

ADULTS WHO HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES:
TRANSITION FROM GED TO POSTSECONDARY ACTIVITIES

by

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Abstract

Approximately one third of special education students with learning disabilities leave high school before graduation. A high percentage of these students enroll in adult secondary completion classes in an attempt to obtain a high school equivalency certificate. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2003 transition planning is mandated for all students with disabilities enrolled in secondary education programs. This mandate does not apply to adult secondary completion classes and researchers clearly purport that the lack of transition planning may leave adult students with disabilities unexposed to needed services. While there is adequate substantiation within the secondary education system that transition planning leads to positive post-high school completion outcomes for students with learning disabilities, there is no evidence or validation of such within adult secondary completion programs. Given this void, the intent of this research was to discover and inform the education field as to the value of transition planning and supports by investigating their existence and understanding how they contributed to post-GED completion activities, from the perspective of the adult who has learning disabilities. The participants' stories are powerful and inspiring and provide a starting point from which to learn. As a result of this study ten themes emerged, substantiating the need for and the value of transition planning activities for students with learning disabilities who are engaged in adult secondary education completion programs. The emerging themes were: navigational bridges, goal-oriented behaviors, independence, determination, self-awareness, self-defeating behaviors, support network, co-investigation, academic supports, and career planning. There is much wisdom to learn from these participants' stories.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the welfare case manager who beyond doubt believed in me and opened the door to opportunity and to my first college advisor, Dr. Maxine Mimms, who by her steadfast passion and love of guiding learners introduced me to education in its truest form. These individuals changed my life forever and to them I am eternally grateful.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables.....	x
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction to the Problem.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purposes of the Study.....	7
Rationale.....	9
Research Question.....	10
Nature of the Study.....	11
Significance of the Study	12
Definition of Terms	14
Assumptions and Limitations	19
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	21
Introduction	21
Conceptual Framework	23
Adult Secondary to Postsecondary Education Transition	24
Adult Secondary to Career and Technical Vocational Education Transition.....	32
Adult Secondary to Employment Transition.....	34
Summary.....	38
Conclusion	43

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	47
Introduction.....	47
Theoretical Framework.....	48
Research Design.....	49
Sampling Design.....	51
Measures.....	53
Data Collection Procedures.....	55
Ethical Considerations.....	55
Pilot Testing.....	57
Data Analysis Procedures.....	58
Reliability and Validity.....	59
Limitations of Methodology and Strategies for Minimizing Impact.....	64
Research Study Timelines.....	65
CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	66
Introductions.....	66
Presentation of Data.....	68
Objective A.....	69
Navigational Bridges.....	70
Goal-Oriented Behaviors.....	76
Objective B.....	81
Independence.....	81
Determination.....	87

Self-Awareness.....	94
Objective C.....	99
Self-Defeating Behaviors.....	99
Support Networks.....	103
Co-Investigation.....	108
Academic Supports.....	112
Career Planning.....	114
Additional Results.....	118
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	120
Introduction.....	120
Summary and Discussion of Results.....	121
Summary of Study.....	121
Discussion of Results.....	127
Objective A.....	127
Objective B.....	132
Objective C.....	135
Conclusions.....	139
Recommendations.....	142
Recommendations from the Data.....	143
Recommendations based on Theoretical Considerations.....	143
Recommendation 1.....	143
Recommendation 2.....	144

Recommendations for Practice.....	144
Recommendation 3.....	144
Recommendation 4.....	145
Recommendation 5.....	145
Recommendation 6.....	146
Recommendations for Further Research.....	146
Conclusions.....	148
REFERENCES.....	150
APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM	166
APPENDIX B. PERMISSION TO AUDIO RECORD	168
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	170
APPENDIX D. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL.....	172
APPENDIX E. IRB APPROVAL.....	174
APPENDIX F. FULBRIGHT PROTOCOL.....	177

List of Tables

Table 1. Compiled Demographic Data.....	127
Table 2. Research Objectives and Emerging Themes.....	130

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Preparing individuals who have disabilities for success as “adults living, learning and earning” (Murphy & Golden, 2004, p. 3) has long been a goal of schools and society. Since the revision and reauthorization (1997 and 2003) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 transition planning between secondary and postsecondary education, training and work activities have been mandates for secondary special education programming (Wright & Wright, Special Education Advocate, n.d.). “Nationally, research puts the graduation rate of secondary students who have disabilities between 68 and 71%, which means that almost one-third of all public high school students in America [who have disabilities] fail to graduate” (Swanson, 2004, p. 13). Throughout the last decade, data collected by the Federal Department of Education delineated that, of the total secondary student population who have disabilities, those who are 14 years of age or older and have learning disabilities leave the secondary environment at an annual rate of 35 to 43% (National Center for Educational Statistics). This data suggests that about two thirds to almost one half of the number of secondary students who have learning disabilities leave school programs before graduating (Cobb, Sample, Alwell & Johns, 2005; Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004; Lichtenstein & Zantal-Weiner, 1988; Mellard & Lancaster, 2003; 26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 2004).

Concurrently, the execution of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, has been viewed to have had significant influences in increasing the dropout rates among secondary students who have learning disabilities (Cortiella, 2004; Harvey & Koch, 2004; National Center for Learning

Disabilities, 2006; 26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 2004). The NCLB Act of 2001 has heightened the Nation's awareness of high school graduation rates creating a central concern in educational policy about the dropout rate of students who have disabilities (Swanson, 2004). Harvey and Koch (2004) presented that those secondary students who have disabilities have faced unique challenges under NCLB. "The higher academic standards and educational accountability meant to address demands of the new economy may have undesirable results (e.g. increased drop out)" (Harvey & Koch, 2004, Conclusion section, ¶ 2). Throughout development and implementation of NCLB great concern has been raised articulating that the standards imposed by NCLB will only increase the dropout rates, especially among those students who have learning disabilities (McDermott & McDermott, 2002; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). Dorn hypothesized that the very nature of learning disabilities could make this worse for students who have such. "One could imagine, plausibly, that the direct and indirect effects of high-stakes tests might result in a lower likelihood of teens' [with learning disabilities] graduating with academic diplomas" (Dorn, 2003, Lessons and Perspectives section, ¶ 1).

Given the number of students who have learning disabilities who leave the secondary school environment without a diploma or completion certificate, it became important to understand what options are available post exit from secondary education. A large percentage of adults who have dropped out of high school and who have learning disabilities have gone to adult literacy and basic education skills classes or General Education Development (GED) programs. The number of students in these programs who are affected by learning disabilities range from conservative estimates of 15-40% to as high as 50-80% (Ross-Gordon, 1987; Ross-Gordon, Plotts, Joesel, & Wells, 2003; Ryan & Price, 1993; Vogel in Vogel & Reder, 1998;

White, W. & Polson, 1999). When compared to peers who do not have learning disabilities, dropouts who have learning disabilities are less likely to live independently and less likely to enter and complete any form of postsecondary education or training (Murray, 2003).

