. It is speculated that this might be due to their unwillingness to continue any identification with what they perceive to be a potentially stigmatizing disability. A resulting lack of research about the experiences of these subjects further contributes to the failure to recognize the problems encountered by the mildly impaired school completer who transitions to adult life in the community.

Other studies speak to the fate of the learning disabled student who exits school. Cobb and Crump (1984) conducted interviews of one hundred learning disabled students who had exited an Alabama school system. They concluded that most of the sample were experiencing some degree of success as adults. They noted that most were financially independent and eighty-four percent were employed. However, incomes of those employed were reported as quite low, with two out of three earning less than $10,000 annually. A disturbing side note was that almost half of the sample did not complete high school.

Humes and Brammer (1985) conducted a follow-up study of learning disabled high school graduates in a rural Virginia district and found that while most were indeed employed, they were over-represented in low paying occupations. Concern is expressed about the limited options presented to learning disabled students despite the assets they possess, like good intelligence.

A research finding of White et al. (1982) was that while learning disabled youth appeared successful in several adult adjustment categories,
their perceptions were that they were not experiencing success and thus they were not satisfied with their lives. The development of realistic attitudes and expectations for adult life are cited as critical need areas for satisfactory functioning for the learning disabled student who transitions to life beyond school. The follow-up study of Mithaug et al. (1985) also speaks to adult adjustment activities. In this sample of 234 students, 42% were socially inactive, having friends who visited infrequently or not at all. Two-thirds of this group lived with their parents, displaying minimal independence in managing their own financial affairs. A very small percentage had their own checking accounts and most were not making payments on any major purchases.

Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) also addresses socialization and financial independence issues (Valdes, Williamson and Wagner, 1990). For the learning disabled population, consisting of 931 respondents, only 7.5% reported seeing friends less than once weekly. The difference in response from the Mithaug study might be the result of the specific question asked. While Mithaug asks how often friends visit, the question in the NLTS inquires about getting together with friends. As most of the respondents in Mithaug's survey reported living at home, it might be misleading to believe that lack of visits to the family household indicates social isolation.

In the area of financial independence, 8.1% of learning disabled NLTS subjects report that they have a checking account and 8.1% report having a credit card in their own name. Robinson (1987) cites more optimistic findings in his study which followed 64 learning disabled graduates in an
affluent Maryland county. He found that most of these graduates were marginally independent. While 71% lived with their families, 78% cited driving their own car as their primary source of transportation and 74% maintained a checking account to conduct financial transactions.

Learning Disabled Students Who Pursue College

Researchers, too, have studied the learning disabled student who pursues college. This student is one who, due to a history of educational deficits, often requires transition planning which will facilitate success. Until recently, however, programs for such students have been limited in scope. Needs continue for consistent programming at the college level for learning disabled students, so that success can be attainable (Johnston, 1984).

Rose (1991) describes the components of a model for assistance to learning disabled college students. Access services as guaranteed by Section 504 Regulations of P.L. 93-112, remedial services, and special support services are identified as the components of a program which can adequately and appropriately serve learning disabled students. While reasonable accommodations, including priority registration for courses, access to syllabi, and permission to tape record or use a note taker, are largely available to students, other needs can often not be addressed at individual colleges. In Robinson's study (1987), he reports that just over one-half of the learning disabled subjects in his sample who enrolled in college did not complete the course of study, stating that they were either disillusioned or disappointed with the kind of program in which they had enrolled. Of this group, one-third sought another post-secondary
experience in a technical program, a Vocational Rehabilitation placement, or for the purpose of further academic skill development.

Another gap in services for the learning disabled college student is cited by Nelson and Lignugaris-Kraft (1989) as a lack of research designed to validate which programs are actually effective in bringing about the desired results of successful completion of the program by the student. These authors did an extensive review of services available at colleges, concluding that such services are inconsistent both in their nature and in their availability. Criteria for access to college services varies, with some programs granting access to those identified as learning disabled in accordance with the language of P.L. 94-142, and others granting access to those who are simply low performing students. They further note the discrepancies among various learning disabilities experts in recommending the types of services which might be of benefit to college students, citing a dearth of research to substantiate the benefits of any particular approach. They call for longitudinal studies which examine the impact of learning disabilities programs on the consumers of those services.

A recent study by Kincer (1991) examined the perceptions of learning disabled college students regarding the usefulness of services offered to them to enhance the adjustment process. Surveying 298 learning disabled students in Virginia colleges and universities, Kincer learned that allowing extra time on tests, the use of calculators and word processors with spell checking, appropriate academic advisement, and parental encouragement were regarded as important factors contributing to the success of these students.
It appears critical that transition planning for the college-bound student include a thorough investigation of available college services so that a match can be attained between the learning disabled student and an appropriate college program. Continuing research addressing what services are most effective for these students will undoubtedly be of value to this process.

Vocational Preparation Programs

While outcome studies delineate a myriad of problems experienced by handicapped students who exit school, researchers have also focused on programs afforded disabled youth in school. The inclusion of a vocational education option for special needs students, to be delivered in the least restrictive environment, has been mandated by federal law. Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner and Shaver, 1989) indicate that about 60% of disabled students took at least one vocational education course in their most recent year in high school, spending an average of 6.8 hours weekly in such a course. The rate of participation in vocational classes increased as students moved from grade to grade, with 86% of eleventh or twelfth graders reporting enrollment in vocational education classes. Of the 1,103 learning disabled students participating in this phase of the study, 59.2% reported vocational enrollment within their most recent school year.

Sitlington (1981) proposes a career education model which integrates special and vocational education components as an approach to serve handicapped students. Included in this paradigm are career awareness activities for elementary age students, career exploration tasks for
completion in junior high school, and career preparation activities to be undertaken during the high school years. Specific skills are included at various points in this continuum model. Kokaska (1983) supports this need for a career education approach, noting that the development of the competencies which lead to successful lifelong employment require nurturing which begins at an early age and extends through adulthood. He expresses concern about a lack of consistency in providing career education opportunities to handicapped students and also notes the need for continuing follow-up information to provide schools with the information they will need to have in order to adjust their programming to suit the needs of individuals.

Brolin and Loyd (1989) speak to the state of career education for the disabled, noting that efforts focus heavily on secondary years. They indicate that transitioning is the term which is now used to describe what was formerly referred to as career education. While focus has been on high school years, these writers note the need to make more substantial career education efforts for disabled students from grades kindergarten through twelve.

Recent changes in federal law have set the stage for the reform of vocational education which will undoubtedly affect the types of programming which handicapped students will receive in future years. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, approved on September 25, 1990, changes the focus of vocational education from separate programming designed to teach specific job skills to broader focused educational experiences which combine vocational training and
academic education, including thinking skills (Wirt, 1991). The needs of special students continue to be addressed through this legislation, with funding being allotted to provide needed services for disabled students.

Of concern to vocational education has been the numbers of students who have obtained employment in the fields for which they were vocationally trained. These numbers have been reported to be as low as 38% for all students sixteen months after graduation. Robinson (1987) found that 31% of the students in the learning disabled population which he surveyed were working in jobs for which they had been prepared through vocational education course work. The curriculum reforms which will be experienced in vocational education will attempt to provide more integrated experiences for youth. It remains to be seen how disabled youth fare as a result of these programming changes.

Reforms in vocational preparation areas for the disabled have been accompanied by reforms in transition planning. This need, too, has been addressed in recent legislative measures. The Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, which renamed the Education of the Handicapped Act as the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. (P.L. 101-476), was signed into law on October 30, 1990. It includes a new definition of transition services. The law notes that these services are to be individually determined based on students' needs and interests, and are to be included in students' Individual Education Programs no later than age sixteen. The services are to assure successful movement from the school to the community, addressing employment, the need for further instruction, and daily living skills, as appropriate.
Factors Related to Successful Transitioning

Trends in transitioning efforts for disabled students were reviewed by Trach and Rusch (1985). They dismissed traditional models like the eliminative and developmental models as being largely unsuccessful. Instead, they advocate adult life or community referenced models. As part of the planning for transition, youth are placed in the job they will have after graduation and the training is adjusted to accommodate the needs of the particular student in that job. This approach is regarded by these writers as more effective than models which place most emphasis on the elimination of behaviors which will not be regarded as acceptable by employers or those which regard successful passage of developmental milestones by the handicapped student as prerequisite for the emergence of more sophisticated job appropriate behaviors. The authors cite the concern that with this model, most youth simply run out of time before they exit school and are left to approach an employment setting with inadequate developmental skills. With a focus on early planning, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is addressing the often cited problem of youth who exit school needing more time to obtain skills needed for transitioning.

Moon and Beale (1984) note the importance of appropriate support from agencies during transitional planning for the handicapped, since post-school programs are not entitlements under the law and must be aggressively sought out by school personnel and parents. The need for long-term planning, which begins even at elementary school, is emphasized. Halpern (1991) reflects on the status of the transition
movement, stating that the essence of transition is not a listing of services, but is rather the occurrence of a phenomenological process. From his viewpoint, he says that transitioning can best be defined as "a period of floundering that occurs for at least the first several years after leaving school as adolescents attempt to assume a variety of adult roles in their communities". Citing the effectiveness of apprentice programs in Germany, he presents comments of the syndicated columnist William Raspberry who notes that the delayed transitioning process which is typical for students in the United States is confirmation to young adults that there is a very limited relationship between what is learned in school and what is needed to succeed in the world.

The issue of parental involvement and support also enters the discussion as important to successful transitioning. The involvement of parents in the educational programs of their children decreases notably with the passage of time. Cone, DeLawyer and Wolfe. (1985) discuss the observed "burn out" of the families of disabled students as grade levels increase. Research conducted by Haring, Lovett and Saren (1991) found that 66% of the 129 parents of disabled high school completers they surveyed reported being involved in the school programs of their children never or only occasionally. Many of these parents indicated that they had negative feelings about attending meetings where they believed that decisions had already been made and where their input was only a formality.

While family involvement with the educational system decreased as years pass, stresses reported by families of youth approaching transition
make the need for guidance and support at this stage crucial. Winton (1986) discusses the transition for the disabled into adult life as a neglected, critical point in family life development. She emphasizes the need for systematic family intervention at this stage, citing the need for special education case managers to be able to provide information about the range of community resources available to the family. They need to be competent in advising the family about where needed services and support can be obtained. In this regard, a special education case manager who is knowledgeable of such options can positively impact the transitioning process for a student.

While various opinions exist about the most effective programming options for disabled students, the work of Hasazi, Gordon and Roe (1985) in their Vermont follow-up study cities the finding that part-time work and summer work during school were predictors of subsequent job status in terms of percentage of time employed and wages. Respondents in this study indicated that they were most successful in finding jobs through their personal family or friends network. This is somewhat similar to finding in the Colorado study (Mithaug, et al., 1985) where it was found that subjects most often found jobs through teachers and friends. In Vermont, it was found that vocational education experiences were related to successful employment, as was the availability of transportation in this rural geographical area.

The replication of this study in Delaware revealed some similar findings (Wise, et al., 1987). Work experience in high school was cited as important to successful employment after school. As in Vermont and
Colorado, the family and friends network was more helpful than public agencies in locating employment. The more in-depth nature of this study differentiated between findings for specific handicaps. It showed that learning disabled students were more likely to be employed than youth with any other types of handicaps. Transportation availability showed a strong relationship to employment, as it did in the Vermont study.

Outcomes

In-depth studies conducted in various states have focused on outcomes for students in terms of employment as well as social adjustment issues. An adapted version of the Vermont follow-up study was used by researchers in an urban Maryland county. The work of Scuccimarra and Speece (1990) focused not only on employment outcomes for students with mild handicaps, but also social adjustment. They reported on interviews with 65 young adults two years after their completion of high school. Seventy-eight percent of these graduates were employed, representing an unemployment rate double that of the general population in that county for the age group being studied. Wages were reported to average $7,598 annually, which is only slightly above the poverty threshold for a single person. A finding of concern was the disparity in gender for unemployment rates, with 23.8% of the women subjects unemployed, as compared to 6.8% for the men. In areas of social satisfaction, those who were employed expressed a higher level of contentment with their social situations than those who were not working.

In 1986, the Maryland State Department of Education conducted a
follow-up study of 1981 graduates (Malevar, 1986). This project was unique in that it categorized graduates as vocational, nonvocational, special education vocational, and special education nonvocational. While this report notes that results are to be interpreted with caution due to the inability to obtain data from the required number of cases, several possible conclusions are suggested. Findings indicate that over 80% of special education graduates were satisfied with their high school preparation for future education. Almost five years after graduation, 86.1% of all special education graduates were employed either full or part-time, earning an average of $12,482 annually. This figure, in fact, exceeded the $11,452 average per capita income in Maryland for that year. Special education graduates from vocational programs reported higher earnings than nonvocational graduates. Vocational graduates appeared to succeed in employment earlier than nonvocational graduates. The report concludes that special education services in Maryland are adequately preparing youth for post-school life. It is suggested that locally collected data might provide further insights into the post-school status of disabled youth in that a higher rate of participation might be generated and local economic and demographic anomalies might be considered in the interpretation of the findings.

Such an evaluation of a special education program in a Texas school district was completed from 1986 to 1988, with data collected about 215 former students (Fourqurean and LaCourt, 1990). Surveyors gathered information from students and parents about their concerns and needs, using both focused and open-ended questions. Concerns were expressed by
respondents about social skills and academic weaknesses which impeded success in employment setting. An unexpected number of concerns were expressed by subjects about the negative stigma attached to special education programs, as well as lowered teacher expectations in these programs. Parent comments revealed fears about the financial security of their children, as well as their lack of success in achieving independence from them.

**National Longitudinal Transition Study**

While many follow-up studies have been conducted in recent years, perhaps the most significant study completed to date has been the National Longitudinal Transition Study which was requested by Congress as part of the 1983 amendments to the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. Wagner (1989) reports on preliminary findings of this five year study which included more than 8,000 youth with disabilities who participated in the study. The study included a parent interview component which was completed during the first year of the study. Five years later, youth who were able and available to participate were interviewed. School record abstracts for subjects were included. Also, schools represented in the sample were surveyed to obtain demographic profiles of their students and teaching staffs and to determine what policies and programs affecting handicapped youth were in place. The final component of this study was to include substudies which would focus on subsamples of the main study group, with data being reported in a more in-depth fashion for specific populations.

Findings were analyzed in terms of disability category. When
considering learning disabled students, it was found that such youth were more likely to receive a failing grade in high school than those in any other disability category except speech. This finding is surprising when considered at face value. It is hypothesized, however, that this might be the result of a greater number of students in this disability category participating in mainstream classes and subject to standard grading practices. It is assumed that students exhibiting more severe handicaps might be in instructional situations with modified goals and grading practices due to the intense degree of their disability, thus limiting the reasonableness of their receiving failing grades. This conclusion is supported with data presented in the statistical almanac which provides information regarding the learning disabled population in the National Longitudinal Transition Study (Valdes, et al., 1990). It is shown here that 33.3% of learning disabled students received failing grades in regular education classes, while 12.3% of learning disabled students received failing marks in graded special education classes. Ninety percent of those identified as learning disabled did, in fact, enroll in some regular education courses as compared to 83% of all special education students who did so. Only 30% of students with multiple disabilities took any regular education classes (Wagner and Shaver, 1989).

