

CASE STUDIES OF POSTSECONDARY COLLEGE STUDENTS
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

By

YVONNE M. BRADSHAW

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

Counselor Education

Approved:

O. Madison-Colmore, Chairperson

Marvin G. Cline, Co-Chairperson

Thomas H. Hohenshil

Harold J. McGrady

C. Frederick Capps

April, 2001

Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Postsecondary College Students, Learning Disabilities, Auditory Processing Deficits,

Accommodations, Anxiety Disorders

CASE STUDIES OF POSTSECONDARY COLLEGE STUDENTS

WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

BY

YVONNE M. BRADSHAW

(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to (a) identify educational counseling interventions and accommodations that learning disabled (LD) postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success and (b) identify barriers and issues that LD students experienced in accessing services.

Ten postsecondary students were identified and classified as LD that had attended a community college in Northern Virginia and volunteered to participate in this study. Out of the ten, two students were selected for this research study. These students were interviewed using a two-part questionnaire (Appendix C). The questionnaire included significant factors and variables frequently associated with postsecondary success. Questions in part I of the Questionnaire pertained to the LD student's profile (e.g., medical and social history, employment, volunteer work, hobbies, education including special education experiences, language therapy, and assessments). Questions in part II consisted of the recommended support services identified in the literature (e.g., disability awareness, accommodations, self-advocacy skills, academic remediation, parent and counselor advocacy, computer technology, career counseling, transition services, and rehabilitation counseling) often delivered to LD students. Psychological and educational assessments were also obtained, reviewed, and coded. The interviews were tape recorded in order to assure concise descriptive information from the student's own 'personal' past and current educational experiences. Each student reported that they had received a great deal of assistance by another individual who had been most instrumental in helping them overcome their postsecondary academic barriers. These individuals were also interviewed. The interviews were transcribed, and the data collected were coded. Two in-depth comprehensive case studies were developed by reviewing and recording data from the interviews, psychological assessments, and educational records. All narrative material was subsequently analyzed by coding procedures used in grounded theory.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Robert and Brendon Bradshaw.

You were my inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend a sincere appreciation to several individuals whose encouragement, expertise, and assistance enabled me to complete this dissertation.

I am most thankful to Dr. Marvin Cline, my Dissertation Co-Chairman, who was always willing to find the time to meet with me and help me select a topic, which would meet all the research requirements, and at the same time be in keeping with my personal interests. I am extremely thankful to have had the opportunity to have received guidance from an expert in the field of qualitative research. As the themes evolved, he continued to serve as a guide to assure that I identified and appropriately named the most critical code(s) correctly and at the end, the final formal theory. Thank you also for leading cohesive group coding classes that promoted constructive peer review. As we learned how to code, you encouraged the necessary critiques so that substantial and credible findings could emerge. Thank you to all my group members for your caring honesty and helpful input.

Thank you, Dr. O. Madison-Colmore for your willingness to take over as Chairman when my committee had to be reorganized and for your patience as I frantically pulled together all the final pieces at the last minute. You made going forward possible. You made the completion a reality. You saw to it that everything was in place for the final copy.

Thank you Dr. Martin Gerstein, as my first advisor you put me on the path to this dissertation. You had faith in me and gave me the confidence to overcome the hurdles.

A special thanks to Dr. Harold McGrady. I feel very fortunate to have had such a knowledgeable professor in the field of learning disabilities serve on my committee. I would not have been able to pursue this topic without your participation. I trust that the findings from my study will only reaffirm your teachings on the importance of inclusion.

To Dr. Thomas Hohenshil, thank you not only for your vote of confidence when I needed you most but for also serving on my committee. Thank you for writing the journal articles that needed to be included in my dissertation. My research findings, not surprisingly, reaffirmed your similar concerns.

Thank you to Dr. C. Frederick Capps for adding balance to my committee by representing the field of vocational rehabilitation as an experienced psychologist employed with the Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to drive to Northern Virginia.

To my loving parents, who were always there for me, thank you. I could always count on you when the going got rough. You taught me the meaning of love by your good example. You gave me the faith that has sustained me. Thank you mom for passing on to me your artistic talents. Thank you dad for teaching me your hard work ethic and organizational skills. Thank you both for your instilling in me moral values and the need to speak the truth. Thank you as I have truly been blessed by your love.

Thank you to my loyal friend, Ruth Nussbaum who also happens to be one of the best librarians employed at the Library of Congress. You were most instrumental in the completion of this dissertation; you so graciously listened to me as I discussed every stage; you helped with the tedious work of reviewing the final reference copy. Thank you so much for your willingness to always want to seek out important journal articles on special education topics. This dissertation reflects your hard work as well and has your name on it in my heart.