Concurrently, these same individuals frequently have had extreme difficulty securing and maintaining employment, and wage progression has been all but nonexistent (Kortering & Braziel, 2002; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Price & Shaw, 2000; Seo, 2005). These factors should be of great concern, given the extremely competitive global economy and the understanding that the demands of a workforce in the twenty-first century requires a level of knowledge and high-performance necessitating a more educated, skilled employee (Harvey & Koch, 2004; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). Kavale (1995), speaking about secondary students who have learning disabilities states, “As the LD field continues to ‘grow up’, expansion of services involving postsecondary education, vocational training, and services to improve job skills, academic skills and psychosocial adjustments are necessary” (p. 38).

For students remaining in elementary and secondary schools, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 (revised 1997 and 2003) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has provided scaffolding for transition services for students who have disabilities. Both federal acts require an individualized transition and employment plan be developed for students who have disabilities sometime between ages fourteen and sixteen.

There has been much written on the transition from high school to postsecondary activities of secondary students who have learning disabilities, a great deal of which has been focused on the barriers that prevent postsecondary education attainment and the attributes students who have learning disabilities need for successful transition (Alamprese, 2005; Hart,

Pasternack, Mele-McCarthy, Jimbrich, & Parker, 2004; Kavale, 1996; Kravets, 1994; Skinner & Linstrom, 2003). However, by comparison with secondary programs, the existence of information or data about the activities and effects of transition services in adult literacy, basic education or General Education Development (GED) programs has been virtually nonexistent. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act imply that programs should provide services and activities framed in

real life contexts to ensure...the skills needed to compete in the workplace, exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship...and coordinate with other available resources in the community, such as establishing strong links with...secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, one-stop centers, job training programs and social service agencies. (Workforce Investment Act of 1998, p. 112 STAT.1071)

While many of these elements might be contained in a secondary transition plan, there are no provisions in the Act for recommended or mandatory transition planning for any enrolled adult literacy, basic education, or GED studies student with or without a disability.

The concept of transition planning activities and strategies from adult literacy, basic education and GED preparation programs to postsecondary environments for adults with learning disabilities has been viewed as fairly new and program engagement is completely voluntary. There are limited studies, but these have not provided much insight from the perspective of the adult (Gittleman, 2005). Even less is known about adults who have learning disabilities and have transitioned from GED completion to post-activities in postsecondary career and technical training or work. Gerber validates the situation explicitly when he states “Unfortunately, [secondary/IDEA] transition planning does not help those who have dropped out of school” (Young, Gerber, Reder, & Cooper, 1996, p. 10).

The number of adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) students (excluding English as second language [ESL] learners) enrolled in programs nationwide in 2005 was 1,438,532 (U.S. Department of Education, February 2006). It was earlier stated that the estimated percentages of students in these programs who have learning disabilities range from 15 to 80% (Ross-Gordon, 1987; Ross-Gordon, Plotts, Joesel, & Wells, 2003; Ryan & Price, 1993; Vogel in Vogel & Reder, 1998; White, W. & Polson, 1999). When comparing these estimates with the number of enrolled students, one could speculate, with some accuracy that somewhere between 359,633 at the lowest and 1,150,826 at the highest has some form of learning disability. At either end of the spectrum, these numbers are staggering.

The intention of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 (revised 1997 and 2003) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is to advance education and training prospects for secondary students who have disabilities and prepare them for employment, promoting independence and self-sufficiency through active and engaging transition planning and activities (Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003). It is easy to recognize the underlying principles of mandatory transition planning for secondary students. Much of the research posits that the post secondary school outcomes of students who have disabilities, and more specifically learning disabilities, while still significantly less than adequate when compared to peers who do not have disabilities, have had positive demonstrated results (Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind & Herman, 2003; Lemaire, Mallik & Stoll, 2002; Mellard & Lancaster, 2003; Perkins, 2006; Powell, 2006; Sinclair, Christenson, Thurlow, 2005). These confirmed successes are clearly linked to secondary transition programs that focused on the development and supported implementation of meaningful transition goals that were based on student needs and desires. In a study on

improving graduation and transition outcomes of students who have disabilities, Benz, Lindstrom and Yovanoff (2000) not only confirmed a significantly higher rate of graduation from secondary school but documented that “the combination of time in the program, paid work experience, and completion of transition goals—with completion of four or more transition goals—have an especially powerful effect for these youth” (p. 523).

While various limitations have been cited in the available research on the effectiveness of transition planning and implementation with secondary students who have disabilities, especially those who have learning disabilities, there is enough evidence of the merit of such to question whether the same or similar planning and services are critical to the transition of those who have not completed high school and are enrolled in adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs.

Statement of the Problem

Transition planning in the secondary education environment for students who have learning disabilities occurs as a result of the passage and implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act. Such has not been the case within the adult secondary education environment. While the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 provides a framework for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities to become independent and self-sufficient, it has not presented a mandate in the form of transition planning and implementation for such to occur.

Research (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Koch, 2004; McIntire, 2004) has confirmed the importance and success of transition planning and implementation within the

secondary education system for students who have learning disabilities. A substantial amount of the research has sought to identify and address the barriers that prevented students who have learning disabilities from post secondary activity access and goal completion (Cummings, Maddux, & Casey, 2000; Grigal, Test, Beattie & Wood, 1997; Kortering & Braziel, 2002). Equally, the research has highlighted the importance of student involvement in such planning as a means to increasing independence and self-sufficiency through the improvement of a variety of knowledge, skills and abilities including self-determination, self-advocacy, and the identification of a career pathway (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Foley, 2006; Gerber, 2005; Hadley, 2006).

The problem has been that adult students who have learning disabilities do not have the benefit of transition planning for their postsecondary experience. Given this void, it has been difficult to determine whether the same benefits, identified in the research of secondary students who have learning disabilities, would cross over to the adult secondary population or if there should be a departure from what was currently understood to be a beneficial transition planning process as a result of the stages of adult development that have occurred since leaving the secondary system. The research has not addressed whether providing transition planning and implementation for students who have learning disabilities and are enrolled in adult literacy, basic education skills and General Education Development (GED) programs could be valuable in accessing and transitioning to post secondary activities in higher education, training and work.

Purposes of the Study

While there are no regulations for transition planning and implementation activities at the adult secondary education program level, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and IDEA 1975 (revised

1997 and 2003) have provided the mandate and a platform for transition planning for secondary students who have disabilities, inclusive of those who have learning disabilities. There is evidence of research supporting what works and what has not worked for secondary in-school youth who are transitioning to post-school activity. However, the research has been limited when discussing transition planning and implementation activities for students who have disabilities, particularly those who have learning disabilities who have engaged in and successfully completed the GED. There is little known about these individuals after GED completion is achieved; degree of post secondary transition activities, how those activities occurred, and the level of success enjoyed.