The rate of drop outs for learning disabled students also produced disconcerting results. It was found that 36% of learning disabled students, who are the majority of secondary special education students, exited school by dropping out. While 61% exited by graduating, this figure is far lower than the 71% graduation rate for all students reported...
by the Department of Education during that time period. This finding is quite consistent with data collected by other researchers studying dropout rates.

Wagner’s report looks at the post-school status of youth in various disability groups. Fifteen percent of all disabled youth attended post-secondary institutions, a figure much below that for nondisabled youth. Seventeen percent of the learning disabled enrolled in post-secondary education, with most of those attending vocational or trade school.

Fewer than half of the disabled youth who exited school were engaged in paid employment one year after leaving high school. This finding was consistent with those of Mithaug et al. (1985). Learning disabled youth fared better than others in this category. Fifty-seven percent of the learning disabled subjects were found to be working in paid employment, earning an average hourly wage of $4.63, higher than the wages for any other category of disability.

Wagner presents an analysis of factors which helped or hindered disabled youth in their efforts toward successful transitioning. Students who did not receive failing grades were significantly more likely to complete school than those who experienced failure. Age was also found to be a factor. Younger students were more likely to receive failing grades than older students. Perhaps this is the result of the fact that by later grades, many failing handicapped students have already exited from school. Wagner and Shaver (1989) also speculate that teachers are less likely to fail such students near the end of their school career, feeling
there would be little benefit to the student who is required to repeat a class at this point.

Younger students who experienced failure were more likely to drop out than older students, indicating that transition services which focus primarily on older students might be ineffective because many students have already left school before such services are provided. Early leavers also are at a disadvantage in terms of a lack of specific vocational preparation since more intensive vocational course work is usually not afforded younger students. Wagner and Shaver (1989) report on the study of transcript abstracts used in compiling data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. They found that while for ninth grade special education students, vocational course work extended for approximately five hours per week, twelfth graders averaged nine hours weekly in vocational classes.

Wagner also reports from the NLTS that males and minority students received failing grades in high school at a higher rate than others. While it might be further assumed that these handicapped students thus drop out of school at higher rates than the general population, Butler-Malin and Padila (1989) dispute this assumption. They report that no consistent gender or race/ethnic differences could be found in the drop out rate for disabled youth when behavioral and experiential factors are included in the model for analysis.

While low socioeconomic status (SES) in and of itself was not found to be consistently or significantly directly related to disabled students' receipt of failing grades in high school, factors which are related to low
SES emerge as significant in their correspondence to school failure. In examining the data in terms of likelihood for dropping out, Butler-Nalin et al. (1989) report that the level of education of the head of household is related to the likelihood of dropping out, finding that the lower the educational level, the greater is the chance that the handicapped youth will fail to complete school. Lack of employment by the head of household also results in a greater risk for school drop out. Frequent school absences were found to be a predictor for school failure, as well as for school drop outs. In analyzing data from the NLTS regarding the learning disabled population, it is found that 33.6% were absent for a total of more than 20 school days. In this high absenteeism group, urban students exceeded suburban and rural students by a wide margin and males slightly exceeded females. Findings also support the relevance of social integration as a measure for school success. Parental reports of a lack of involvement by students in community or school groups were related to a higher rate of school failure (Wagner and Shaver, 1989).

Butler-Nalin et al. (1989) discount any relationship between ability level as measured by an IQ test and school completion, finding rather that successful performance on functional tasks is a better predictor for school completion than intelligence quotients for disabled students. In summarizing their analysis of factors which result in the increased incidence of drop outs among handicapped students, these researchers refer to the diagnosis of a disability and the disproportionate experience of these students with poverty as two strikes against them as they experience the school system. The authors cite the increased likelihood
that they will not graduate from high school and will subsequently become unemployed or under employed as the possible third strike for these students.

Conclusions

In examining the history of follow-up studies of students with disabilities, several conclusions may be inferred. Many such studies have indeed been conducted. While results vary from study to study in terms of the degree of success experienced by disabled students after their exit from school, a clear trend toward lowered success rates in employment and the achievement of independence is seen. While efforts have been made toward addressing this problem in terms of transition planning and curricular reform, the promising results which are anticipated have not yet been reported in the literature. Indeed, researchers have remained focused on the reporting of gloomy statistics which point to the problematic lives of disabled young adults. Far fewer attempts have been made to provide a more in-depth picture of how the lives of these young adults proceed following their exit from school. Little has been written which reports on the reflections of these students on their school and work experiences and their perceptions of what school might have provided for them in assisting them to prepare for life as an adult. The current study will attempt to fill this void.
Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

With the goal of providing in-depth information leading to the generation of theory about how learning disabilities have affected the adult lives of selected individuals, an embedded multiple case study design was utilized (Yin, 1989). The main units of study for the research were the learning disabled young adults who were selected as subjects for the study. However, other subunits were examined through the research procedures. They included the experiences of the subjects in terms of their personal reflections on school, their levels of success in and beyond school, and the particular curricular and vocational choices made by or for these students. Other subunits examined in this embedded design were the parents, teachers and employers in respect to their interactions with these students during their school years as well as in the years beyond school.

Lincoln and Cuba (1985) caution the researcher against giving serious consideration to any piece of information which cannot be triangulated, that is, validated against another source. By using multiple data sources in conducting this research, triangulation procedures were utilized. Yin (1989) also stresses the need for using multiple data sources, citing this as a means for increasing construct validity.

Several data sources and different data collection methods were utilized to address the various subunits of this study. These methods included personal interviews with subjects, parents, employers and teachers. Follow-up telephone conferences were also held.
Archival records were reviewed at the school, including cumulative and confidential student files. Other data sources included newspaper clippings, observations of special education classes, and the review of program information available from the school system.

Upon development of the research issues, a broad questioning sequence was developed. These sequences were used in order to focus interviews and to ensure collection of information addressing the identified areas of research interest. However, the interviews were minimally structured, with the order of topics not predetermined by the interviewer but rather emerging as the interview proceeded. Stainback and Stainback (1988) refer to this method of interviewing as recursive, with specific questions being generated based on responses to previous questions. Such broad questioning sequences were developed for the subjects, parents, employers, and school personnel.

A pilot study was then conducted in order to ascertain whether the questioning sequences were effective and in order to provide an opportunity for the researcher to evaluate personal interviewing skills. Interviews were conducted with the pilot subject and with two of the subject's teachers. The interview with the subject was tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The interviews with the teachers were conducted with the interviewer taking notes rather than tape recording the sessions. This was done in order to investigate whether it appeared that the electronic recording device hampered the quality of the interview in terms of the level of comfort of the subject.

The transcribed interview was reviewed and modifications to the
questioning sequences were made in order to allow for a more natural progression to the conversations and to provide more open-ended response opportunities. The transcript was coded and analyzed using The Ethnograph, a program for the computer assisted analysis of text-based data (Seidel, Kjolseth and Seymour. 1988). The researcher's notes from interviews with the teachers were also coded and analyzed. It was determined from the pilot study that tape recording of the interviews provided a richer base of information, allowing the interviewer to focus on the questioning patterns rather than the recording of information. Once rapport with the subject was established during the initial phase of the interview, the electronic recording device did not seem to inhibit the responsiveness of the interview subject in any significant way.

The initial case for study was then selected. This young adult was a 1989 graduate of a Frederick County high school who had been identified as learning disabled at an early age and had been enrolled in special education programs for many years. He had also taken vocational education courses and attended the Career and Technology Center, then known at the Vocational Technology Center. This subject was chosen in consultation with a high school special education teacher who had taught this student and remained in contact with him.

At this time, a reflexive journal was begun in order to record the sequence of events in the development of the case, as well as the researcher's reflections on notions which emerged during the course of the study. Kirk and Miller (1986) emphasize the importance of precise record keeping in order to increase the reliability of the study. Such record
keeping will allow subsequent researchers to understand what steps have been utilized in conducting the study and what contributions these procedures might have made to the outcomes of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the use of a reflexive journal for recording the researcher's rationale for decision-making as the study unfolds. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the study, charting the researcher's decision-making.

After the interview with the first subject was reviewed, contact was made with his special education teacher, mother, employer and vocational education teacher. Interviews were conducted with these individuals. A record review was conducted at the school site. An observation of a special education classroom, similar to one in which the subject had participated while a senior in high school, and taught by the subject's former special education teacher, was made on the day of the record review.

Interviews were transcribed and coded at this point. With the development of a preliminary coding scheme, it was possible at this time to identify the emergence of overriding themes which became the issues of concern for this subject. It was undeniable that his transition to adult life had been unsuccessful. It was also evident that he had received a wide array of services which seemed to be appropriate choices, but actually did not effectively address the needs of this individual student. It also became apparent that various service providers, including special education teachers, vocational education teachers and regular education teachers did not effectively communicate in planning
for this student. This first subject provided a rich data base for analysis.

An iterative approach was used in determining what type of subject would next be selected. It was determined that another student, who had also graduated in 1989 and who, by description, had similar experiences as a learning disabled student who had participated in vocational education and was having difficulty with employment issues, would be chosen. This selection was made in order to determine whether any similar themes emerged relating to their transitioning experiences. The next subject was contacted by her former special education teacher.

She indicated she would be willing to participate in the study. Four appointment times were scheduled to conduct an interview with this subject. She did not appear at any of the scheduled times, even though they were arranged to be of greatest convenience to her. The researcher subsequently identified her as an unavailable subject, and proceeded to locate another subject.

The third subject contacted was a young female who had graduated from high school in 1989, and fit a similar profile to the unavailable case. Identified as a learning disabled student, she had received special education services throughout most of her school years. She had also been enrolled in vocational education classes both at the school and at the Career and Technology Center. She was selected in consultation with her high school special education teacher who initially contacted her regarding her participation in the study. She was next contacted by the researcher and an interview was scheduled to take place at a local fast food restaurant. She appeared promptly and participated in an in-depth
interview session.

Following this interview, an appointment was made to meet with the special education staff at the high school which the subject had attended. Interviews were conducted with two special education teachers who had taught the student. Records were reviewed at the school site. A special education class, similar to one in which the subject had participated while in high school, and taught by the subject's former special education teacher, was also observed at that time. After analyzing these interviews, the student's former work study supervisor was contacted in order to solicit information regarding the student's employment performance in that program.

Information obtained in the study of this case was then coded and analyzed. Categories began to emerge which pointed to similar focal themes between Cases 1 and 2. Both students struggled with learning disabilities which were identified at an early age. Both benefited from extensive specialized course work in school, which included vocational education and special education. Employment outcomes for both were problematic. Job changes were frequent. Employment histories revealed that both had not worked in any areas related to the vocational training they had received while in school. Jobs obtained by both were low-paying and usually temporary in nature.

School planning was fragmented for both students. In reviewing school files, participation by appropriate personnel, to include vocational education, special education and regular education teachers, as well as counselors and administrators was documented. Needed parent signatures
were obtained. Yet evidence pointed to a lack of meaningful communication about the student's program. For example, results of vocational assessments could not be found in student files housed in their home high schools. These records were maintained separately at the Career and Technology Center, making continuing utilization by the transition planning team unlikely.

While parents signed all required documents, they were often not present for the meetings. For the second subject, a parent was not in attendance at a single special education meeting during the student’s entire school career. There was also no indication that the students themselves attended the meetings. While legally it is not mandated that students attend special education planning meetings, it seems apparent that their lack of involvement makes the likelihood of successful planning highly doubtful.

At this point, much data had been collected relating to school and transitioning issues for these subjects who both left school in 1989. Despite the inclusion of transition plans in both student records, it appeared that such plans had not been developed in such a way as to effectively drive decision making for these students. This fact contributed on some level to the unsuccessful outcomes experienced by both subjects.

Questions were then posed about the possible impact of a greater time gap between exit from school and the examination of the subject's life. Questions also were developed regarding what differences might be seen in studying a learning disabled young adult who had met with a greater level
of success in post-school years. In keeping with this profile, the next subject selected for study was a female who had graduated from high school in 1985 and had recently completed college. She had been identified as learning disabled while in high school and received special education services during this time. This subject was interviewed at a local restaurant. Following the interview, contact was made with the subject's former special education teacher. This teacher was then interviewed. At the suggestion of this teacher, the subject's mother was contacted. She agreed to participate in an in-depth interview which was taped recorded and analyzed. A special education class, similar to one attended by the subject while in high school, was observed by the researcher. A unique data source for this subject was a newspaper article in the local press related to her participation as a contestant in a state beauty pageant. This article provided some further information about the subject's background and also included comments about the subject by her mother.

The analysis of this case revealed similarities to Cases 1 and 2, even though the life outcomes for this student were markedly different. A glaring gap in this student's profile was the failure of the school system to identify her learning disability at an earlier date and to provide appropriate services to address her needs. When she finally received services while in high school, she never developed an understanding of the nature of her disability and how it might affect her life. While she wished to pursue college, she was unaware of any specialized services which she could access to help her succeed in post-secondary education. She struggled with feelings of inadequacy about her ability and reported
distress about her lack of exposure to higher level skills in high school, where she had been viewed as a student with less than average ability.

A major theme for this student then emerged as inadequate planning and the selection of levels of courses which were inappropriate in terms of her learning disability and her goal to complete college. Again, parent and student participation in planning meetings was notably lacking. The parent reported that she vaguely remembers signing some papers, but could not recall the essence of any discussions at special education meetings. The student herself never participated in any such meetings.

Analysis of these three cases provided the researcher with two major themes which will be explicated in references to the specifics of each story line. The first theme is the provision of services to special education students in a lockstep manner, with students being made to fit available services, rather than having services tailored to meet individual student needs. This service delivery approach was illustrated in all three cases.

The second major theme is one of fragmentation of services. In every case, service providers failed to function as an effective team in making mutual decisions about the student, in conjunction with the family. These two factors evolved differently for each of the subjects studied. However, the difficulties experienced by all in transitioning to adult life can be linked to these major factors.
Findings: Summary of Field Notes by Case

Case 1

The first subject was contacted initially by the special education teacher who had referred him to the researcher. He consented to participate in the study and was then telephoned by the researcher in order to arrange a meeting time. An interview was scheduled to take place at a local fast food restaurant. The subject arrived earlier than the agreed upon time and readily consented to the tape recording of the interview. He also granted written permission allowing for the review of school records and for contact with relevant personnel about him. He was talkative and friendly. He had good eye contact and seemed at ease throughout the meeting. He said that he had stopped in to see his former special education teacher during the previous week because he had heard that she had sprained her ankle. It was at that time that the teacher asked if he would agree to be interviewed by the researcher. It was apparent that the subject remained quite fond of this teacher and would probably consent without hesitation simply because it was she who had made the request of him.

The interview lasted about seventy-five minutes. Near the end of the interview, the subject made several references to his desire to work in the roofing business. At that time, the researcher mentioned that a contact in that business was available to the researcher, and the subject could be referred to him if he was interested. The subject expressed great interest in this lead, stressing his skills in the roofing business, since he had previously worked in that area with his father. When probed
about his willingness to learn. He replied that he had a lot of skills and probably would not have to learn much. He emphasized his good work habits—stressing punctuality and reliability.