To my very special friend and language editor, Patrick Doherty, a special thank you for always being so willingly to take time to review my dissertation drafts. Your objective opinions and needed editing made a difference.

To my son, Brendon who had the technical know how to set up my computer and deal with a run down printer until we were able to purchase a new one. I could always count on you to lend a helping hand at a moments notice.

To both my sons, Brendon and Robert, for teaching me what it is like to be a parent who has to advocate for their children. I wrote this dissertation for you. Thank you both for your encouragement and teaching me what love really means.

A most sincere thank you to the all the students and significant others that I interviewed for this dissertation. Thank you for not only giving so eagerly of your time but for your willingness to share your experiences with such candor. Your statements were analyzed and coded so other students and educators could learn from your stories. Perhaps, one day the recommendations that emerged will be recognized and acted upon. To the students I interviewed, I hope this dissertation will also pay tribute to your courage and self-determination. I hope that by completing this dissertation I will have also fulfilled my commitment to you to 'get the word out'. To the significant others that I interviewed, thank you for describing the qualities of a caring advocate and sharing with me your recommendations.

Lastly, to Sister Antoinette Cabrera, FMA, a Salesian Sister, I give thanks to you for your prayers. Let us both give thanks to God.

Table of Content

	Page
Abstract	
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
List of Tables	ix
Chapter One	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Introduction	1
Background of the Study	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Hypothesis, Assumptions, and Limitations	4
Definitions	4
Chapter Two.....	9
Review of the Literature	9
Introduction	9
Defining Learning Disabilities	9
Research Studies of LD Postsecondary College Students	11
The Need for Qualified Counselors and Transition Planning.....	15
Summary of Theoretical Framework	17
Chapter Three.....	18
Methodology	18
Research Topics	18
Sample.....	18
Data Collection Procedures.....	19
Procedure	19
Analysis of Data	21
Summary	21

Chapter Four	23
Case Studies and Analysis of Data	23
First Case Study	23
Introduction	23
Overview of Themes	23
Theme I – Anxiety Disorder and Treatment	24
Theme II - Sam Learns to Read when He is Taught How to Hear.....	27
Theme III - Support from Friends and Professionals who Cared Enough to Find Solutions	29
Theme IV - Self-Determination – The Need for Self-Actualization and Self-Sufficiency	32
Theme V - Support Groups, Technology, Other	33
Summary	35
Second Case Study.....	36
Introduction.....	36
Overview of Themes	37
Theme I - Anxiety Disorder and Treatment.....	37
Theme II - The significance of support and advocacy from family members and coach.....	39
Theme III - Not All Colleges are Alike – a Small Private College Offers the Academic Support that makes a Difference.....	40
Theme IV - Accommodations that Make a Difference.....	41
Theme V – Employment Goals Influence the Need to Achieve Educational Outcomes.....	42
Summary	43
Chapter Five.....	44
Conclusions and Recommendations	44
Overview and Final Analysis.....	44
The Need for Supportive Advocating Family Members, Friends and Coaches	44
The Need for Qualified Advocating Counselors	45
The Need for Supportive and Caring Faculty who Find Solutions	46
The Need for Alternative Educational Strategies	46
The Need to Eliminate the Stigma of Labels	47
The Need for Positive Learning Experiences	47
Language Assessments and Programs for Reading Remediation.....	48
The Need for Diagnosis and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders	48
The Need for Inservice Training and Improved Technology	48
The Need for Health Insurance	49
The Overall Need for Advocacy at All Academic Levels	49

Summary Recommendations and Future Research	49
Formal Theory	51
REFERENCES	58
APPENDICES	64
Appendix A. IRB Requests	65
Letter to NOVA, IRB Request.....	68
Letter from NOVA, IRB Approval.....	69
Email from NOVA, IRB Approval.....	71
Letter to WWRC, IRB Request.....	72
Letter from WWRC, IRB Approval.....	73
Appendix B. Announcement	75
Letter to PEACTC Press Editor	76
Appendix C. Confidential Records/Interview Release.....	78
Informed Consent for Participants	79
Appendix D. Questionnaire	81
Appendix E. Transcript Coding, Student Case One.....	84
Transcript Coding, NOVA Counselor	157
Transcript Coding, Student Case Two	193
Transcript Coding, Coach Case Two	233
VITA.....	247

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: The Development of Poor Self-Esteem	52
Table 2: Poor Self-Esteem Prevention – Involved Caring Community	53
Table 3: Positive Self-Esteem Re-building Process, Advocacy, Links to Services and Accommodations.....	54
Table 4: Outline of Recommended Services and Research that would Enable Students with Learning Disabilities to obtain a Postsecondary Education.....	55