In order to determine whether the development of transition planning and implementation activities is beneficial to explore in the adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs, especially for students who have learning disabilities, it was important to understand what these students have accomplished since the completion of their secondary certificate (GED) and to establish, from their perspective, a baseline of needs and wants during their adult secondary completion process. It was not prudent to suppose that transition planning and implementation at this level is necessary or even desired until such a study was conducted.

The objectives of this study were to: identify the post-GED outcomes of candidates who have learning disabilities; identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within previously attended adult education programs; establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General

Education Development (GED) programs; and identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development.

Rationale

The results of a study of the transition planning and supports that contributed to the post-activities and outcomes of successful GED candidates who have learning disabilities contributes new knowledge to the field of adult literacy, basic education and General Education Development (GED) programs. These results begin to answer a range of questions as well as pose a variety of new ones about the worth and value of transition planning and implementation activities within adult secondary education programs. Most importantly, the study sought to become more informed about the transition needs from the perspective of the adult student. The limited research available within the adult secondary education arena investigated these transition concepts from a program perspective. “Transforming ABE [adult basic education] programs to include helping learners make a successful transition to postsecondary education is an iterative process requiring new forms of instruction, enhanced services, and collaborative relationships with other agencies and organizations” (Alamprese, 2005, p. 1). This limited research did not appear to align with the theories of adult learning. Malcolm Knowles concepts of adult learning, referred to as andragogy, postulated that adults are able to direct their learning; have an accumulated maturation of exposure and experiences that serves as a strong source for learning; affix their learning pathways with present and parallel social roles; want applicability and connection in the acquisition of knowledge and skills; and are motivated by intrinsic values rather than extrinsic (Merriam, 2001, p.5). At the center of adult learning is “learner initiative”

driven by the learner's acceptance of responsibility and desire to control planning, implementation, and evaluation of the activities and processes within the learning environment (Heimstra, 1998). Thus, the worth of understanding, from the perspective of the adult student who has learning disabilities, the level of importance and value transition planning and implementation activities or the lack of such within an adult secondary educational arena is invaluable to the adult secondary education field. Moreover, the results acknowledge or reject the perceived need that individuals who have learning disabilities can or cannot successfully transition independently.

Research Question

The primary research question is: What formal or informal transition planning and supports contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities?

The GED consists of five tests: Language Arts, Writing; Science; Social Studies; Language Arts, Reading; and Mathematics, requiring individuals to read, compute, integrate information and express in writing at a level exceeding that of at least 40% of graduating high school seniors. Completing the entire battery demonstrates competence in the 21st Century skills of communication, information processing, problem solving, and higher order thinking. Candidates must demonstrate competence in lifelong learning skills such as solving problems and making decisions, taking responsibility for learning, learning through research, planning and reflecting, and evaluating (GED Report, 2005). Given these identified competencies, the heart of the research was to understand what had transpired after acquisition of the GED Equivalency

Certificate, now that the candidate had successfully demonstrated the noted competencies and whether the described results were directly related to the provision of formal or informal transition planning activities. Thus, the study explored the following research questions:

1. What were the post-GED activities and outcomes of participants who have learning disabilities?
2. Were formal or informal transition services available, what were they, and did the participant take advantage of them as a part of the previously attended adult secondary education program?
3. From the perspective of the participant, what was the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities during adult secondary education programs?
4. Based on the participant's stated transition needs and wants, what are the recommendations for further program development?

Nature of the Study

A postpositivist or qualitative research approach using a descriptive methodology or “descriptive needs assessment research” (Francis, 1988, p. 30) or an Ethnographic Case Study (Creswell, 2005) was used. One of the primary reasons for the selection of a qualitative methodology is that it used “complex reasoning that is multi-faceted, iterative, and simultaneous” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). The utilization of a primary inductive analysis approach allowed for the true essence of the individual's experiences, perceptions and opinions to be evaluated from the descriptive elements leading to an evolution of themes for deductive planning

(Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). The anthropological terminology “thick description” (Merriam, p. 29) is used to describe the phenomena found in the descriptive elements thereby recognizing and understanding the current state of affairs related to the research question and as such, providing constructs for syntheses into themes to be used to inform future policy, practice and research (Gall et al., 2003). Creswell suggests this approach serves well in the writing of the research which uses a combined descriptive and thematic format. The descriptive aspect would “incorporate a detailed description of people” lending more power to the themes (Creswell, 2005 p. 266). Combining a descriptive approach with a thematic writing model will allow for “extensive discussion about the major themes that arise from analyzing the qualitative database” (Creswell 2005, p. 266).

The decision to structure the study after a qualitative methodology provided a framework that contained sufficient structure but offered the opportunity for “insight, discovery and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28-29), three substantive elements that promoted a sophistication of understanding in this case study and laid a powerful foundation for future policy, practice and research.

Significance of the Study

Research pertaining to the needs of adults who have learning disabilities was miniscule compared to child and adolescent studies. Research specifically related to the post-activities of successful GED candidates who have learning disabilities was virtually nonexistent. The merit or worth between transition activities and post-activities, formal or informal, during adult literacy, basic education and GED programs has been nominally reviewed, but only from the viewpoint of program development and operations, and not from the perspective of the adult student who has

learning disabilities. Based on the theories of adult learning, the researcher saw it as remarkable that no studies representing the perception of the adult learner, with respect to the relativity and value of transition planning and implementation after completion of the GED, had been conducted. Given the number of adult students who have learning disabilities who are reported to enter adult literacy, basic education and GED programs, the potential impact of this small, beginning study outcomes, could lay a foundation for future research ultimately having significant effects on the field.

Assuming transition planning was found to be an elemental need, the ultimate beneficiaries of this study could be adult education students who have learning disabilities who may, as a result of the outcomes of the study, gain much higher levels of access to formal and informal opportunities for transition planning and implementation activities. These opportunities have the ingredient of being more closely aligned with the adult student's needs and wants because the nature of the study sought to base conclusions and outcomes on the relativity and value of transition planning and related services as seen through the eyes of the study participants. Preceding this benefit however, were opportunities for adult literacy, basic education, and GED programs to develop, with validation from the study's results, transition planning services based on the values and needs as specified by adults who have learning disabilities and have participated in the study. There was a chance that transition planning and services would not be viewed as necessary or crucial post-GED completion. If this was a resultant conclusion of the study, then the beneficiaries would be both adult secondary programs and the adults who have learning disabilities because the field would not then assume that what

is good for secondary special education students is equally good for adult secondary education students who have learning disabilities.

No matter what the outcomes, the study was critical to the field, as there was a void in the research and literature regarding these issues and elements. This study helps to inform the field and its outcomes endeavored to validate or invalidate what appeared to be a secondary special education standard applied at will to the adult secondary education system.