The researcher then offered the subject a ride to the bowling alley, as the subject indicated that he did not have a car and would need to call a friend. During the ride, he was friendly and relaxed, paying close attention to the street signs and giving directions. The researcher asked if he had any regrets about high school and he replied that he wished he had tried out for the basketball team, but did not at that time have the confidence to feel that he would have been selected. He commented that, in retrospect, he felt that he probably would have made the team.

Later that evening, the researcher called the roofer to learn whether any jobs were available at the time. He indicated that he was looking for a helper. The subject was then telephoned. He was not at home and his mother answered the call. She expressed great appreciation for the help and stated that her son was in need of a better paying job than his current position with a landscaper. She said that he was a "great kid who just needed a break". She also remarked that her son had worked with her husband in roofing for a time and that might be the reason why he was interested in that type of work. She said that her son had just called her to report where he was and that he would be home soon.

Nine days later, the employer was contacted. He said that he had hired the subject. While it was too early to tell, he did say that he had done well on the first day, arriving punctually to meet the ride which was provided for him. He noted that the subject was "a young twenty-one".
He had since been sick and had not reported to work for a few days, but the employer believed that he was genuinely ill with the flu.

In a few weeks, an appointment was made at the subject's school. The student's cumulative and confidential files were reviewed. Records indicated that the student lived with both parents. He started school in a neighboring county, where he was identified as a student in need of speech and language services as a pre-schooler. In kindergarten, he was noted to be a high risk student.

In second grade, he was identified as learning disabled and resource room service began. He continued to receive speech and language service throughout this period. He was retained in second grade.

By fifth grade, special education services were extended so that the student received all of his language arts program from the special education teacher. By this time, his family had moved to Frederick County, where he continued to be enrolled through high school graduation.

In middle school, the student was re-evaluated. Testing revealed discrepancies between achievement and ability in the areas of reading and mathematics. Special education continued, although speech service was discontinued in eighth grade at the request of the parent.

Records indicate that in Grades 8 and 9 the student received Level 2 resource service which is defined as special education instruction for a time period not to exceed one hour daily. In Grade 10, his service was increased to Level 3, meaning that he received between one and three hours of special education instruction daily. that year. A full scale intelligence quotient of 82 was noted in the record, with achievement
scores in the discrepant range in the area of reading only. At this point, the psychologist completing the evaluation recommended counseling around career goals. There is no indication in the record that this service was subsequently included in the student's Individual Education Program.

In Grade 11, the student again received Level 2 special education service. Strengths were noted on his program as math calculations and problem solving. Weaknesses were listed as reading, written language, word fluency, word knowledge, verbal reasoning and social knowledge and judgement. Notes indicated that he had not yet passed the Maryland Functional Writing Test, which was a graduation requirement. A career education course, to be taught by a special education teacher, was included in his program. It was noted that this course would prepare him for a recommended consumer education course.

While the subject entered the Career and Technology Center in Grade 11, only sketchy references are made to this fact in the home school student record. When questioned about the vocational assessment process for this student, the special needs vocational teacher explained that a formal assessment had not been completed for this student, as he had participated in the exploratory program at the Center. The design of this program was for students to sample four different vocational programs over a nine week period. This sampling was to serve an evaluative function. This program usually occurs when a student first enters the Career and Technology Center. For this student, however, this did not occur. As a junior, he entered the Center requesting enrollment in the masonry
program. No information could be located substantiating the reason for this choice. Since he proved to be unsuccessful in this area, the decision was then made for him to participate in the exploratory program as a senior. In this program, the student sampled four areas - carpentry, machine shop, heating and air conditioning, and construction electricity. He received low grades in all areas except machine shop, where he received a grade in the high average range. It was noted by the teacher that report card grades are based on work maturity skills, test scores, the quality of work, and the maintenance of a notebook.

After completion of this program, the student applied for the carpentry program. Records note marginal grades in this program, with poor attendance cited as a concern at this time. A final note in the student's cumulative file noted that he graduated with a Maryland diploma, having met all requirements including the passage of functional tests.

The subject's special education teacher was interviewed at the time of this school visit. It was obvious that the subject was well-liked by his teachers. He was, however, regarded as quite immature. In fact, another student entered the classroom and a discussion began about his getting a date for the prom. It was obvious that the teachers were trying to help this young man with this problem. The teacher winked and remarked about how much this student reminded her of the subject.

The subject's mother was regarded as a highly involved parent who, in the opinion of the teacher, was upper class by background and wanted the subject to conform to these values. The teacher noted that this parent had offered to work with parents of other learning disabled students who
might be in need of help in dealing with their youngsters. The teacher suggested that the researcher interview here as she was regarded as one who could readily represent the parent perspective.

A class, similar to one in which the subject had participated while in high school, was observed. The learning disabled students in this room were working on tax forms. Students received much individual assistance and the atmosphere was relaxed and informal. Students frequently strayed off the topic and engaged in conversations with the teacher about other subjects. Before the class began, several students had been in the special education room, eating lunch with the teacher. It was apparent that they received a great deal of nurturance and support from this teacher. The level of rigor in academic demands made on the students was questionable to the observer.

The subject's mother was then contacted. She agreed to meet with the researcher. The meeting place was a local restaurant on a Saturday morning. The subject's mother arrived fifteen minutes late. She was strikingly well groomed and was highly verbal. She noted immediately that she had just received her teaching degree in early childhood education. She had worked for an adjacent county school system for fifteen years as an instructional assistant and was now seeking a teaching position. She was most interested in learning about the research project and seemed very eager to talk about the subject and her experiences with him in school and since school. While she presented herself as very assertive, she reported that she regretted not having been more demanding of the school system when her son was a student. Her comments about her son as a person
revealed a great deal of care and concern, as well as genuine fear about the future. She made many negative statements about his school experiences, indicating that while her son was contented and happy in school, and did achieve graduation, his contentment was ill-founded as he left high school quite unprepared for adult life. The mother was very talkative, with the interview lasting for more than two hours. At the conclusion of the interview, she brought up other educational topics for discussion with the researcher.

On the same day, the subject's employer was interviewed. The mother had revealed that he was no longer employed at this job. The employer discussed the subject's performance in terms of his expectations and in relation to performance by other workers. He said that while the subject was a very likable young man, he seemed only marginally interested in learning the work. He talked frequently about other jobs which he was pursuing. This was inconsistent with his comments to the researcher and to his vocational education teacher who had both been left with the impression that he was most interested in working in the roofing business. While the subject called the employer one evening to advise him that he had found another job and was thus quitting, the employer said that he had already decided that he was going to let him go as he was dissatisfied with his level of productivity.

In order to gain further insight into the subject's level of preparation in the area of vocational skills, the vocational education teacher was then contacted. A telephone interview was conducted. The teacher revealed that the subject's immaturity made it seem that he was
not quite ready for the program. He said he was generally passive and ill at ease at the Center. His pleasing personality made him likeable to all who dealt with him. This teacher noted that the subject's mother was in contact with him rather frequently. This was regarded as quite unusual for a high school student. He noted that at one time, the subject indicated that he was going to quit school and that the staff had intervened to get him through this crisis. The teacher said that he felt that the program did not really address this subject's needs and that revisions now being made would perhaps have benefited him to a greater degree. It was felt that the subject needed much more detailed planning for success in a specific program than he was able to receive in the program at that time. He added that in his opinion the student had few salable skills at the time of his exit from the vocational program.
Data Summary: Case 1

The nature of the interview with the subject led the researcher to believe that some aspect of his learning disability was related to memory areas. While the subject was able to respond to questions and elaborate upon them when prompted, there were many times when his memory failed in recalling names of people and in recalling the sequence of events. In fact, seven times during the course of the interview he could not identify the teacher he was referring to by name. He spoke of a favorite teacher as being his carpentry teacher at the Career and Technology Center. He spoke about how this particular teacher had tried to help him find a job at the very end of his senior year in school. Yet he could not identify this teacher saying:

Yea. It was at the Vo-Tech. I can't think of his name.

It'll come to me.

When referring to tasks he was assigned on his current landscaping job, he had some trouble finding words to describe what they were. In describing how he worked on edging flower beds, he said:

I mean not like bushes. around...I can't think of the name now. Around like where the trees are.

The general impression was that the subject had little insight into the nature of his learning problems. He admitted several times that he did have problems in school with learning. Having indicated that he had trouble with English, the interviewer asked more specifically about the
areas of English which he found to be most difficult. He replied that he did not care for writing. When probed, he said:

When we had to write a big old paragraph about what you did over the summer, I couldn't figure out what to do. I couldn't spell some of the words. I mean it was pretty hard for me.

The subject's mother indicated that they first became aware of learning problems when the subject was in kindergarten when difficulties with language were noted. Records indicate that he first received special education services from a speech therapist. By second grade, he was recommended for retention and repeated that grade. The parent noted that she regretted agreeing to the action because it seemed to impact his self-esteem. According to school records, the subject was identified as learning disabled at that time and began receiving special education services through a resource room program. It was during his fifth grade year that the family requested alternative evaluation services from the county diagnostic center. The mother said that this testing, as explained to them by a psychologist, provided much insight as to the nature of the subject's learning disability. She said that it was at this time that she and her husband began to understand what their son's learning problem was and how they might expect that it would impact his life.

Records indicate that the subject continued to receive special education services as a learning disabled youngster throughout middle school and high school. The results of testing completed toward the end of his high school career revealed severe discrepancies between
achievement and measured ability in the areas of reading and written language. Math calculations and math problem solving were listed as strengths. Examiner's recommendations included counseling around career goals. Career Education was noted as a special education course listed in the Individual Education Program and was to be taken in eleventh grade as preparation for Consumer Education in the twelfth grade.

The subject enrolled in the Career and Technology program in the eleventh grade. According to the delivery model offered at that time in Frederick County, he would attend his home high school for part of the day where he would take academic courses, including special education, as required. For the rest of the day, he would travel to the Career and Technology Center for specialized vocational course work. A special education teacher assigned to the Career and Technology Center was to provide assistance to students in need of such help, and would serve as liaison between the home school and the vocational center. It was apparent that the subject met with limited success at the Career and Technology Center, probably for a variety of reasons. His vocational teacher said that it was just too much for him -- it was "over his head". His mother expressed great frustration that he was not able to enroll in the program earlier. She said that this was the school's error and that she felt that admission to the program at an earlier date would have allowed him more time to develop specific vocational skills. She stated:

He went in eleventh and twelfth grade. And actually he could have gone in tenth grade. But we were told that he
couldn't. I don't know why. They said it was just a mistake. And then when I called back, they said they couldn't fit him in. And there wasn't anything we could do about it.

The subject expressed frustration with the course work at the Career and Technology Center. In referring to carpentry classes, he said:

In carpentry, he (teacher) helped me out a lot. Somedays I'd stay after school. And if I had problems, he'd help me out. He'd go over it -- he'd do it real slow. He'd show me how to do it. Because I really couldn't pick it up real fast...

The subject likewise reported difficulty with his masonry course, saying:

It (masonry) was frustrating. I couldn't understand the problems and stuff. I couldn't figure out feet, diameter, and stuff like that. I couldn't figure that out. Carpentry -- that was almost the same way. Since I had roofing and everything, I started using a tape measure. I got better at that. Like one-sixteenth and all that -- I still don't know like a quarter, four-sixteenths, sometimes I don't know that either. It's hard.

While the subject met with very limited academic success in school, experiencing great frustration with learning, he indicated several times that he truly enjoyed school and liked his teachers very much. He made
several positive comments about the help received in all academic areas from his high school special education teacher. He also noted that his elementary special education teacher gave him a great deal of help and he liked her very much. All who were interviewed about the subject commented on his likable personality. His mother reflected that she felt things went much easier for him because he was so likable and friendly. Problems in school were very limited. His mother did, however, comment on an incident in fourth grade where the subject became defiant and hostile toward his special education teacher. She said that she and her husband were completely shocked by this behavior, as he had been very respectful to all adults until this time. She attributed this outburst to frustration with being pulled in so many directions in school, being taken out of class for speech and for special education reading services. She said that at this point, she intervened and limited the number of times that he would be required to leave his classroom for special services. She referred to her son as being tired of the particular special education teacher's approach. She said that the instruction was a phonics method and her son was unable to succeed. She said that the teacher was rigid and unwilling to modify her program to suit his needs. It is interesting to note that this same special education teacher was referred to by the subject in a positive light.

The subject's high school special education teacher remarked that occasionally he would become stubborn about completing work, but that he could be coaxed into complying. The subject himself spoke about a limited number of disciplinary problems in high school. In speaking about
such an incident, the subject offered the following description:

I mean... for being late for class, and just being a troublemaker and everything. I mean, not that much, but a little bit more. I got in one fight, got mad at a teacher -- got three days (suspension) for that. It was over something stupid.

The subject also reported that he was truant from school on occasion:

Somedays I just cut school. If my friend -- the guy who lived down the street from me, I used to ride his bus. I'd call in the morning to see if he was going. And if he didn't feel like going, some mornings I'd just stay home with him. We used to have dirt bikes and everything and we used to go riding around all day.

The subject's mother referred to her son as not presenting any particularly difficult issues regarding discipline through his high school years. She did note an episode where he took his father's truck without permission and left town with his girlfriend who was not getting along with her family at the time. She said that this was very traumatic for them, since the girl was not of legal age and their son could have been legally charged on the matter. She stated that she felt that the subject was truly unaware of the possible consequences of such an action, and just felt that he needed to help this girl. She noted many times in the interview that the subject frequently took actions without considering the consequences and that this was a source of great frustration to the family. According to his mother, the subject continues with this type of
behavior.

While the subject expressed general satisfaction with school experiences, his mother expressed much dissatisfaction. She expressed dissatisfaction even with early school years, saying:

. . . he was very frustrated. In the third grade, he missed out on learning cursive writing and multiplication because he was pulled out for so many things, although they assured me at the time that he was getting these things when he came back into the room. Baloney. You know, I taught him at home. And by the time he got into fourth grade, he was very frustrated about being pulled in so many directions.

The subject's mother expressed concern about low expectations several times. She said:

I could never get anyone to see any value in expecting more of him. They expected less, and he gave less.

Each year, I saw that he gave less and less.

She saw herself as a parent who wished to be supportive of her son's education, but was blocked from doing so. Expressing her frustrations about her relationship with the school, she said:

I think that we felt that we were being very supportive in trying to be a part of the school, and involved with them and our son, and yet we didn't always feel comfortable with that. And we didn't want to be pushy parents. I don't think we knew how to be pushy parents.
We just wanted to help our son. We wanted to know what his assignments were so we could help him accomplish them and get them done.

Still referring to the school, she later added:

And I don't feel that we were welcome. I don't always feel that they appreciated the fact that we wanted to be involved. Or that they allowed us to be involved. And I think that in little subtle ways they could have made us, or could have helped us, and didn't. Many times, we thought, you know, why is it so secret what they're doing? What is the big deal here? We're trying to really know what this child is doing in school, and nobody is willing to tell us.