Definition of Terms

Adult basic education. Adult basic education programs, sometimes called adult basic and secondary education programs, provide a full range of education including elementary and secondary levels of instruction in reading, writing and mathematics. These programs typically serve adults over the age of sixteen who do not have a high school diploma and are no longer eligible for traditional secondary education programs (Zafft, 2006)

Adult literacy. The National Literacy Act of 1991 (PL 102-73, Section 3) defined adult literacy as the “ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at level of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential”(Vogel in Vogel & Reder, 1998, p. 5).

Adult secondary programs. These education programs are usually available in local communities, funded by federal, state and local resources, to provide literacy and basic skills to individuals 16 years of age and older.

General educational development (GED) equivalency examination. The GED consists of five tests: Language Arts, Writing; Science; Social Studies; Language Arts, Reading; and

Mathematics, requiring individuals to read, compute, integrate information and express in writing at a level exceeding that of at least 40% of graduating high school seniors. Completing the entire battery demonstrates competence in the 21st Century skills of communication, information processing, problem solving, and higher order thinking. Candidates must demonstrate competence in lifelong learning skills such as solving problems and making decisions, taking responsibility for learning, learning through research, planning and reflecting, and evaluating (GED Report, 2005).

General educational development (GED) programs. Preparation programs that include practice testing and instructional components based on the needs of the student as a result of the practice testing. Enrollees are typically 16 years of age or older; if secondary school age release from last school attended is required (Hall, Mellard & Putnam, n.d.).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 (revised 1997 & 2003). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth-2) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth (ages 3-21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B (US Department of Education, 2004).

Learning disabilities. Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to

the individual, presumed to be a central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not, by themselves, constitute a learning disability.

Although learning disabilities can occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory or mental impairment, serious emotional disturbances) or with extrinsic influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient/inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1998). Broadly defined, the term learning disability is used to describe a variety of problems in acquiring, processing, storing, retrieving, and/or responding to information. Adult learners who have learning disabilities encounter frequent difficulty processing, receiving and sending accurate messages to and from the brain. The information being transmitted becomes scrambled like a short circuit, a distorted radio signal, or a fuzzy television picture. The inaccurate sensory transmissions lead to difficulty learning and performing in education, training and work settings, as well as affect emotional, social and personal interaction (Payne, 2001, p. 6-7).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001. The NCLB Act, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provides for increased accountability for States, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for States and local educational agencies (LEAs) in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for the youngest children (US Department of Education, 2001).

Post secondary. Post secondary refers to all programs for students leaving high school, including programs at community colleges, technical colleges, four-year colleges and

universities (NETnet, n.d.). However, for purposes of this study, post secondary will also refer to all training and work activities for student's leaving high school.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Act is Federal legislation that, in addition to authorization of formula and training and service discretionary grants for vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, independent living, and client assistance, authorizes research activities administered by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research and the work of the National Council on Disability. The Act also includes a variety of provisions focused on rights, advocacy and protections for individuals with disabilities (US Department of Education, 2004).

Secondary education. Education beyond the elementary grades; provided by a high school or college preparatory school (WordNet, n.d.).

Self-determination. Refers to the rights of people to have full control over their lives, regardless of a disability; the focus is on self-direction and individual responsibility framed by the concepts of free will, civil and human rights, freedom of choice, and independence (UIC National Research & Training Center on Psychiatric Disability, 2002).

Special Education. The term special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including (A) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and (B) instruction in physical education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, PL 108-446, Section 602).

Transition planning. The development of a managed group of activities specific to the needs of a student who has disabilities that assists in the supported and successful movement

from a secondary education environment to a postsecondary opportunity. Such opportunity may include but not be limited to higher education, vocational and technical training, coordinated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community involvement (Murphy & Golden, 2004).

Transition services. The term transition services refers to a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (a) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (b) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (c) includes instruction, related services, 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 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, PL 108-446, Section 602). For purposes of this study transition is referenced in the context of post secondary transition which commonly refers to the services and activities for older students (e.g., career and technical training, higher education and work goals).

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. Enacted by Congress to consolidate, coordinate, and improve employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation programs in the United States. The purpose of WIA is to provide workforce investment activities, through statewide and local workforce investment systems, that increase the employment, retention, and

earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants, and, as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation (Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1998).

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The purpose of this title is to create collaborative efforts among the Federal Government, States, and localities to provide adult education and literacy services, in order to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for work and self-sufficiency; assist adults who are parents to obtain educational skills necessary to promote and support their children's educational development; and assist adults in completion of a secondary school education (Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1998).

Assumptions and Limitations

Little was known specific to the post-GED activities of adults who have learning disabilities, however, from an analytical perspective, there were some assumptions and limitations that were factored into the study. When investigating the post-GED activities of successful GED candidates the external dynamics and forces of income levels and stability, poverty, declining labor markets, decreases in accessible vocational rehabilitation services, reductions in federal and state programs, access to community-based information and lack of research-based information about adults who have learning disabilities (Dubois, 1998; Litchenstein, 1993; Mellard and Lancaster, 2003; National Council on Disability Position Paper, 2003; Scanlon & Lenz, 2002) were factored into the methodology, especially the surveying and interviewing protocols. Additionally, there were human and disability-based variables that were

considered. These included intrinsic values, personalities and behaviors, and the cognitive affects of the learning disabilities (e.g., strengths and limitations that might impede post-GED activities). Finally, the lack of available participants to survey or interview was considered as a potential and significant limitation. However, this issue was considered carefully and an explanation of the steps to counter the limitation is identified in subsequent chapter 3.

In the researcher's opinion, this study was critical to adult learners engaging in adult secondary completion programs as well as the providers of said programs and their funding sources. It was assumed that, based on the current and projected numbers of special education secondary students who have learning disabilities who have not or will not complete high school, that adult literacy, basic education and GED programs will continue to emerge as a viable alternative. What was also assumed, perhaps due to the lack of research, was that transition from adult secondary education naturally transpires; a concept that in truth had not been validated.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn about the formal or informal transition planning and supports that contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes of the successful candidate who has learning disabilities in an effort to determine whether there was merit in promoting transition services within adult secondary literacy, basic education skills and General Education Development (GED) programs. In 1975 Public Law 94-142 (now 101-476 Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act) acknowledged that as adolescents make their way to adulthood there are recognized needs that require preparation (Zigmond, 1990). These needs have been frequently referred to over the past thirty years as transition supports and services. While not heralded as exceptional, historically transition services for special education students in secondary programs are viewed as having a positive impact on students who have learning disabilities (Lissner, 2006; Sabel, 2000; Koller, 1994). Accordingly, this study explored, from the viewpoint of the adult who has a learning disability and has completed a secondary equivalency examination such as the GED, what activities had occurred since completion and whether such activities could be contributed to formal or informal transition services.