The subject's high school special education teacher saw him as someone with unrealistic career goals, perhaps fostered by his parents' expectations, which she categorized as not consistent with the subject's interests and capabilities. She noted that the subject entered high school with a plan to go to college. The teacher's comments, as well as those of the subject's mother and the subject himself lead one to believe that the subject received mixed messages about what a suitable occupational goal might be for him. It is clear that the special education teacher saw him as a student who would succeed in construction or landscaping types of jobs. She said that he expressed interest in outdoor work involving manipulative tasks. While the subject's mother expressed displeasure with the amount of vocational training her son had
received in school, stating her opinion that he would have benefited from at least one more year of intensive training. Some of her comments lead one to wonder whether her expression of vocational goals for her son were sincere. She said that she felt that her son was uncomfortable in the environment of vocational education. She said that he did not see himself as one of these types of students. She commented that he would never want to participate in vocational education competitions or public displays. She also said that when her son disappointed her by indicating that he did not wish to attend her graduation from college, he remarked that he did not like to attend other people’s graduations. She said that she was most disappointed because she wanted to show him off to her friends. One wonders about her true level of comfort in seeing her child in a laborer’s role, as well as the subject’s level of comfort in his mother’s circle of friends and their offspring. It seems clear that school personnel and the parents did not communicate effectively about the subject’s post-school plans, with both sides seeming to blame the other for the unsuccessful outcome for the student.

Clearly, the subject himself was most conflicted about his own career goals. He expressed interest in roofing, but when given a job opportunity in this field, he quickly reneged on this commitment, saying that he was really looking for something else. This was quite inconsistent with what he had told the interviewer and his vocational teacher. Wondering where this interest began, it is interesting to note that he said he had worked with his father in this area. His mother, too, noted that he had worked with his father at a roofing job and that
they appeared to have had a close relationship during this period. The subject also indicated to the interviewer when the possibility of a job opportunity in this area came up that he really knew this type of work very well. The roofing employer, however, said that the subject had virtually no skills in this field, again indicating the subject's lack of realization of his status in regard to expected job capabilities. One is led to wonder whether the subject's interest was in roofing as a job or whether the subject felt he could please his father by working in this job and thus rekindle the close relationship which had existed when they had worked together. The subject said at one point in the interview that he hoped to go to college to become a teacher in the area of roofing and carpentry. It was again apparent that he had little realization of what qualifications would be required to accomplish this.

During high school, the subject worked at a fast food operation and in a supermarket. He indicated that he did not like the restaurant work. He inquired of his carpentry teacher, on the day of graduation practice, as to whether he might help him find a job. The subject understood that the teacher said he would look around for a job for him. The subject reported that the teacher eventually did contact him, but the job which he had found for him was located in Pennsylvania which was too far away. It was apparent that the end of high school came and he had no plan in place for any specific employment. After several months, a relative got him a temporary job with a maintenance crew for an adjacent school system. The subject reported that he enjoyed this job very much, and was deeply disappointed when it ended. He attributed the loss of
this job to the recession and remained hopeful that he would be hired again when economic times improved. At this time, his mother reported that he became withdrawn and depressed, spending most of the time sleeping in his room. His father, in particular, became highly frustrated with him because he viewed him as unmotivated to find another job. His mother described his father as leaving the daily newspaper on the table with advertisements circled, directing the subject to follow up on them. She said that they would often return home from work only to find him still asleep. After a time period, the subject’s mother reported that he came to her, admitting that he did not know how to make a call to inquire about a job. She related that she instructed him in this process and rehearsed it with him. She said that this revelation was shocking to her. The subject’s mother also reported that they went to the job training agency with her son to investigate employment opportunities. While she said that there were jobs available, she said that her son was not interested in any one of them. The subject then found a landscaping job through a newspaper ad. He related that he felt that his experiences in this job were satisfying because he felt he was making progress in learning more and more tasks in this business. He noted that he had received one raise since he began work. He said at the time of the interview that he was planning to contact another landscaper because he felt he had skills which could warrant better pay as well as benefits. He noted, however, that his parents did not approve of his landscaping work because it was seasonal and most importantly, because he did not receive benefits. He was aware that the family health benefits
which his father obtained as a Viet Nam veteran who had been in the Marines would terminate on his twenty-first birthday, which was approaching. He had also been laid off for the entire winter without any unemployment benefits, reporting this to be the case because the employer did not make adequate deductions from his pay. He also noted that the employer's failure to deduct enough taxes from his pay made it necessary for him to pay taxes this spring, which was a burden for him. He said that while he had now begun working again, money was a problem for him and his mother did help him out when it was necessary. He stated that he did have economic goals which he felt would lead to a more independent life for him. He said that he wanted to get his own telephone and to establish credit. He said that he was expected to make payments on his truck and to pay for the insurance and gas. His mother indicated that he was unable to keep up with these expenses and, in fact, on the day of the interview, she was driving his truck because he had fallen in arrears on the expenses. She said that upon his graduation, they had notified him that they would expect payment for board. Although this was a minimal amount, he could not afford it, and at the present time, his parents were not receiving any rent from him. By his mother's account, he owed his parents $2000 in various loans. While she stated that she wished they could simply forget about the loans, she
said that she and her husband felt that this would not be in her son's best interest in the long run.

In discussing the future, the subject expressed no specific plans or goals. While he hoped to attain independence, he seemed to have no realistic approach on how to accomplish this independence. His mother expressed fear of the future. She related her concerns that her son was nearly twenty-one, but was not anywhere near the level of independence that one might expect for one of that age. She said that she felt that he had good qualities and she was fearful, yet hopeful, that he would be successful, but would probably take a longer time than is usual to do so. She attributed this, to a great degree, to her son's learning disability and to the school system's failure to prepare him for adult life.

She presented herself as a strong figure who might have acted as her son's protector in some way. Her comments and those of her son led the researcher to believe that her husband was disappointed in his son's present status. It seemed as though the subject was trying to please both his parents, but was realistically unable to meet their expectations at this time. Actually, it is questionable as to whether he even knows what these expectations are. At the time of the interview with his mother, the subject had begun a job with a utilities company, laying cable. The mother reported that this could be a job with a future and that her son was very excited and motivated to do well. The job had been acquired through a family contact.
The subject's teacher reflected on her prediction of his success at the time of graduation as being uncertain. She said that she felt he would have benefited from a time-limited version of supported employment to assist with job adjustment problems which she felt certain he would encounter. His vocational teacher, recalling a contact with the subject following graduation, noted that he was not doing anything productive at the time. He reflected on his immaturity and his lack of specific job preparation at the time of his departure from school.

It appears that while the subject left school with a diploma in hand, this credential was of little meaning to him in adjusting to real life. He participated in special and vocational education programs. He was diagnosed as a student with a learning disability at an early age and received extra services and accommodations virtually throughout his school career. Yet some needs which were probably keenly related to this disability, went unaddressed. It appeared that some combination of low self-esteem, coupled with immaturity, confusion about realistic expectations, and a lack of specific career counseling resulted in a graduate with little chance of success in the world of work, at least in the immediate future. Another factor which might be of some significance were the discrepant messages given by his family about what their expectations were for him.

While the subject exited high school with limited potential for success, certain factors appear to be present which might favorably
impact his ultimate accomplishments. It is apparent that his family is intact and interested in his welfare. It appears that they will be able to provide support to him on a continuing basis and have demonstrated this in their efforts to help him locate employment. All who have been in contact with the subject report positively on his personal skills in interacting with others. He is truly a pleasant young man who is comfortable with others. The subject has also acquired a high school diploma, meeting all the requirements established in the state of Maryland, including functional standards. While this accomplishment does not appear to have had a great impact on the acquisition of a job for him thus far, it does represent the achievement of a benchmark which sometimes serves to separate applicants for specific positions as eligible for consideration or not. The attainment of the diploma has also served as a status symbol in the subject’s eyes. According to his mother, he is quick to point out this accomplishment to those of his friends who have not completed high school. Undoubtedly this fact positively influences the subject’s self-esteem.

Major themes then can be stated as having significant impact on the post-school status of this subject. First of all, program planning was inadequate. His vocational program began at too late a time to have been effective in providing him with training in any field at all. While the subject participated in a vocational curriculum, he seemed to lack interest in the fields which he chose, and met with success only in that he was able to pass the required
courses to graduate. As confirmed by his employer, he truly had no voca-
tional skills and was not motivated to acquire on the job training when it was offered.

The subject's lack of commitment is certainly related to the conflicting messages he received from his family. It seems clear that the subject's mother is in conflict about accepting her son's disability. While she said that she had been an advocate for him in demanding that the school system attend to his needs as a learning disabled student, it is ironic to note that she took such a minimal role in career planning for her son. The researcher is left with the opinion that if she had really wanted her son to receive earlier vocational programming, she would not have dismissed his failure to enter the Career and Technology Center in an earlier grade as a school system error which could not be remedied. It is more believable to the researcher that she was resisting this avenue.

The father remains an important missing piece in attempting to understand the family dynamics which developed around this learning disabled young man. It is interesting to note that the mother commented in her interview that he questioned her about participating in the study. The clear implication was that he would have preferred if she did not talk about the matter. While the mother stated that he was highly involved with the subject, school conference records reflect his participation on only one occasion. It is doubtful that the family really understood or accepted that fact that their oldest son was learning disabled.
The subject's continuing state of conflict is apparent. He is realizing his need to achieve independence, but is unable to make any strides in that direction. He simply does not know what course to follow.

Another major theme in the case has been a pattern of disjunctive school-home relationships. School personnel regarded the subject's mother with some intimidation. She was very critical of the school in her comments. These factors resulted in avoidance on the part of the school in clearly presenting the point of view held by the staff regarding realistic planning for this student. The mother, too, avoided facing reality in some sense when she opted out of pursuing a plan which would present attainable goals for her son, namely earlier vocational programming. When the chips are down, both sides avoided dealing with the real issues and the student suffered as a result.
Findings: Summary of Field Notes by Case

Case 2

The second subject was referred to the researcher by her former high school special education teacher. The teacher noted that this subject maintained contact with her and with another special education teacher at the high school. She said that upon learning about the research project, the subject agreed to participate.

The subject was contacted by telephone and a meeting with her was arranged for the following Saturday to take place at a local fast food restaurant. She arrived about five minutes late and accepted the offer to buy lunch for her. Initially, it was somewhat difficult to establish rapport with her. She offered only brief responses and seemed reluctant or unable to expand on her comments. After some time, she began to speak more freely. She was particularly expressive toward the end of the interview when she began talking about her feelings of frustration with herself for making some choices in high school which proved not to be in her best interest in the long run. When commenting on how she chose to enter the work study program as a senior instead of continuing in the nursing program at the Career and Technology Center, she offered little by way of explanation except to indicate that she was tired of school and anxious to get out and do other things. She noted that she was married at the time.

When commenting on her feelings about school, she became somewhat emotional saying that she did not feel that high school did very
much good for her. She indicated that, in her opinion, vocational education could have been the most important link to success for her. She regarded many of her other courses as having little practical value to her.

The subject is married with a toddler. She and her husband lived with family members. She is employed as a cashier at a local discount department store and her husband is currently unemployed. The subject remains in contact with high school friends, many of whom were also special education students. She remarked that they get together on occasion with their special education teachers for social events.

Following this interview, the high school special education teachers were contacted and appointments were made to review student records and to meet with both of them. The review of this student's files revealed that while the subject lived with both parents throughout school, on not one occasion had either her mother or father participated in a special education meeting regarding their daughter.

The student was first identified as learning disabled as a third grader. She received Level 2 special education service through Grade 6, at which time services increased to Level 3. The Individual Education Program for that year includes special education instruction in reading, language and mathematics.

The student was re-evaluated in Grade 9 at the age of 15 years and 9 months. Her reading and language levels as that time were
assessed at the fourth grade level, in the severely deficient range. Math scores were evaluated to be on the fifth grade level, in the moderately deficient range. The student continued to receive special education services.

In Grade 10, her Individual Education Program listed services in math, English, and American Studies, as well as resource room support. At this time, the student enrolled in the vocational sampling program at the Career and Technology Center, where she participated in a program designed to provide exploratory information about a variety of vocational options. As was the procedure with students in this program, no formal vocational assessments were given, as the program itself is considered to be an evaluation tool.

The student report card indicates that in the exploratory program, the student sampled landscaping, food services, construction electricity and computer operations. While she passed all components of the program, she received low scores in landscaping and computer operation. Absences were noted as excessive.

During the second half of tenth grade, the student participated in the food service program. The pattern of excessive absences continued and the guidance counselor noted that personal problems were creating considerable difficulty for her at this time.

The student applied to continue at the Career and Technology Center in eleventh grade. At this time, she requested entry into the "Fundamentals of Nursing" program. A skill profile in her vocational file revealed that she was quite successful in this program.
attaining satisfactory to high scores in areas of bedside care, attitude, and interest. She did have considerable difficulty mastering the content of the course and the profile reflects failure in the attainment of program competencies in some skill areas. She completed the site care requirement which required her to work in a hospital or nursing home setting. An instructor noted on a report card that she was trying hard and had a positive attitude and caring manner. Her attendance while in this program had markedly improved.

While she missed passing the competency test in the nursing program, the vocational support teacher said that she would have been able to receive additional assistance if she chose to return to the Center. He did not feel that this would have been an unsurmountable hurdle for her. However, the student never re-applied for admission to the Center as a senior and instead entered a work study program through her home high school, where she was placed at a local supermarket.

During this year, the student was again evaluated by the special education teacher and psychologist and was found to be learning disabled in the areas of reading, math, and written language. Intelligence testing revealed a significant discrepancy between verbal and performance scores, with verbal areas being stronger. Other strengths were noted as math problem solving, perseverance, and attention to details. Weaknesses were listed as passage
comprehension, recall of information, vocabulary, visual motor tasks and writing skills.

The final note in her file indicates that she graduated, completing all requirements specified by the state of Maryland, including the passage of functional tests.

The student's special education teachers were interviewed at the time of this visit. Both teachers remarked about the subject's difficult family life, indicating that, in their opinions, home problems seriously interfered with the subject's educational progress. They indicated that the subject was often absent from school, sometimes taking on her mother's responsibilities as a daycare provider when she was unable to do so. While chronic health problems were cited as the official reason for her mother's disability, a substance abuse problem was suspected. The subject's early marriage was regarded as a possible escape to her home problems. However, the subject's difficulty in securing financial independence from family members was now creating continuing problems for her.

The teachers regarded the subject as a highly organized student who had a high level of motivation to succeed in her school work.

The two teachers had conflicting opinions about the nature of her learning disability. One teacher felt that it was difficult to
determine whether the problem was a learning disability or environmental disadvantage. The other teacher disagreed with this opinion. She said that she regarded the subject as learning disabled by any definition.

After interviewing the special education teachers, complete school records were reviewed and a special education class, similar to one in which the subject had participated, was observed.

The subject's work study coordinator was then contacted. This teacher had also had this student in a Consumer Education class. The teacher recalled that the student was likable and worked well in his class, putting forth much effort. She had been placed in a work study assignment at a local supermarket during her senior year. He indicated that while the employer was initially very satisfied with her job performance, she was eventually fired for shoplifting. He recalled that she had taken about twenty-five magazines about cars and trucks without permission. She said that they were for her husband. As was the strict store policy, she was fired immediately for this offense.