Of critical importance was the consistently emerging theme that adults who have “learning disabilities constitute a relatively distinct population” (Kavale & Fornes, 1996) with “lifelong implications” (Goldstein, 1997; Young, Gerber, Reder, & Cooper, 1996). The most recent published data on the number of secondary students who have learning disabilities exiting special education in the United States reports that 45,930 or 58% dropped out of school between

the years 2001 and 2003 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). The estimated number of adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) students, (excluding English as second language (ESL) learners) enrolled in adult secondary programs nationwide in 2005 is reported to be almost 1.5 million (U.S. Department of Education, February 2006). Add to this data estimates from the research that the numbers of students in these programs who have learning disabilities vary from 15 to 80% (Ross-Gordon, 1987; Ross-Gordon, Plotts, Joesel, & Wells, 2003; Ryan & Price, 1993; Vogel in Vogel & Reder, 1998; White, W. & Polson, 1999).

An individual who has a learning disability is faced with a neurologically based nervous system condition that is both persistent and pervasive throughout the lifespan (Roffman, 2000; Taymans, West, & Sullivan, 2000; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1985). Research has and continues to consistently document that adults who have learning disabilities face numerous barriers as they maneuver from pre-school through postsecondary education levels (Defur & Reiff in Gerber & Reiff, 1994; Human Resources Center, 1988; Johnson & Blalock, 1987; Koller & Holliday in Vogel & Reder, 1998; Mulligan, 2003; Gerber, 2002). This, together with the perceptions society continues to have about the adult's ability to be independent and self-supporting (Goldstein, 1997; Kravets, 1997; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994; Roffman, 2000) created the framework for a substantial literature review that looked at the presence and absence of both formal and informal transition activities in several adult secondary spheres.

Kavale (1995), speaking about secondary students who have learning disabilities, clearly articulated: "As the LD field continues to "grow up," expansion of [transition] services involving postsecondary education, vocational training, and services to improve job skills, academic skills

and psychosocial adjustments are necessary” (p. 38). Thus, this literature review presents an analyses and syntheses, not just of the presence or absence of transition activities of adults who have learning disabilities, but an integration and evaluation of the data from the three critical transitional environments identified by Kavale. The three transitional environments that emerged from one pivotal juncture, that being adult secondary completion, are (a) postsecondary education, (b) career and technical vocational education and training, and (c) employment opportunities. The purpose of the literature review was to attempt to identify a validated baseline of transition needs as well as understand and establish the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities in adult secondary programs.

Conceptual Framework

Theoretically, based on research of secondary students who have learning disabilities who were involved in comprehensive transition planning, specific goals and outcomes leading to engagement and varying degrees of success in postsecondary education, career and technical vocational education and training, and employment opportunities have been realized (Hager, 2007; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994; Sabel, 2000). However, it was very clear from the literature that the outcomes achieved were the result of goal-oriented, multi-faceted, explicit planning and assistance that involved the intersection and cooperation of the student, parent or guardian, secondary school, and the organization(s) to which the planned transition would occur. Data suggests that this approach resulted in the student who has a learning disability acquiring the confidence, independence, self-determination and direction, culminating in the ability to pursue future career opportunities independently (Lissner, 2006;

Varrassi, 2006; Gerber, 2005; McNair, 2002; Mellard & Scanlon, 1998; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994).

The question posited was whether these same principles applied to adults who have completed an adult secondary equivalency program and were transitioning to postsecondary education, career and technical vocational education and training, and employment. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) identified in a Focus on Policy publication that there should be a component within the adult secondary system that supports GED completion to postsecondary transition (2003). Goldstein (1997), speaking specifically about individuals who have learning disabilities, generalized that the “guidance, intervention, and transition process may focus on...the development of vocational skills or the compensatory strategies necessary for successful adult living” (p. 217). Roffman (2000), after intensive interviews with thirteen adults who have learning disabilities, concluded that employment success comes from the abilities to “develop strong self-advocacy skills and be tenacious” (p. 280). With these points in mind, the objectives of this literature review were to identify the variables in other research and works addressing post-GED outcomes of candidates who have learning disabilities and applicable transition services provided during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs leading to postsecondary education, career and technical vocational education and training, and employment opportunities.

Adult Secondary to Postsecondary Education Transition

“the impact of learning disabilities tends to persist throughout the lifespan. As a result attention should be paid to the implication of learning disabilities for secondary education and

postsecondary education” (Accardo, p. 29, 1996). In 1994, Minskoff explicated that literacy and adult education programs must include “widely expanded” postsecondary and vocational training information and access as well as “assistance with difficulties in psychological and social adjustments” (Minskoff in Gerber & Reiff, 1994, p. 118-119). A review of the literature from 1988 through present confirmed these themes. The National Council on Disabilities (2003) reported that people with disabilities were less like to enter postsecondary education programs and if they did, they were more likely to enroll in a two year community college or vocational program. This served as important foundational information as much of the literature discussing students who have learning disabilities focused on transition to two year community college and vocational programs (Boyer-Stephens in Taymans, West & Sullivan, 2000; Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995; Hart, Pasternack, Mele-McCarthy, Zimbrich & Parker, 2004; Mellard in Gerber & Reiff, 1994; Rapp in Gerber & Brown, 1997; Schoen Lemaire, Mallik, & Stoll, 2002). The Council further reported that people with disabilities were less likely to complete a degree program, and if completion occurred, it usually took two times as long as their peers who did not have disabilities. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth follow-up study of 327 adults found that of the students who had learning disabilities that enrolled in postsecondary two-year vocational technical programs or two or four year degree programs the completion rate was 3.3% (Vogel & Reder, 1998). These facts may have significant financial and self-sufficiency implications as the difference between annual income earnings when comparing individuals who have some college or an associate’s degree to those without such is \$5,000 to \$9,000 dollars less (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Upon further investigation, the Council found that people who have disabilities displayed an underlying understanding that they can participate in postsecondary

opportunities but also assumed they would encounter significant difficulty which could be a causal factor in non-enrollment (Schoen Lemaire, Mallik, & Stoll, 2002). However, the research also substantiated that they had higher resilience and persistence as they sought to keep up with their peers who did not have disabilities (Goldberg, Schnieders & Higgins, 2006; Lichtenstein, 1993; National Council on Disabilities, 2003). Finally, a clearly articulated necessity specified a strong level of navigational support, during the transition from secondary and adult secondary programs to postsecondary institutions (Goldberg, Schnieders & Higgins, 2006; Harris & Robertson, 2001; Helton, 2005; New Freedom Initiative, 2001; Tincani, 2004; Vogel & Adelman, 2001). The National Council stated that eighty percent of people who have disabilities and are enrolled in a secondary environment will require some level of assistance managing and coordinating the postsecondary experience. Reinforcement of the need for assistance is echoed by Tyler in an interview with NCSALL where he stated: “Do whatever you can to help make the GED a bridge to postsecondary education [rather than an endpoint], because postsecondary education is where the real economic payoffs are” (NCSALL Focus on Basics, 2004).