The work study coordinator recalled her interest in nursing. He said that he had attempted to have her accept a placement in a nursing home, as he thought that this would be more in line with her interests. To his surprise, she indicated that she did not want to work in this capacity at that time.
Data Summary: Case 2

In the case of this subject, school difficulties began at an early age. By third grade, concerns were significant enough to warrant diagnostic testing. A learning disability was detected at this time and direct special education services began. The subject received resource support for one hour daily throughout the rest of elementary school. Upon entering middle school, services were increased, with the subject receiving special education for reading, language, and math.

Testing in Grade 9, confirmed continuing severe discrepancies between achievement and ability in reading, math, written language, and skill areas. The subject continued in a special education program throughout high school, receiving support in all areas.

School records reflect little participation by parents. While appropriate forms included parental signatures, many noted that they were sent home for approval as the parent did not participate in the meetings. When the subject was asked about her parents in terms of their level of support in educational matters, she said that her father did give her guidance in this area. She said:

My dad did. My mom wasn't so much, but my dad did. My dad was always on me to get as much education as I
could. Because he wished he did because he wouldn't be where he is now.

She added that her father indicated that he would help her financially if she got into college to pursue nursing. She said that her parents were divorced and she got to see her mother on occasion since she enjoyed visiting with her grandson. She noted that she had no brothers or sisters.

In addition to continued special education support in high school, the subject had extensive course work in vocational areas. At her home school, she was enrolled in horticulture and typing. She began a part day program at the Career and Technology Center in tenth grade. She sampled many courses during this period. The tenth grade exploratory vocational program allows the student to take a variety of introductory courses in order to evaluate their interests and abilities. At this time, by her report, the subject sampled construction electricity, food services, computers, landscaping and drafting. While she initially selected food service for more intensive study, she said that she soon realized that she was not really interested in this area. She said that she observed the nursing program at the center and decided that she wanted to pursue this area. She comments:

I got in food service, and I just wasn't interested. I noticed the nursing. I really was always the kind of person who wanted to do things for others. I just stepped in for the day, for a day of the nursing program.
to see what it was like. And it looked like it was interesting to me. And I took it.

The subject continued with the nursing program through eleventh grade. She said that she found the program very difficult. She said:

There was nothing much easy about it. I guess the easiest was working with the patients, instead of mannequins, because they move, they respond to you. And the hardest was memorizing the muscles, the bones, the functions of the body.

The subject commented that she received much help from the vocational instructors. She said that she also received some support from the special education instructor at the Career and Technology Center. Her home school special education teacher had a different opinion. She felt that better communication between the vocational center and the home high school would have been helpful to the subject. If this had occurred, she felt that the subject would have had a better chance of success with the nursing program.

The subject noted her frustration with the limited amount of time she had at the center. She said:

I guess that if I could have spent more time at Vo Tech in the nursing -- more hours wise. Because we didn't have that many hours there. We only had a couple of hours, like two hours. You really had to buckle down and learn what you can right then. But if we had more
time, it would have probably been better. I would probably have had more of a chance of passing the test because I would have had more time to study there and to review. But by the time they had the breaks -- they had like a half hour break -- you'd only have an hour and a half.

At the end of the eleventh grade, the subject took an examination which could have certified her as a geriatric nursing assistant. She noted that she missed passing the test by three points. She said that this was a great disappointment to her. While she says she plans to re-take this test, she is apprehensive about the preparation which will be required for her to succeed.

The subject noted that she received an award for her efforts in the nursing program. When asked why she had been recommended for this award, she commented:

For achievement. Trying to do something that was over my head. And I tried and I accomplished. And I guess it was rare for a lot of students that have my disability in needing help. And they seen that I tried and I did it. And they gave me that award.

Despite her interest in the nursing program, the subject elected not to continue during her senior year, choosing a work study program instead. She said that she had had a summer job at a supermarket and just decided to continue with it as a work study position. She worked in customer service. She said that this was not a decision
that she would make again, but she was frustrated with being in high school at the time and decided on this option. She had just been married and was assuming new responsibilities.

Upon graduation, the subject said she sought employment by reading newspaper ads. She was first employed in a part time cashiering job at a discount department store. Then she obtained full time employment with a limousine company. She described her duties in this position as answering telephones, reserving limousines and doing general clerical tasks. She said that while she enjoyed this job, it was located approximately thirty miles from her home. When she learned she was pregnant, she said that she decided to find closer employment. She then went to work full time as a cashier at another discount department store. Upon the birth of her baby, she said she continued in the same position on a part time basis. This is the job she still holds. She says that she makes minimum wage and has some limited sick leave with this employer, but receives no other benefits.

At this time, the subject reports that she wishes to return to the community college where she can complete a nursing program. She says that she had contacted her former high school special education teacher who has arranged an interview at the college for her. This teacher remarked that this was beyond her duties as a high school special education teacher, but she agreed to help this subject. The subject regards this teacher as a continuing resource to her, noting that she knows she can get help from her if she needs it.
The subject also spoke of re-taking the geriatric certification exam, although she says that she would prefer working in a hospital rather than a nursing home. She said she called a local nursing home to inquire about their preparation program, but was not able to speak to the person who could provide this information. The subject was not very specific about whether she actually planned to pursue this, saying that she might call back at a later time.

The subject views her current financial situation as inadequate. She lives with extended family. Her husband is currently unemployed and they are having difficulty paying bills. She said that they are responsible for insurance payments and car expenses. She says she wishes she could make more money and do something more related to her interest in nursing.

In reflecting on high school, she expressed appreciation to the teachers who helped her. She said:

And I guess I'll always remember them teachers because they helped me when I was really down and out and I needed some help. With tests and everything, these people helped me. And I still go back and see those people just because I want to.

In a closing comment, the subject expressed great frustration and confusion about how high school had prepared her for life. She said:

What part of high school helped me? You know, we've got to have this degree. We've got to have this diploma to get a real good job. You really don't. I'm telling you.
What you need is that experience. Right there. Like in my nursing, I took the program at Vo Tech. that's what's helping nowadays. Because you're out there and these men are teaching you, and these women are teaching you, these persons, like nursing, welding, and that's what's out in the world. Computers and stuff. With reading, okay that helps you understand and everything, but what did history help you? Okay, with science, well if you want to go into something like be a scientist or something like that. Yea. Or a lab or something like that. But most of the things like history and some of the other things, you know, the Vo Tech is what really helps you because they're out there teaching you what you have to know and getting you certified to do it, and they put you in this job. Okay, that's what you want. Like I said. I just didn't understand what was high school so much about. Like getting that diploma. Yea. you have to get it, but does it help you now?

The outcome for this student has been unsuccessful in terms of acquiring the skills needed to function successfully in employment. Her learning disability was a significant early factor in preventing academic success. As she grew older and progressed through the grades, negative factors piled up. Problems compounded by a dysfunctional family at a critical decision making phase in her life, she got side-tracked from what appeared to be an emerging vocational
path. It seemed as though guidance was unavailable certainly from her family, and only in a limited way from school. She seemed to come upon this nursing choice without much assistance. When she made the decision to change course, no apparent attempts were made to keep her on course.

At this point in her life, the subject is headed down a precarious course. She is still motivated to return to school to pursue her dream. Whether she realistically will be able to fulfill this ambition is highly questionable. Limited financial resources will undoubtedly be a problem. Home pressures including child care and the need to work to support the family will be significant. Assistance with learning problems she will undoubtedly face will be limited. While the subject remarks that she feels she can get help if she needs it, it is doubtful if she is aware of how limited the resources will be. Her high school teacher, overwrought with other responsibilities and pressures, will probably not be as available as the subject believes she will be. The only factor which will work in the subject’s favor will be unequivocal commitment to the accomplishment of a formidable task. Whether she will be able to overcome the odds which are stacked against her is a matter left to question.

A major theme in this case was the impact of a dysfunctional family system on this subject's life. Complicated by a learning disability, family problems created stresses for her which led her down an unfortunate path. The suspected substance abuse of the
subject's mother certainly is a critical issue. While it was not appropriate to explore this topic in further depth during the interview, it is possible that the subject struggles with problems associated with being the adult child of an alcoholic. One such characteristic is a lack of self-confidence. In studying the interview with the subject, her lack of confidence is apparent. She came very close to passing the geriatric nursing assistant exam, and then abandoned that program. In discussing her continuing interest in this area, she said that she made one telephone call to inquire about a nursing home certification program, but never called back when she was not able to get through to the appropriate person. The subject articulates a definite goal, but her plan for achieving that goal is laden with gaps.

As in Case 1, the subject's parent provided ambiguous signals about what was desired from their child. School personnel reported frequent absences because the subject tended to her mother's responsibilities as a day care provider when the mother was not able to do so due to her illness. While the subject's father expressed that he supported her educational efforts, he allowed this situation to occur, requiring that his daughter miss school to play the nurturing role in caring for her mother. The subject then entered an early marriage, assuming increasing familial responsibilities as a wife and mother while barely leaving her own childhood.

School planning for this subject included high level of special programming. But for this subject, the central issues of self-esteem
and confidence were missed. Her choices were ill-advised. She made mistakes along the way. No extended services were available beyond her exit from school. The most hopeful possibility is that the special education teacher who has befriended her will continue to serve as a mentor and will provide guidance as to what steps she can take to achieve her goals. While the subject clearly respects this teacher and needs continuing support from her, the researcher is left to believe that the teacher is ambivalent about such a continuing commitment.

While this subject exhibits a higher level of motivation and maturity than the first subject, family and school planning issues are significant features for both cases.
Findings: Summary of Field Notes by Case

Case 3

The third subject was referred to the researcher by a special education teacher who had had this young woman as a student in high school several years ago. The teacher now was employed as a special education administrator and the subject had recently contacted her to offer her services in working with learning disabled students. The teacher spoke to her about the research project and she agreed to speak with the researcher about her experiences. The teacher noted that even though the subject had graduated from high school several years ago, she had been seen as severely learning disabled. She remarked that she had had many diversified experiences since leaving high school and that it would be of great interest to interview her.

The subject was contacted by telephone. She was unavailable on several occasions. A message was left for her and within a week, she telephoned the researcher and an interview was then arranged. The subject noted that she was out of town regularly and her time was very limited.

The interview was conducted at a local restaurant. The subject arrived five minutes late and immediately apologized for her tardiness. She said that she could spend thirty minutes for the interview, as she was on a very tight schedule.

The subject was immediately impressive for her striking attractiveness. She was very well-dressed, with make-up appearing as though she had received professional consultation. She remarked that
her present schedule was very hectic due to final preparations for the state beauty pageant. She would be a contestant, representing an adjacent county.

When mention was made of the special education teacher who had referred the subject, she appeared not certain as to who this was. In fact, she mentioned this person in the context of a college, rather than a high school teacher. It is most interesting to note that the subject remarked that it was not until her attendance at the community college that she became aware that she even had a learning disability.

The subject projects a high level of self-confidence in her conversational style. While her voice was a bit loud, she seemed unaware of this. She appeared to be concentrating closely on the conversation, as though she had been highly coached in conversational skills. Her eye contact was intent -- unnaturally so. She seemed to have some difficulty remembering and associating names. She commented upon this deficit during the interview.

The session lasted about forty-five minutes. At the conclusion, she made cordial comments and indicated she needed to rush on to her next appointment. The subject’s high level of ambition was readily apparent to the researcher. The concluding remarks made by the subject revealed that she felt angry about the fact that she had a learning disability and that she felt challenged to overcome this problem and become highly successful. She also noted that she felt that because she was highly attractive, she would have to work
especially hard to convince others that she was intelligent and capable in her own right. She explained that she felt the need to acquire "substantial credentials" in order to gain respect for her as an educated person. She also remarked that she continued to elect tasks which would present the greatest difficulty to her in light of her specific learning disability. She said that such accomplishments were very important to her in bolstering her self-confidence.

Following the interview with this subject, the researcher had occasion to speak with her special education teacher, a school psychologist who was also the subject's neighbor, and a teacher who had been a classmate of the subject. The special education teacher was very surprised to learn of the subject's remarks regarding her lack of awareness about the nature of her learning disability while in high school. She consented to arrange an appointment with the researcher to discuss the subject in greater depth. The psychologist, who knew her as a neighbor remarked about the parent's goal for her daughter to become highly successful as a beauty pageant contender. She said that she felt her ultimate goal was to become Miss America. The classmate spoke of the subject as a local celebrity who she was honored to know.

An article about the subject then appeared in the local newspaper, pursuant to the upcoming beauty pageant. Some biographical information which was included revealed that she had graduated from college with a degree in communications. Her area of talent was lyrical ballet. It noted her career goal as becoming a
lobbyist, an interest which developed after her work in the office of a state senator during the legislative session. In a follow-up article after the contest, it was noted that the subject had been selected as a finalist, but not the winner of the state pageant.

An interview was then conducted with the high school special education teacher who had referred the subject. The teacher remarked that she remembered the subject quite well. She said that she remembered a breakthrough moment for the subject when she had introduced a structural analysis method for decoding. She said that this made her wonder about the nature of her disability and about the type of reading instruction she might have had in her early school years. At the conclusion of the interview, the teacher suggested that I make contact with the subject's mother, who had been a physical education teacher at the school which the subject attended. She was now retired. The subject's mother was contacted by telephone and an appointment was scheduled to occur within the next week. The interview was held at a local restaurant. The mother consented to the tape recording of the interview. She spoke with the researcher for approximately one hour, seeming relaxed and commenting openly about her views of her daughter's successes and difficulties. She appeared to be highly supportive, both emotionally and financially, of all her three children. While she played a definite role in providing assistance to the subject in completing writing assignments through high school and college, she seemed rather non-assertive about advocating for her daughter's needs. While she recognized that
she had difficulties in reading and writing from an early age. She was only vaguely acquainted with the kind of special education programming which she had received. She commented on the strong work ethic of the family and her commitment to providing the opportunity for a college education for all her children. She noted that she was very generous in sharing her economic resources with her children. She revealed some frustration in the subject's continued dependence on her for support with educational endeavors, and seemed especially concerned about her recent interest in attending law school. She also noted that the subject did not have a job which provided insurance benefits and that this was a real concern to her. She added that the subject had recently moved to Connecticut to join a friend and seek employment. As the subject made no mention of this impending move during the interview with the researcher, one is left to wonder about whether this move was planned or done on impulse.

The subject's mother commented that she was divorced from the subject's father, who had been a railroad employee. She noted that he was a hard worker, but was not highly involved with the family. She said that the subject had limited contact with her father because he lived in another state.
Data Summary: Case 3

The learning disability which caused so much difficulty with reading and writing for this subject was not detected at an early age. While the subject's mother recalled her alarm at being told by an elementary school teacher that the subject was having difficulty with reading, no diagnostic testing was completed at this time and the subject received no specialized assistance. The subject was described as amiable and cooperative. She noted that she felt her teachers believed she was lazy and disinterested, but pleasant, and responded by assigning her to low level classes.

In remarking about her middle and high school experiences, she said that she felt short-changed by being put in remedial level classes because she did not learn the things she needed to know to prepare her for college. She also said that she lost self-confidence because this made her feel as though she was not intelligent enough to compete with peers. She noted several times that she had no idea that she had a learning disability and thought she lacked intelligence. Her high school special education teacher says that this problem was explained to her very clearly and wonders if she was not able to understand it at that time, or whether she just rejected that information. She said:

Because I know that in that learning strategies class I talked a lot about how they were there because of that (learning disability) and they were there to learn strategies to help them work around that. That was just
part of the thing I did.

Records indicate that a learning disability was diagnosed in high school, and the subject received modified instruction, as well as study skills training. Specialized reading instruction was also included in this program. The special education teacher indicated that she had great difficulty with the reading and writing process. The subject's mother notes that her writing was disjointed, with a proliferation of spelling and grammatical errors. The subject reports that she required a high level of assistance with writing, and utilized tutoring services, personal assistance from her mother, study groups, and computer assistance in dealing with writing assignments. She remarks about her assignments at the community college:

...it was really rough. I had my mom look over papers. which originally it looked like it was a five year old's writing. I mean, just grammatically wrong, the spelling was wrong, it was incoherent. I would basically have to read her the paper and she would re-write it so that way. we would know what these words are. I would always miss endings of words. What I read and what I write are two different things. So therefore my proofreading skills are horrible. Then after my mom looked it over, then I'd go to a tutoring center. And they looked it over. And then after that, I'd re-write it again. And then after that, I got so fed up with it. I just turned
it in. (laughter)

The subject reported that after graduating from college, she acquired a temporary position as a secretarial assistant in a state legislator's office. She remarked that she was a terrible secretary and that her writing difficulty made it nearly impossible for her to adequately perform her duties in this assignment.

The subject's mother was a physical education teacher at the same school that the subject attended. The special education teacher noted that she always seemed concerned about her daughter's learning problem. She recalled that it was the mother who initially referred her for diagnostic testing. However, the mother recalled little interaction in the special education process. She noted that the special education teacher did give her daughter some help, but had little recollection of the details. She remarked that she believed most of the teachers were unaware of her daughter's problems because she was very compliant and worked so hard to compensate for her deficits.

The subject had notable strengths in high school. Her mother noted that she was accomplished in sports, earning eighteen letters. The subject remarked that she had only a few friends. Her mother concurred that she had a limited number of friends, but added that she did not support her involvement with cliques of students. She preferred her involvement in athletics.

The subject's mother and sisters appeared to be sources of support to her. Both the subject and the mother discussed the
learning problems of one of her sisters. Her father, who is now divorced from her mother, was also described as having serious reading problems.

Following graduation from high school, the subject began what had become a lengthy process toward independent status as an adult, which she still has not quite accomplished. She first attended a college in a neighboring state. She was unsuccessful and left after one semester. Her mother noted that this occurred because the living arrangements required that four students share a room and that this situation was not conducive to studying. The subject then was accepted as a foreign exchange student and lived in Australia for a year. While it was not required that she participate in an academic program since she was a high school graduate, the subject reports that it was at this time that she gained respect for education after observing the English system of schooling.

Upon her return from Australia, she contacted the community college and applied for admission. She was required to take developmental courses to remediate her skills. It was at this point that she reports that it was suggested that she be evaluated for a learning disability by the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. She says that only then did she become aware that she had a learning disability. She says:

There I finally learned that I was learning disabled. I finally learned my problem. I guess it’s hard to get motivated about something in the dark. But I mean when
the lights turn on and you can see the wall in front of
you, you can start tearing it down. But in the dark,
you have no idea what's going on.

The subject reports that, while she was able to successfully
complete the community college program in two years, it was a
struggle. She was determined to go on and was accepted as a transfer
student at a state university.

The subject elected to major in communications. She says she
made this choice knowing that writing was "her weak link". She says
that she felt she needed to overcome this disability and thus chose
to focus on this in her program. She said that she knew that her
strength was in verbal skills. She joined the debating team and
successfully competed with her peers. She remarked about the
challenge of this endeavor:

I knew that debating was going to be extremely hard.
But I still had this lack of self-confidence. I guess
you could say. And I knew that if I had specialized
knowledge in some area, which you do in-depth research
in debating, that I might have more self-confidence.
And it was extremely hard. All I did was study
constantly and my coach was against me because here I
was a blond haired, blue eyed beauty girl that had a
learning disability that wanted to debate, and she just
wanted to dust her hands of me. But I think with a
learning disability, what I've learned is to really
work hard.

The subject reported that during college, she had an extremely limited social life because studying required so much time of her. She said that she worked with study groups because she learned better by hearing information and that this also enabled her to have social contacts with classmates.

Upon graduating from college in 1990, the subject reported that she had several temporary jobs which included waitressing, working as a news reporter for a television station, and working in a political office. She remains a competitor in beauty pageants saying that the money she has earned in contests has enabled her to buy a computer. In conjunction with this endeavor, the subject reports that she has become highly involved with some community service projects. She says that she has worked with the Orton Dyslexia Society where she has learned a great deal about learning disabilities. She says that only now is she aware of the legal protection afforded students with learning disabilities. She also has been a speaker at several local high schools where she has made presentations to groups of learning disabled youngsters. Her mother described her reaction to attending one of these sessions:

So someone said: It's all yours. And she had an hour and a half. She did an excellent job. She really did. And she told those kids that it was up to them -- that they weren't stupid. That they just had a problem and that they were going to have to make the effort. To get
the help. And she did such a great job. Because here's this beautiful girl telling people that she had problems, you know. They think of her as being successful and think she doesn't have any problems in the world. And I really think -- I was glad I went down with her. I just sat back.

The subject reported that she was attempting to begin a support group for learning disabled students at the community college. She said that in talking to current high school students she was becoming aware of more services which were now available to them. She stressed, however, her feelings that early diagnosis, tutoring and small classes with individualized assistance were critical to success for these students. She also said that they needed to be aware of the nature of their problem so that it would not erode their self-confidence, as it had affected hers.

The subject reports that her career goal at this time is to become a lobbyist. She says that in order to do this, she needs to attain a law degree. She says that she is currently preparing for the Law School Admission Test which is the first step toward accomplishing this goal. In asking her teacher about her reaction to this goal, she said that while it seemed a bit unrealistic, she had always been impressed with the subject's ability to defy the odds and accomplish beyond what was predicted for her. Her mother seemed a bit skeptical. She commented that she felt that her daughter was a very brave person for even taking the test. She said that she felt
she needed to do this, to once and for all determine if this was a realistic ambition for her. The mother also commented that she was concerned about finances for this type of education, remarking that while she helped her through college, she couldn't afford for her to be a student all her life.

The subject's mother expressed concern that her daughter was still financially dependent, to a large degree. When asked what her goals were for her daughter, she immediately responded that she would like to see her get a job which provides insurance. She added:

Where she's working with the public. Career type -- career girl type. I think she wants to be -- I think she has a picture in her mind of what she'd like to be -- a successful career woman. And I don't know what my goals for her are except I'd like to see her find something that she likes to do -- get settled and make a life of her own.

She noted that her daughter had recently left for another state where she was exploring job opportunities. Her mother said that she supported this move toward establishing her independence.

This subject presents an interesting picture of a young adult who struggled with a learning disability and is on her way toward achieving success. Her refusal to accept limitations is striking. While she received specialized service from the school system at a late date and in a limited fashion, she proceeded to utilize ancillary services to get what she needed in order to meet with
success. Her mother was a strong figure in providing much needed help. She learned computer skills to help compensate for writing deficits. She obtained assistance through adult services at the community college and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation which provided further insight into her disability, as well as assistance with compensatory strategies.

This subject is insightful into the nature of her problem. She also utilizes all her assets in accomplishing her goals. Her mother off-handedly described her as "a bit of a manipulator". Perhaps her mother's remarks are not off course. In a most revealing remark, the subject said:

I think the reason I'm so successful. I think I'm successful, in education is because I look at it as a game and as a challenge. And if I constantly play the game, then I'll be fine. And it relieves a lot of stress because you don't consider it real life, you consider it as a game.

This remark leads one to wonder what the subject considers "real life".

At the conclusion of the interview, the subject became rather emotional in describing her anger about having "this problem". She said that she directed her anger toward overcoming all semblance of the problem so that she could lead a normal life.

The subject's life, however, could probably not be described as normal. Whether competing in a beauty pageant, preparing for debate,
planning for law school exams, or conducting an interview with a researcher, she is intense and goal directed. She admits to having very few friends, explaining that friends require time which she doesn’t have to spare. She is striking as a woman with a mission -- with every intent of succeeding despite any cost.

The impact of her learning disability on her life is complex. Her early lack of school success, low self-confidence, and lack of popularity with peers might indeed be related. Descriptions of her in high school make it seem as though she was there, but was largely invisible to teachers and peers alike. It seems, however, that she might, at this time, be almost capitalizing on her learning disability in some way. Her mother remarked that she felt that this problem made her stronger. It is almost as though this unique problem in this dynamic and successful young woman is an interesting anomaly which indeed might open some doors for her. It seems that the subject is well able to analyze situations and will consciously or unconsciously transform the perceived weakness of having a learning disability into a strength. This is not to say that this young woman has not worked extremely hard to get to this position. Her words to high school youngsters reveal her underlying beliefs. She admonishes to go out and get what they need to be successful.

While she is still on the path toward adult independence, little is left to wonder about whether she will accomplish what she desires. It seems clear that she is no longer content with being invisible.
A central theme in this case is the delayed diagnosis of a learning disability. Consequently, school experiences for this subject were problematic. Viewed by others, and then by herself, as a student with limited ability, her self-esteem was eroded. She participated in a lower track curriculum rather than one which would have addressed her high cognitive ability while providing modifications to compensate for deficient skills in reading and writing. The subject reports that she entered college lacking the higher level content exposure she needed. This made college a more formidable challenge for her.

Another critical issue for this subject was her lack of understanding of the nature of her learning disability until a later date. Believing she was simply not very intelligent certainly impacted her confidence level in school. Her ambiguity in committing to a plan immediately after high school might have been the result of her limited self-confidence. Continuing vacillation in developing a clear plan toward achieving goals might also be related to these early beliefs about herself and her abilities.

Summary of Data Sources

Presented in Table 1 are the data sources for the cases selected for study. Seven data sources were available for Case 1 and five sources were available for each of Cases 2 and 3. The subjects and their special education teachers were interviewed for all three available cases and a special education class comparable to those attended by each of these three subjects was observed. Other sources utilized were not common to all three of the available cases.
Table 1

DATA SOURCES BY CASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IS</th>
<th>IST</th>
<th>IVT</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>CO</th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IS - interview with subject
IST - interview with special education teacher
IVT - interview with vocational/work study teacher
IP - interview with parent
R - access to school records
CO - classroom observation
IE - interview with employer
O - other date source
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Following each interview, tapes were transcribed by the researcher. Memos and marginal remarks were noted on the transcripts. Miles and Huberman (1984) note the importance of recording the interviewer's immediate reaction to the data as it is generated. Using the transcription format for The Ethnograph allowed ample room for the recording of such reflective remarks.

A preliminary coding scheme was then established. Miles and Huberman describe such a coding scheme as the identification of general domains for codes, with more specific codes being inductively developed as the process proceeds. Line by line open coding was completed for each interview. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain open coding as the breaking down comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing of data. Eight domains were initially identified as employment issues, learning disability, independence issues, family involvement, school issues, social life, student thinking processes, and adjustment issues. The subject interview for Case 1 was then analyzed using this coding scheme. A list of sixty-two specific codes within these domains emerged as the interview was examined. (See Appendix F for final iteration of codes).

The interview was then mechanically coded using The Ethnograph. As stated by the authors of this computer program, this product is designed to effectively and efficiently manage the mechanical aspects of data collection and organization for the qualitative researcher.
freeing time for more intensive attention to the critical analysis of the data. Following entry of the sixty-two codes, the subject interview was mechanically sorted into these categories.

The parent interview for Case 1 was then coded. In this process, another domain emerged which was labeled as parent perceptions. Forty-two additional codes were identified at this point. This interview was then mechanically sorted by individual codes. The same procedures were utilized to sort and code interviews with the special education teacher and the employer. At each step, additional codes emerged and were added to the code list. Codes identified at this stage were mostly descriptive in nature. Notes regarding the emergence of inferential codes were made by the researcher for later use.

In analyzing the content of Case 1, we see the emergence of predominant themes which ultimately impacted the student's life beyond school in a significant way. Under the coding domain identified as school issues, the subject's and parent's comments about school history in terms of specific curricular and extracurricular activities, experiences with teachers, areas of success and frustration, and level of satisfaction with teachers and programming were analyzed. Teachers' views on the nature of the student's school experiences and on the nature of learning problems encountered by the student were also analyzed. The teacher's predictions about the student's likelihood of success beyond school provided useful data and related information was obtained with this
questioning line regarding elements which were missing in the student's program which might have deterred his progress.

For this case, the student expressed satisfaction with all teachers and school experiences, while the parent expressed lack of satisfaction with the student's school experiences with respect to special and vocational education. The student had a very limited understanding of the nature of his learning disability, although he acknowledged having difficulty with learning tasks at his home school and at the Career and Technology Center.

School history revealed disjointed planning for the student, with decision making occurring in a superficial way. Teachers reflected on a lack of communication between service providers as interfering with success for the student. The vocational teacher felt that the student was not adequately prepared for this program and the special education teacher felt that the vocational teachers did not understand the nature of the student's disability and consequently did not provide enough support for him. The parent was highly ambivalent about vocational education, communicating a subtle level of anxiety about her son being stigmatized by his association with vocational students. The student was confused as result. While he communicated his desire to become an independent adult, he lacked any realistic appraisal of what his skill level was and how he might fit into the work force at this point. The first case in the study proved to be a rich data source in providing insights regarding emerging themes. The multiple data sources which were available
for study allowed the investigator to gain valuable insight into the life of the student during his school years and beyond.

Data analysis procedures for the second case began with line by line open coding of the student interview. While most of the codes developed during the analysis of the initial case applied and were utilized, some definitions of codes were amended at this time to provide more specific descriptions of information. Teacher interviews regarding this subject were likewise analyzed through use of the coding system.

In Case 2, school issues related to curricular experiences, learning problems and planning procedures emerged as critical in the study of this subject. Rich data sources included the student, as well as several of her teachers. A parent interview could not be obtained. However, comments by school personnel, as well as the lack of evidence of any parental participation in school planning meetings, led the researcher to believe that the subject's parents were generally uninvolved with the school decision making process regarding this student.

The subject herself reflected on the fragmentation of her program. She expressed regret that during the time she was enrolled in the nursing curriculum at the Career and Technology Center, she had such a limited time period to spend at that site during the course of the school day. She indicated that she felt that more time there would have enabled her to receive more of the help she felt she needed in order to learn the material which she viewed as being very
difficult. Her special education teacher said that while she tried to help the student with her work in this program as much as she could, she felt that more support at the Career and Technology Center was really what was needed for this student.

When this subject left the vocational program in twelfth grade and enrolled in the work study program instead, the coordinator reported that he tried to obtain employment for her in an area related to nursing. The student instead opted to work in a supermarket. No record of any planning meeting around this decision can be found in the student's school record.

The student left school with an unfinished goal in mind and with no specific plan as to how she might pursue this goal. A note in her file in the spring of her senior year reflects a discussion about her interest in a nursing program at the community college. However, two years after this time, the subject had not yet followed up in any depth on the pursuit of this possibility.