Described deficiencies in transition services, especially those perceived to promote success upon entry into a postsecondary environment, were prolific throughout the literature. Additionally, the lack of goal-setting behaviors was found to be of great concern (Goldberg, Schnieders & Higgins, 2006; Vogel & Adelman, 1992). A number of surveys involving postsecondary college service coordinators, rehabilitation counselors, and parents related true unhappiness with transition professionals and the services provided by high schools, especially relative to the types and amounts of services available compared to the needs of students who have learning disabilities and were entering at the postsecondary level. Of parallel concern were

the students' expectations that the myriad of services available at the secondary level would transfer without exception to the postsecondary level. Explicit and implicit statements espoused, urging transition teams and professionals ensure secondary completers recognized the types of services available and service limitations at the postsecondary level for students who have disabilities (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Harris and Robertson, 2001; Hart, Pasternack, Mele-McCarthy, Zimbrich & Parker, 2004; Helton, 2005; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Maudslay, 2003). The New England ABE-to-College Transition Project Evaluation Report identified that successful programs have transition-educated professionals who have solid relationships with college partners and understand the uniqueness of students who have learning disabilities as well as possess a strong understanding of what it takes to enter a higher education arena (Gittleman, 2003). The National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (1994) articulated the issues well and advocated that secondary school personnel assist students in looking forward, past high school, toward postsecondary opportunities by "initiating, designing, and evaluating effective transition plans and coordinating services that are consistent with federal and state statutes, rules and regulations" (p. 101).

In New York, a coordinated transition agreement process has been successful for the past thirteen years. This agreement process brings together schools and community providers such as vocational rehabilitation and employment training services allowing full cross-agency collaboration around four elements perceived to be vital to a strong transition: contact information; referral methods; documentation of disability, skills and needs; and initiation of a feedback process to ensure a positive transition services (Murphy & Golden, 2004).

A basic premise throughout the literature was that student participation in transition planning is minimized; not fully embraced. The IDEA promotes a strong student presence and participation in the transition planning process. The lack of student involvement is thought to be one of the major causes of poor self-advocacy development (Goldberg, Schnieders & Higgins, 2006; Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995; McIntire, 2004; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994). Coordinators of disability services at the postsecondary level were extremely concerned about students' lack of ability to self-advocate, citing an inability of students to identify strengths or limitations and assess the necessity for accommodations, affecting the ability to function independently (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Mott, 2004; Ross-Gordon, 2001; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003; Trainor, 2002; Tottle, 2002). Related data found no difference in the level of comfort concerning assertiveness between individuals who have learning disabilities and those who do not, but suggested students who have learning disabilities may need to exert more assertive, self-advocating behaviors than their peers who do not have learning disabilities in order to receive accommodations and services (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Gerber, 2005; Scrutchfield Orr, 2003). Evaluation of parent roles suggested parents generally have difficulty transferring advocacy roles to their children during secondary transition processes due to the desire to protect their child and ensure maximum services. However, research suggests that it is during the stages of transition plan development together with the evolution of the plan that the reins of advocacy must be turned over to the student (Abreu-Ellis, 2007; Meredith, 2005; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994; Rahamin, Corbey, Ward, & West in Taynmans, West & Sullivan, 2000).

Tightly woven in the self-advocacy spotlight was the need for students who have learning disabilities to understand their rights under the laws and be able to fluently exercise such rights by the time transition and engagement in postsecondary activity occurs. Professionals postulated that in addition, students must recognize the legal variables between services provided at a secondary level versus a postsecondary level. The right of passage from secondary to postsecondary places the responsibility for disclosure of a disability on the student. Thus, the theme amongst secondary and postsecondary environments was that students should “rid themselves of any discomfort disclosing their disability” (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005, p. 17) becoming knowledgeable about the law and its applicability to disclosure of their disability as well as comfortable with the process of disclosure (Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Mott, 2004; Mulligan, 2003; Turini, 2006). The focus point again centered on the postsecondary institutions’ requirement to provide specific types of services under the governing laws and regulations which when compared to secondary provisions is much less. More importantly, because elementary and secondary child-find approaches are no longer in effect, services at a postsecondary level are only provided when requested by the student (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind, & Herman, 2003; Kravets, 1997; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003;). These lay the foundation for the concern echoed throughout the literature that students who have learning disabilities must be exposed to and understand how to use resources and services available to them; more specific, developing self-determination skills was critical to success (Koch, 2004; Koller, 1994; Mellard & Lancaster, 2003; Mott, 2004).

In all arenas of transition, issues of diagnosis were a pervasive problem. Child-find methods required by law (Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act 2004) are

changing within elementary and secondary systems. Different than IDEA of 1997, the changes of 2004 purport that when determining if a student has a potential learning disability that is interfering with academic performance three steps utilizing a response-to-intervention (RTI) approach are applied. These steps are intended to determine whether the noted academic deficiencies can be remediated through (a) standard instructional methods, (b) intensive instructional methods and supports, or (c) require specific special education services (Hyatt, 2007). Within the elementary and secondary education system the RTI model replaces the assessment model which employed an aptitude-achievement discrepancy criterion when identifying whether a student has a learning disability. The perception of many experts is that these changes may lead to more inefficiency in producing current, acceptable documentation of a disability required for services in a postsecondary situation creating what could become a significant barrier (Reschly, 2005). While there were valid points in favor and against RTI and non-discrepancy assessment models, the fact of the matter is that the postsecondary education system has not embraced the changes. Thus, students who have learning disabilities who do not possess diagnosis using the criterion of aptitude-achievement discrepancy may not meet the required disclosure and documentation requirements of many postsecondary institutions. The lack of acceptable diagnostic documentation creates yet another obstruction to postsecondary education and training opportunities (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2007).

The literature proposes that outside the family unit, schools are the most logical place for a student to receive support. Teachers can be dominant influencers and are able to model and support strong communication and relationship development, both of which are critical skills in a

postsecondary environment (Gittleman, 2003; Murray, 2003). Roos (2000) concluded that a formalized support plan should extend two years after transition to postsecondary education.

In a study done by the American Council on Education, two out of every five first year students in attendance at four-year institutions were those who had disabilities, constituting the largest group identified in the student-population demographics. Compared to their peers with disabilities, students who have learning disabilities placed themselves lowest on mathematics abilities, intellectual self-confidence, academic abilities, and writing abilities and as well were the most likely to anticipate a need for special tutoring or remedial work in English, reading and mathematics. Interesting, that among students who have disabilities, those with learning disabilities were the least likely to have been offered financial assistance as an incentive to enroll and were also least likely have interests in professional fields (2001). Similar conclusions were identified in the Community Partnership for Adult Learning Report; Helping Adult Learners make the Transition to Postsecondary Education (2005). The report highlighted the need for adult basic education programs to increase services to include more advanced educational instruction to meet the rigors of college academics, provide counseling for financial aid options, and make available classes in stress reduction, time management and study skills. Further validation of these needs was cited in the conclusion from a study of GED graduates who did not have disabilities who were in their freshman year of college. The finale assessment identified three major barriers affecting transition: students' lack of knowledge and subsequent limited use of academic support services; students' inability to access financial aid information together with frustration around use of other institution services; and students' lack of emotional support

systems (Helton, 2005). This recent study seems to purport that these deficiencies are related to all transition systems, secondary to postsecondary, special education and alternative education.