Case 3 proved to be another rich data source. The subject interview was coded using line by line analysis procedures. This interview was sorted using thirty-seven codes. Sixteen new codes emerged during the analysis of this interview. Six of these codes fell under the domain of learning disability, as this subject was very reflective and expressive in her comments on this topic as it applied to her life. As this subject attended college, a new category which included items related to post-secondary school experiences was added to the coding scheme.
The subject's mother also provided a wealth of information in her personal interview. This interview was mechanically sorted by the thirty-one codes which emerged during the analysis procedures. One code from the initial list was re-defined in the process of analyzing this interview and a new code emerged at this time. The interview with the subject's special education teacher was also coded and sorted.

For Case 3, the school history was more remote, since the subject had graduated in 1985. An extensive special education history was not available as she had only entered the program while in high school. Information relating to the theme of her late identification and its impact on her life as a student was obtained through the interviews with the student and her mother. Discussion of her frustrations and her limited self-confidence as a student were key to the understanding of how this delayed identification negatively impacted her. Comments by the special education teacher revealed a lack of communication with the student about her disability and her needs. While the teacher was very insistent that she clearly presented the issues surrounding her learning disability to the student, the subject recollected that she gained insight into her disability at a later date, while she was in college. The parent was highly supportive of her daughter and worked diligently in assisting her to overcome her difficulties with reading and writing. But the parent did not truly participate in the development of school programming for her daughter. She remained in the background.
It is evident that the communication between regular and special education teachers was limited in respect to this student. While her Individual Education Program included the signature of regular educators as required by law, the fact that she was placed in low level sections of courses, described a remedial, leads one to believe that little understanding about her true capabilities was developed. Course adaptations which would have enabled her to function successfully in higher level courses were not included in her educational plan. Fragmented, inadequate planning had serious negative consequences for this student.

Following the open coding procedures, information was analyzed to determine how data could be put back together by making connections between categories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define this step as axial coding.

In order to conceptualize the data connections for each case, logic diagrams, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), were developed. Each logic diagram included the causal condition which was noted to be the subject's learning disability. Lists of the unique properties of the learning disability for each subject, as well as the context in which the problem occurred and strategies utilized to address the disability for each individual subject were developed. The next part of the logic diagram noted the phenomenon as the level of success in transitioning to adult life which had been experienced by the subject. The dimensions of the phenomenon for each subject were listed. These included descriptions of the
present status of the subject in terms of life accomplishments and needs. The overall consequence for the individual was noted as the last component of the logic diagram. (See Figures 1.2.3).

The components of the logic diagrams provided patterns for the reporting of the cases in terms of their story lines. Most importantly, the logic diagrams provided the researcher with the linkages needed to make connections across the cases. For example, in Case 1, it appears that the subject had a high level of need. Many strategies for addressing his needs were included in his school program. Extensive service was provided, particularly through special education, vocational education and parental support. Yet the outcome for this student was unsuccessful. Planning for this student, though well-intentioned, was disjointed. A meeting of the minds to include those of the student, parent, and school staff was never accomplished for the purpose of determining realistic goals which would lead to a plan for employment for this subject.

Vocational preparation began in Grade 11, far too late to accomplish complete status and thus be prepared for skilled employment in any field. It is also realistic to believe that in light of this student's learning needs, a greater amount of time would be required to acquire skills than might be required by other students. Options to extend training, or begin training at a much earlier point, were not available to this student. The student graduated with a diploma. He is not a drop-out. The school system felt little pressure to do more for him at the time of his exit. Yet he is
unprepared for further activity in academic or any skilled vocational areas. This is a subject who required much by way of services and individualized planning. He received much in terms of services, but not meaningful coordination planning. He truly required more than was offered. The outcome for this individual is negative.

Case 2 presents another set of circumstances. This subject's learning disability was diagnosed at an early age. Specialized services were provided throughout her school career to address her identified needs. An array of strategies were utilized to include extensive special education services and extensive vocational education classes. This young woman stumbled upon a vocational class which became an area of interest to her. While she participated in an extensive sampling program, she discovered on her own that nursing was an area she wished to pursue. She received an award in this area for her effort. Obviously, she was recognized as a student who had some promise in this program. Yet she abandoned her plan as a senior. Rather than remain on course in completing a program which would provide certification in a skilled vocational area, she elected to merely complete the course work required to obtain a high school diploma while working in a supermarket on a work study program. It seems clear that family issues clouded decision-making at this time in her life. While attempts were made by her work study coordinator to direct her on a path more closely related to her interest in nursing, she rejected any career counseling advise at this point and pursued a dead end path. In the case of this subject, time simply ran out. She exited the school system as a high school graduate. This status will include her on the
success side for the school system. Yet the personal outcome for her is
dismal. In this case, the missing strategy might be continued agency
support or extended school opportunities. One is left with the impression
that an investment of this type with this subject would not be wasted.

The third subject is a young woman who probably would have benefited
from more select service to address her learning disability at an earlier
age. She received little. Yet in the long run, it seemed as though she
actually needed very little by way of formal institutional response to her
problem. The outcome for her future is an optimistic one. Drive,
ambition and family support were probably very strong factors in helping
her overcome the odds. However, more appropriate school services to
address her learning disability would probably have made school a more
rewarding experience for her and would have resulted in less damage to her
self-esteem.

Finally, a conceptual schema describing the network of services
available to address the problems of students with learning disabilities
was developed. (See Figure 4). This network included school, home and
community services. Cases were analyzed in terms of their "fit" to this
network of services. Gaps were identified for each subject. Conclusions
regarding the institutional responses to the needs manifested by the
learning disabled students were developed through analysis of this schema.

For Case 1, transition planning was inadequate. This student and his
family would have benefited from more intense counseling to address the
issue of living with a learning disability and how this condition can
impact career plans. There was no indication that any agency support was
included in the subject's post-school plan. While he received vocational training, it did not provide him with entry level job skills in any area whatsoever. This subject’s transition to adult life has been unsuccessful.

For Case 2, parental support was unavailable. While school personnel knew this to be the case, meager attempts were made to provide the intense support she would need to stay on course with a career plan. As a senior, she simply should not have been allowed to enter a work study program which had no relationship whatsoever to any expressed vocational interest. Post-school agency support is another missing factor. This student is in need of information about how she can attain post-secondary training to complete a nursing program. Her lack of confidence due to her learning disability, as well as her struggle with family issues, makes it unlikely that she will know what steps to take to get back on course. The extension of counseling services beyond graduation would be of great benefit to this student.

The prognosis for Subject 3 is more optimistic. While she has not yet achieved independence as an adult, she is making strides in that direction. Gaps in her program of services were delayed diagnosis and special education instruction to address her reading and writing deficiencies.

In considering these cases, it seems clear that while a network of services was in place to address the needs of learning disabled students, some components were not fully considered as potions for these particular individuals. Furthermore, service selections were made in a lockstep
fashion, somewhat resembling the process of making selections from a menu. In many cases, input from all service providers and relevant individuals was missing. Decisions were made from the perspective of a system and not from the perspective of an individual student. Territory issues between service providers interfered with quality, student-centered planning. The results for these students illustrate the impact of the systemic problems identified in this research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSAL CONDITION</th>
<th>PHENOMENON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>Unsuccessful transition to adult life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties of learning disability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dimensions of transition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deficiencies in:</td>
<td>Several jobs since h.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading</td>
<td>Jobs unrelated to skill training (landscaping, maintenance, roofing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>Low-paying jobs/no benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>memory</td>
<td>Poor job-finding skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decision-making skills</td>
<td>Unrealistic evaluation of skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low self-confidence</td>
<td>Unrealistic career goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immaturity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context of learning disability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial dependence on</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identified in elementary grades</td>
<td>family: in debt to parents. lives at home, borrows money from mother, no established credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average intelligence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrepancies between achievement and measured ability in reading and written language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 1, P.2

high level of family support/

involvement

intact family system

amiable personality

Strategies to address learning
disability

Diagnostic testing

Speech/language therapy since kdg.

Resource room for reading since primary grades

Retention in Grade 2

Family counseling around learning disability

Special education for language arts in middle school

Program modifications

Functional skills training

Parent assistance with school work

Frequent parent contact with teachers

Special education in high school

Resource support

Unsatisfactory employer evaluation: lacks maturity, skills, initiative

Consequences

Marginally employed

No job skills

Financial dependence on family
Case 1, P.3

Career Education

Transition Plan

Vocational Education sampling program

Vocational Education program at Career and Tech. Center

Special education support at Career and Tech. Center

Guidance counseling

Counseling support at Career and Tech. Center

Teacher assistance with job finding

Parental assistance with job finding

Researcher assistance with job finding

Extended family assistance with job finding
Learning disability

Unsuccessful transition to adult life

Properties of learning disability

deficiencies in:

- reading
- writing
- language
- math

performance I.Q. much higher than verbal

(P. 126, V76)

Dimensions of transition

- Several jobs since h.s.
- Jobs unrelated to skill training (clerical, cashiering)
- Low paying jobs - part time.
- no benefits

Conflicting family responsibilities (child care)

Context of learning disability

identified in Grade 3

Marginal financial independence (lives at in-laws' home)

discrepancies between achievement and ability

in all areas

Unclear plan for pursuing career goals (continued

Figure 2

LOGIC DIAGRAM

CASE 2
Case 2. p. 2

dependence on high school teacher)

low level of family support/

involvement

family dysfunction

(Alcoholism, illness
divorce)

Expressed dissatisfaction with

present employment status

Strategies to address learning
disability

Borderline level of financial

independence

Diagnostic testing

Unhappiness with job status

Resource room service since

Grade 3

Increased level of special

education service in

middle school-reading,

language, math

Incomplete program in area of

interest (nursing)

Special education instruction

in high school-math, English

history, resource

Marginal employed

Functional skills training

Program modifications

Transition Plan

Vocational education sampling

program
Case 2. P.3

Vocational classes in home school
Career and Technology Center
  program - nursing
Special education support
  at Career and Tech. Center
Individual teacher support
Work study program
Post-school assistance with
  entry to community college program
CAUSAL CONDITION-----------------PHENOMENON

Learning disability

Properties of learning disability deficiencies in:
reading
writing
memory

low self-confidence

Dimensions of transition
Unsuccessful first semester in college
One year experience as exchange student abroad
Remedial courses at community college

Context of learning disability
reading difficulty noted in elementary grades
writing difficulty noted in middle school
learning disability identified in high school
consistent family support

Successful completion of community college program
Transfer to state university
Completion of degree in communication
Recognition as college debater

Figure 3

LOGIC DIAGRAM

CASE 3
Case 3. P.2

enrichment experiences -

- foreign exchange experience in Australia
- Temporary jobs: clerical in political office, television reporter, waitress

family learning problems -

- sister, father
- Beauty pageant contestant
- Presently unemployed
- attractive appearance
- Financially dependent on mother
- Job hunting in another state
- Preparing for Law School
- Admission Tests
- Motivated and confident

extracurricular activities

- (sports)

Strategies to address learning disability

- Diagnostic testing in h.s.
- High level of motivation to succeed
- Remedial classes
- Continuing education goals
- Special education in h.s. in reading, study skills
- Continued financial dependence on mother
- Extensive parental assistance with writing assignments
- Goal oriented
- Post-school testing/counseling through Dept. of Voc. Rehab.
- History of success with challenging tasks
Case 3. P. 3

Developmental classes at

community college

Typing/keyboarding training

Study groups

Tutors
NETWORK OF SERVICES

Learning Disabled Student

Diagnosis Testing
Special Education Instruction
Accommodations
Counseling
Sampling Program at Vocational Center
Career Education
Post-Secondary Program

Regular Curriculum
Parent Support
Agency Support
Vocational Classes at High School
Specialized Vocational Program at Center
Transition Plan

Transition to Adult Life

OUTCOME: Successful Marginal Unsuccessful

Figure 4
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR

PROGRAM PLANNERS AND RESEARCHERS

Discussion

A learning disability is not a static phenomenon. It manifests uniquely in each individual. Its properties are different for each subject. Moreover, the context surrounding its discovery and manifestation is unique for each individual. The variance in context is due to several factors which include the age at which the learning disability is diagnosed, the subject's level of understanding about the nature of the disability, the level of the family's understanding of the disability, the family's level of support for the subject, and very importantly, the response of the school system in addressing the distinct needs of the subject.

Successful transitioning to adult life is a feat which few of the learning disabled successfully accomplish. Will (1984) reported on an unemployment figure of fifty to eighty percent for adults with known disabilities. Recent studies by Malcolm, Polataika and Simons (1990), Haring, Lovett and Smith (1990), and Scucinarra and Söecke (1990) continue to report highly elevated unemployment rates for learning disabled young adults. Problems locating and maintaining employment continue to exist for the learning disabled.

A wide host of strategies can be identified as actions taken by school systems in response to the needs presented by learning disabled subjects.
While some of these strategies are unique responses to an individual subject, most can be categorized as rather standard options which can be made available to any subject. These standard responses include diagnostic testing, special education instruction, vocational education, program modifications, and counseling support.

In examining the cases presented in this study, one learns that the list of strategies which were available to address the needs of the subjects were quite extensive. The options actually selected as appropriate for each subject varied somewhat. Why the options were selected, however, becomes a point which remains unclear. Whether all the possibilities were fully considered for each individual subject is doubtful. Furthermore, the plans for these students were not necessarily seen as packages or interconnected sets, but rather as lists of fragmented interventions.

In studying the course of school life and beyond for learning disabled subjects, the conundrum for policy makers is apparent. A wide array of services to address special needs students is in place in the school system. Some gaps continue to exist, with limited career counseling and well-coordinated transition planning being obvious shortfalls in the history of the students studied in this research. Other researchers have supported the notion of inadequate transition planning as a critical failure in serving disabled students. Fairweather (1989) discussed the limited availability of community agency services in more rural areas as an obstacle to developing adequate transition plans for some students. Haring, Lovett and Smith (1990) bemoan inadequate community follow-up.
services as having a devastating impact on the prognosis for success for learning disabled young adults. It is apparent that while transition planning is in place in many instances, its effectiveness as seen in this research and by others has been limited.

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (1990) requires inclusion of transition services as part of the student's Individual Education Program. This service plan is to be developed by the time a student reaches the age of 16. While items can be listed on a plan to fulfill this requirement, discussion of transitioning needs for individual students needs to be brought to a higher, more meaningful level. Halpern (1991) calls transitioning a phenomenological process, rather than a list of services. In the transitioning process which occurs over a time span of years, planners need to be ready to consider new options as the student's needs unfold and evolve. Creative solutions need to be added to the discussion in place of standard responses which are made to fit cases. If any transitioning efforts are to be effective for students, they cannot be static attempts to address the needs of individuals with changing needs which are complicated by the fact that a disability is present. Teams must be willing to look at needs in ever-changing ways. Above all, service plans must be coordinated, with service providers all sharing ownership for the end product.

In studying the picture of the students whose stories were told in this research, the failure was not so much that options were not available. The failure was rather in the lack of attention to the
particular needs of these specific students and the inability or unwillingness of school personnel to tailor options so that they truly addressed students as individuals.