Adult Secondary to Career and Technical Vocational Education Transition

The literature covering the career and technical vocational education and training systems was limited. The term vocational related to everything, excluding two and four year higher education institutions, from pre-employment skills (resume writing and interviewing techniques) to apprenticeship training to two year trade and technical programs located within or outside community and two year college systems.

A Washington State study of low-skilled adults who were dually enrolled in adult secondary education classes and short-term community or technical college vocational job skills training certification programs (12 months or less) resulted in a decreased enrollment in postsecondary education after completing the certification program and achieving employment (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). The study articulated the significance of this finding, as completion of two and four year postsecondary education results in higher wage earnings and produces more stability. The study further recommended transition planning as a bridge between certificate programs and additional postsecondary education attainment (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). A later study in Washington State resulted in legislative funding and implementation of an integrated adult secondary basic skills program together with a skills-based workforce training program concurrently providing dual enrollment for students. This process was found to have substantial impact on students' ability to enter a targeted job or career and technical education programs with higher levels of preparation (Washington State Board for Community and Technical

Colleges, 2005). While students who have learning disabilities were not specifically identified, the assumption, based on the national data presented earlier, is that some of the students participating more than likely had learning disabilities

Of the literature available, significant emphasis was placed on collaborative approaches combining academic and vocational training using intensive and holistic models. It was noted that when goal setting activities combined with a systematic approach to removing barriers such as transportation were infused with career and technical vocational training, basic skills, survival skills, academic studies, community collaboration and placement services, transition of students who have disabilities had a much higher level of success (Goldstein, 1997; Grayson, Wermuth, Holub, & Anderson in Gerber & Brown, 1997; Koller & Holliday in Vogel & Reder, 1998; Minskoff in Gerber & Reiff, 1997; Murphy & Golden, 2004; Pike, 2004; Rapp in Gerber & Brown, 1997; Schoen, Lemaire, Mallik, & Stoll, 2002).

Even within the limited literature in this area, there was a strong flavor of transition programs developed for entering students who had learning disabilities which focused on a host of transition activities such as career exploration, job shadowing and mentoring, self-advocacy and self-determination, and training options (on-the-job training, apprenticeships, internships etc.). There was frequent mention of bridge programs that assisted students with learning disabilities to navigate through the system (Center for Change in Transition Services, 2006; Fabian, 2007; Foley, 2006; Hadley, 2007; Hadley, 2006; Prince & Jenkins, 2005; Roos, 2000). However, these bridge programs appeared to only have relationships with secondary schools, not with adult secondary programs such as literacy, adult education or GED completion programs.

Adult Secondary to Employment Transition

The National Council on Disability (2003) citing the New Freedom Initiative, 2001 reports that individuals who have disabilities are two times more likely to live below the poverty guidelines. These same individuals when compared to peers who do not have disabilities are less likely to be employed whether or not they have a postsecondary degree or certificate and have less earning power. This conclusion was equally consistent among individuals who have learning disabilities as the majority of individuals diagnosed with learning disabilities who seek employment after exiting high school fail to obtain work (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Grayson, Wermuth, Holub, & Anderson in Gerber & Brown, 1997; Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007;).

A number of studies throughout the Nation sought to determine the incidence of learning disabilities within the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Welfare-to-Work population (Brown & Ganzglass, 1998; Giovengo, Moore, Young in Vogel & Reder, 1998; Taylor & Barusch, 2004; Thompson, Van Ness & O'Brien, 2001). In all instances the number of welfare-to-work recipients who were found to have learning disabilities ranged from 45 to 56% of the studied population. Even after completing a postsecondary program and becoming gainfully employed, a majority of individuals who had learning disabilities continued to depend on family for housing and additional financial support (Setzer, 1991). The National Council also determined that employers are resistant to hiring people who have disabilities because of discomfort on the part of the employer about disabilities, concern about cost of accommodations and modifications, and a belief that they do not possess the skills to do the job. Almost identical in nature were the factors when focusing on individuals who had learning disabilities (Gerber,

Price, Mulligan, & Shessel, 2004; Price & Gerber, 2001; Price, Gerber, & Mulligan, 2003). In spite of this data, there were a few instances where students who have learning disabilities decide to enter the workplace directly from the secondary experience. In such cases, positive experience in the workplace could be attributed to a well developed transition plan and boosted self-confidence (Koller in Gerber & Brown, 1997; LDA Postsecondary Education Subcommittee, 1999; Meredith, 2005).

Another employment model designed to promote employment-related experiences in support of academic programs during high school has shown positive impacts on transition in both work-related activities and postsecondary endeavors (Murray, 2003). A case study of four high school dropouts highlights the need for possible changes toward learner-centered education, depending on the specifics of the school program. In these case studies, all youth found a much higher level of satisfaction on the job because of the opportunities to exercise control, responsibility and decision making; opportunities they did not experience in the high school environment. An interesting phenomenon in these cases showed that the majority of the described anxiousness of the individuals centered on the high school educational experiences, not work. Solicited comments measuring this phenomenon presented a lack of control, responsibility and decision making as the students stated they were never sought out for their ideas or assistance in the secondary environment, characteristics realized in the workplace. Thus, they felt undervalued, as opposed to the work environment where there was autonomy and a sense of belonging (Lichtenstein, 1993). A similar study suggests a high success factor when career-related work experiences were coordinated with transition plan goal completion; the result was higher graduation rates and employment outcomes. The study made recommendations

pertinent to the variables that contribute to success. Specifics of the recommendations highlighted an inclusive focus on school completion and post-school preparation; the relevance of classes to future goals; a promotion of self-determination through student participation; an expansion of collaborative services; and the extension of career planning, community projects, service learning, and transition services as a common curricula for all students, not just those who have disabilities (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000).

The linking of goal-oriented transition planning with self-determination and self-advocacy fundamentals was again foremost; the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) Newsbriefs stressing that it was “one of the most important goals of transition planning” (LDA Postsecondary Education Subcommittee, 1999). Crawford (1998) concludes that the “key ingredient in achieving successful outcomes...is the linkage of learning to know with learning to do” (Crawford in Vogel & Reder, 1998, p. 289).