Providing an education to the student through acquisition of a diploma is a costly venture. For special education students, it is even costlier. From an early age, extensive resources are allotted to diagnostics and individual learning plans for special needs students. Many planning meetings are required to annually update Individual Education Programs and to review progress. Yet toward the end of the educational experience, seemingly at a time when it counts most, the ball seems to get dropped. The prospect of finishing the journey seems to overtake sensibility about what the destination really is.

The students studied in this research were among the first disabled students to exit schools which operated with special education services mandated by P.L. 94-142. Perhaps some of the programming gaps which were herein identified can be attributed to the fact that these particular students attended school during the early phases of special education program development which focused so strongly on insuring that the letter of the law was met. The development of quality programming for the disabled has only more recently gained attention from school policy makers. With continuing research about the impact of changed programming, more will be known about how developments like the transitioning movement, the regular education initiative, and the integration of vocational and academic
education will effect the life outcomes for special education completers. Knowledge gathered by researchers about the critical nature of individualized, co-ordinated planning for students will undoubtedly contribute to the information base utilized by policy makers who are responsible for the development of improved programming for disabled students.

The picture is then painted of students with learning disabilities and institutions which provide a network of services and options. For each student, options are selected through a process which seems uncoordinated and somewhat haphazard. The students then proceed to the finish line. For many subjects, while the race is complete, the next venture becomes an exhausting and purposeless marathon.

**Implications for Program Planning**

Developing awareness programs for students and parents which begin at an early age so that career options are fully and realistically explored is not a new idea. Indeed, P.L. 101-476 specifically addresses the need for transition plans for disabled students. The problem, however, seems to be one which will not be addressed by simply legislating more meetings and paperwork. As has been shown, institutions can respond to such requirements and little by way of true change for individuals can still be the outcome. What really can impact outcomes is the genuine breaking down of communication barriers between professionals and between professionals and families so that the sole focus for decision-making
is genuine success for the student in life. Using a planning matrix which will explicate options and time lines in a understandable fashion will facilitate purposeful decision making (See Figure 4). Shared responsibility among education professionals to include counselors, special education teachers, regular education teachers and vocational educators is a critical component in the development of meaningful plan of action. Regular adjustments to the individual plans are also critical. Full inclusion of the parents and the students are absolute necessities. Indeed, one fault which can be often accurately be ascribed to educators is the belief that they can do it alone—that they know best. For students to achieve real success, that is, acquisition of a diploma that positively impacts their adult life, nothing could be further from the truth.

Improved community services are also a critical component for transitioning. With rapidly decreasing public funding available for such programs due to difficult economic times, improved agency services are unlikely. In fact, it is improbable that even the present level of service will continue, woefully inadequate though it may be.

Extended school services for disabled students is another recommendation which merits attention. Providing counseling services beyond graduation would allow students to gain needed advice and information about career alternatives when their plans go awry. Saving these young adults from becoming unemployment statistics would be worth the expenditure in the long run. Mentor programs involving
volunteers to provide support and advice is a less expensive avenue which might provide a similar positive impact on the lives of the learning disabled in their post-school year.

What is described above is not information which is unknown. In fact, by description, much of what has been stated above is theoretically occurring in many instances. Yet, in truth, it is not meaningfully occurring and the effects on the lives of students is devastating.

The cases presented in this study provide an in-depth look at what has happened to a select number of learning disabled school completers. While previously described research has substantiated dismal outcomes in terms of the number of learning disabled students who are largely unsuccessful in their attempts to achieve independent adult status after graduation (Wagner, 1989), these cases provide an intensive look into how this process proceeded for these particular individuals.

Even as this work is being completed, changes are being implemented which should affect positive change for present students. The integration of vocational and academic education is a mandate of recent federal legislation (Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act Amendments of 1990). School systems have begun revamping programs to effectively accomplish this integration. The ensuing conversations between general, vocational, and special educators can only be of value in breaking down barriers which have led to such fragmented programming in the past. General studies
programs which lead to the acquisition of a diploma which is practically meaningless are being highly scrutinized and, in fact, abandoned as an option for achieving graduation in some school systems, including the one which the subjects in this study attended. Individual Education Plans which are highly specific as to the career plan for the student are being developed. Partnerships with business and industry are being pursued so that early linkages between education and future employment are established and supported on all fronts.

These are some of the pieces of the puzzle which if implemented in good faith can only be of benefit to future learning disabled school completers. The network of options needs to be continually expanded and modified so that all students are better served.

Implications for Future Research

It would behoove future researchers to continue to study this issue in depth as changes are implemented in conjunction with revised federal law. Thoughtful study of this issue will continue to provide insights into the needs of learning disabled students which will undoubtedly change as the world continues to change. It is undeniable that these students will continue to face formidable challenges in adult life. It is likewise undeniable that school systems will continue to be challenged in their quest to address these needs.

Few studies have been conducted which provide an in-depth look into the twists and turns encountered by the learning disabled in
the years following their exit from school. Only by studying this
progression of events as it impacts the learning disabled will policy
makers begin to understand where things have gone wrong and how
things can be improved for future students. Additional case studies,
as well as longitudinal studies, will provide further valuable
insights on this topic.

It will also be helpful to develop case studies of students for
whom post-school outcomes have been positive. Studying those who
have been successful in accomplishing the life tasks of adulthood
should provide insight into how their specific school experiences
differed from those who were less successful. Gaining an
understanding of the school lives of such students will undoubtedly
be equally valuable to decision makers who continue to struggle with
the problem of providing quality educational services to disabled
learners.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Code of Federal Regulations. Education. 34. Par. 300-399.


APPENDIX A

Questioning Guide for Students

1. How are things going for you now? What are you doing?

2. Tell me about the change from high school to life after high school. How did that go for you?

3. Did you need any help in making that change? Who helped you and what did they do for you?

4. Did you get enough help at that time? What other types of assistance might have been helpful to you?

5. Can you tell me about some of your experiences in school?

6. What kinds of things in school do you recall as being pleasant? Unpleasant?

7. Was there a particular point in school when you began to feel as though you were having some trouble learning? Tell me about that time.

8. Tell me about the people in school who you remember as being helpful to you in some particular way.

9. Tell me about the people in school who you feel were helpful to you in understanding about the learning difficulties which you were experiencing.

10. Were there school people who you feel were not very understanding or helpful to you when you were having learning problems? Tell me about them.

11. Tell me about the kinds of classes you had in high school. Did you have trouble in any of them? Which ones? Tell me about it.
12. Did you take any vocational classes in high school? Tell me about them. Have these classes helped you in your job?

13. Which classes do you feel were most helpful in preparing you for your life after high school? In what ways were they helpful?

14. Did you have any work experiences in high school? Tell me about them. Do you feel as though your learning problems made any of these jobs more difficult for you? If so, what did you do about it? Did anyone help you with any adjustments to make things go better for you at your job? Tell me about how they helped.

15. Tell me about the friends you had in high school. Do you think that school was any easier for them than it was for you? Why/why not?

16. Did you stay in touch with any of your high school friends?

What kinds of things are they doing now?

17. Do you feel that work/school is harder for you because of your learning problems? What kinds of things are harder?

18. Who helps you with the things you find hard? How do they help? Do you feel you need more help at this time? What kind of help do you need?

19. Do you feel you got enough help in high school to prepare you for what you are doing today? What kinds of other preparation do you wish you had in high school?

20. What are your plans for the future? Tell me about where you see yourself working, living, etc., in the next few years. Are you concerned about anything which might prevent you from reaching
your goals? Tell me about it.

21. Did your family help you very much when you were in school?
What kind of help did you get from them? What kind of role do they play in your present life? What kind of role do you see your family playing in your future life?

22. Is there any other area which you would like to comment on which would help me better understand what school was like for you and how things are going in your life at this time?
APPENDIX B

Questioning Guide for Parents

1. How’s everything going with your son/daughter now?
2. What’s been going on with them since high school?
3. How did that change from high school to adult life go? Do you think that they were ready to leave school at that time?
4. Do you think that your son/daughter needed any more help at that time? What kind of assistance might have been beneficial to them?
5. Tell me about the ways in which you were involved in your son/daughter’s school program.
6. And how do you feel about how things went for your son/daughter at school?
7. At what point did you become aware that your son/daughter was having learning problems? What were your feelings about this? Did you do anything different at this point?
8. Were there any teachers who you felt were particularly helpful to your son/daughter in school? Tell me about how they helped.
9. Do you feel that your son/daughter’s learning problems are making things difficult for them at this point? In what way?
10. Do you feel that your son/daughter needs any particular help that is not being received at this point?
11. How involved are you in your son/daughter’s present life?
12. What goals do you hope that your son/daughter achieves?
13. Do you have any concerns about things which might interfere with the achievement of those goals? Tell me about them.

14. Do you wish to comment on any other area which might help me better understand what kind of school experiences your son/daughter had and how things are going in their lives at this time.
APPENDIX C

Questioning Guide for School Personnel

1. How do you know the student?

2. Tell me about your perceptions about the student's functioning in high school.

3. Did you perceive that the student was experiencing any difficulties in high school? Do you feel they were addressed? What was your role?

4. At what point were you aware of this student's learning difficulties? How do you feel the learning disabilities affected their life in high school?

5. How did you perceive this student's high school social life? Did you perceive that there were any problems with peers which might have resulted from the student's learning difficulties?

6. Did you play any role in the transition of this student from high school to post-school life? Tell me about it.

7. What was your judgement about how this student would do after high school? Did you think that this student was prepared to leave school at that time?

8. What type of role did you perceive that the student's parents played in their school life? Did the parents seem to understand the nature of the learning difficulties experienced by the student? Tell me about this.

9. Have you had any contact with the student since they left high school? Tell me about it.
10. Are there any other areas which you wish to comment on which might help me better understand how this student functioned in high school and what impact their learning disability might be having on their present life?
APPENDIX D

Questioning Guide for Employers

1. How did it happen that _____ began working for you?
2. Did you know him/her prior to employment with you?
3. How do you see this person as an employee?
4. What do you see as the employee’s strengths? Weaknesses?
5. Do you see any indications of learning problems which might be affecting their job performance? Describe.
6. How does this employee get along with others?
7. How do you see this person’s job skills in comparison to other employees?
8. Does this person exhibit any behaviors on the job which are of concern to you?
9. What are your predictions about how this person will do in employment in the future?
10. Do you have any other comments which might be helpful to me in understanding how this person functions as an employee?
APPENDIX E

I hereby consent to have Janet Ambrose examine my personal school records, to include special education records, for the purpose of conducting dissertation research at Virginia Tech. I understand that I will not be personally identified in any way in the research document. I also consent to have Janet Ambrose discuss my school history and performance with the following people:

_____ school personnel

_____ employer

_____ parent

______________________________
Signature

______________________________
Date
## APPENDIX F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL ISSUES</th>
<th>SC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCHST</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCSEXCR</td>
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<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
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<td>SCTCHFTR</td>
<td>Teacher judgement of student's likelihood to be successful beyond school</td>
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<td>Teacher opinion of student's work habits</td>
</tr>
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<td>Parent's perception of vocational education experiences</td>
</tr>
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<td>EMPRBEMP</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Student's understanding of nature of learning disability</td>
</tr>
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<td>LDTC5H</td>
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</tr>
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<td>LDDEMP</td>
<td>Employer's perceptions on impact of learning disability</td>
</tr>
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<td>Student's history of the learning disability</td>
</tr>
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<td>LDPSACT</td>
<td>Post-school activities disseminating information about learning disabilities</td>
</tr>
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<td>Self-esteem issues related to learning disability</td>
</tr>
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<td>FAMPSINV</td>
<td>Family involvement/support after student's completion of school</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMGLSSID</td>
<td>Family's goals for the student</td>
</tr>
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<p>| PMOTIV             | Parent's estimation of student's level of motivation |
| PSTDFRUSR          | Frustrations with student experienced by parent |
| PPOS               | Parent's positive comments about the student |
| PREGR              | Parent's regrets about past experiences regarding the student |</p>
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<td>Experiences with teacher</td>
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<td>Learning problems encountered by student</td>
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<td>Negative school experiences</td>
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<td>Student's level of self-esteem/post-school</td>
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<td>Level of self-esteem during school years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ADJFRS</td>
<td>Fears/apprehension about adjustment to adult life</td>
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<td>PADJPR</td>
<td>Parent's description of problems with student's adjustment to post-school life</td>
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<td>POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL ISSUES</td>
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</table>
VITA

JANET K. AMBROSE
6806 FOREST PARK COURT
MT. AIRY, MD. 21771

(301)865-0343  (301)865-5407

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Educational Leadership
- Assistant Principal of largest elementary school in Frederick County (MD).
  Implemented Integrated Classroom Model for delivery of special education services.
- Coordinator of special education programs at area and central office levels.
- President of Psi Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, an organization for women recognized as outstanding contributors in the field of education.

Research Skills
- Conducted dissertation research on learning disabled students who exited Frederick County Public Schools.
- Presented paper at research conference on the evaluation of an integrated model for the delivery of special education services. Abstract published in conference proceedings.
- Graduate assistant on project evaluating the Head Start programs in two large cities in Virginia.

Teaching and counseling skills
- Served as a school support teacher in two Frederick County Schools. Provided crisis intervention and counseling services.
- Served as a special education teacher in programs serving grades Kindergarten through twelve in New Jersey and Maryland.
- Served as a classroom teacher for grades five through eight in private and public schools in New Jersey.

Experience
- New Market Elementary School, New Market, MD. Assistant Principal 1989 to present.
- Responsibilities include assisting in the evaluation of personnel, coordinating instructional services, and serving as
chairperson for special education teamings.

Virginia Tech - Northern Virginia Graduate Center Falls Church, VA. 1988 to 1989
Graduate Research Assistant
Assisted with longitudinal study of children attending public schools who participated in Head Start pre-school programs.

Frederick County Public Schools.
Frederick, MD 1986 to 1988
Central Office Special Education Coordinator
Responsible for case management of students in residential programs and coordination of due process hearings. Other activities included parent training programs and general assistance with the supervision of special education programs.

Area Coordinator of Special Education 1983 to 1986
Provided direct assistance to principals in 23 schools in staffing and supervising special education programs. Responsible for compliance monitoring of building programs and assistance with program improvement initiatives. Taught inservice course on mainstreaming.

Special Education Teacher/School Support Teacher 1979 to 1983
Served as an elementary special education teacher for one year. Served as a school support teacher for three years. Prior to these positions, taught in special education and regular education settings in three New Jersey school systems.

Education
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, VA.
Ed.D. in Special Education Administration, 1992
Minor: Family/Child Development
GPA: 3.9
William Paterson College, Wayne, NJ.
M.A. in Elementary Education, 1975
In addition to completion of degree in education, completed courses required for certification in special education and administration and supervision.

University of Dayton, Dayton, OH.
B.A. in Psychology, 1970
Minor: Personnel Management
GPA: 3.6
Attended Saint Peter's College (NJ) from 1966 through 1968.

**Professional Societies**

*Delta Kappa Gamma*
Serve as president for Psi Chapter.
Recipient of scholarship to support doctoral studies (1988).

*Phi Delta Kappa*
Council for Exceptional Children
Served as local chapter president.

*Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*

*The Maryland Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc.*
Honorary life member.

**Personal**

Publication:

Dissertation:

**References**

Available upon request.

[Signature]