Most of the literature focusing on employment orients itself in a time frame from secondary to postsecondary, the employment either being in lieu of postsecondary involvement or coming immediately after postsecondary involvement. There is however a small team of researchers who, over the past six to eight years, have sought to understand the transition needs and success factors of adults who have been away from the secondary and postsecondary environment for a time. In a LDA Conference of America, these researchers presented data from a study centering on adults with learning disabilities and self-disclosure. While some variables were different and not otherwise noted in the literature, such as the importance of personal choice and its shaping through age and maturity, two factors showed consistency from adolescence to adulthood. Those factors articulated suggested that despite the heterogeneity of

the sample, consequences experienced by adults as a result of the learning disabilities appeared to be directly related to the unique and personalized manner that each individual viewed his or her learning disability. That said, disclosure of the disability proved to be one of the most powerful forces that shaped adulthood for adults who have learning disabilities (Gerber & Price, 2006).

In a related study two questions were asked about adults with learning disabilities: (a) How do Americans view their learning disabilities? (b) What was the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on adults who have learning disabilities? The response ranged from over half the sample not acknowledging the presence of a learning disability to two-thirds of the sample having no knowledge of the ADA. These data combined with that previously cited implies improvements are needed at a variety of transition stages, including those occurring in adult life. One has to wonder about the usefulness of diagnosis and elementary, secondary and postsecondary transition services that place heavy emphasis on identification of the learning disability when over half of the sample in the study did not see themselves as having a learning disability despite documented evidence (Price, Gerber & Mulligan, 2003). The same conclusions were identified in a similar study in which approximately two-thirds of the study participants who were employed and attending graduate classes at a university had not disclosed their learning disabilities to their employer, even though 90% of them reported that their learning disabilities affected their ability to perform at work in some way (Madaus, Foley, McGuire, & Ruban, 2002).

A comparison of employment experiences between Canadians and Americans revealed that both nationalities have the same thoughts and realities regarding the workplace. Consistent

with other literature, self-disclosure, self-advocacy, reasonable accommodations and disability rights under the respective laws of each county were topics of discussion with developmental factors that centered on disclosure, namely the right of choice and privacy; the need for support systems; and the concern that “empowerment is not realized when people with learning disabilities do not self-disclose, obtain accommodations, or use the laws that ‘even the playing field’” (Gerber, Price, Mulligan & Shessel, 2004, p. 290). To that end, Mellard, Hall, & Parker (2000) stated that providing opportunities to explore reasonable “accommodations in the adult education setting are important in that they often provide the foundation for learner’s requesting and successfully utilizing appropriate accommodations in postsecondary and workplace settings”(p. 31).

Assimilating employer data, a study that interviewed employers and compared the results to the same protocols with employers six years prior, revealed that in general, employers seem open and enthusiastic to hire individuals who have learning disabilities, so long as the individuals self-identify and are able to provide current data as to the impact of the learning disabilities in the workplace. The researchers reported that, different than six years prior, many employers refused interviews or did not return phone calls. Those employers who completed interviews made the point that more disability and ADA education was needed for the employer and the employee (Price & Gerber, 2001).

Summary

The Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (2005) reported that in recent years a number of states and institutions have put programs in place to increase transition from adult

education and GED completion programs to postsecondary opportunities. However, the report suggested that overall, these transition activities are less than adequate and in many cases amount to an externally focused, enhanced referral process.

The purpose of the literature review was to identify the transition variables of post-GED candidates who have learning disabilities as well as applicable transition services provided during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs leading to postsecondary education, career and technical vocational education and training, and employment opportunities. The assumption was that based on the data or lack thereof, a baseline of transition questions would establish the relativity and perceived value for the study.

The literature reviewed examining variables that contribute to successful outcomes for adults who have learning disabilities when transitioning from adult secondary environments to postsecondary, career and technical vocational education, and employment environments illustrated a number of central themes. It appeared these themes were framed with the overarching organizational concept of intensive focus on promoting external changes within a program or phase of education while research strongly suggested that transition success should be constructed on developing internal processes that involved attributes such as confidence, communication, self-advocacy, self-determination, goal-oriented behaviors, self-directed responsibility, decision making, resilience, persistence, and social skills, as well as compensatory strategies addressing the limitations of the learning disabilities. "...it is the transitions, not necessarily the changes themselves that are holding people back and thereby threatening to make their change unworkable" (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). Thus, the hypothesis seemed to suggest that when these internal attributes are combined with external program changes, providing a

menu of meaningful, supported transition activity, the evolution of successful transition is feasible.

Before highlighting the themes under the external program changes, a few comments about the orientation of the literature are in order. In the researcher's opinion, the amount of literature specifically directed toward adult secondary transition is abysmal given the number of literacy, adult education and GED programs nationwide and the number students who have learning disabilities who are potentially enrolled in these programs. Most of the literature addressed the elements of transition from secondary to postsecondary, vocational or employment using a deficit model of approach. In evaluation of that approach, one has to assume its origin comes from the western culture medical model which seeks to identify and fix that which is wrong. What was missed by using this model was the heterogeneity of individuals who have learning disabilities. The "fix it" approach will only promote a static framework with prescription-type methodology. Evaluation of the heterogeneity of learning disabilities suggested the need for approaches that are interwoven and involve integration of flexible services and processes dependent on age and maturity as evidenced by the clear differences in the responses of the adults surveyed and the data provided by Gerber and Price, 2006; Gerber et al., 2004; Mulligan, 2003; Price and Gerber, 2001 and Price et al., 2003 when compared to the other data sources.

Studies done by Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind, and Herman (2003) and Ginsberg, Gerber and Reiff (1994) corroborated the origin of success patterns of adults who have learning disabilities concluding that the "overriding factor leading to success was control" (Ginsberg, Gerber & Reiff in Gerber & Reiff, 1994, p. 206). This factor was clearly articulated in the

overarching theme of the literature which asserts the need for self-advocacy and self-determination. In evaluation of this major theme, the lack of self-advocacy and self-determination skills may form the underlying root cause contributing to deficiencies involving financial stability and independence. Other articulated concerns, such as disclosure, navigation, and relationship development can be categorized as sub-themes, again finding root cause in self-advocacy and self-determination development. In contemporary adult learning views, autonomous or self-directed learning is a foundational aspect of adult education and development (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). “The term self-directed learning embraces four distinct phenomena: personal autonomy, the willingness and capacity to manage one’s own learning, an environment allowing some effective control by the learner, and the independent pursuit of learning without formal institution support or affiliation (Phillip Candy in Tennant & Pogson, 1995, p.122). Based on the definitions of self-determination and self-advocacy, Tennant & Pogson’s four factors are clearly connected throughout the literature as necessary constructs laying the groundwork for the opportunity to experience successful transition.

External forces central to effective transition support a long-term, future-oriented collaborative effort involving a community of services that move away from imparting information and move toward a modeling and facilitator role (Center for Change in Transition Services, 2006; Koller & Holliday in Vogel & Reder, 1998; Murray, 2003); a transition within the transition programs for teachers and transition professionals. Other prevalent external program change themes included the tangible bridging of transition activities, meaningful career exploration, development of mentors, active student participation in transition planning, pre-employment skills development, understanding of legal and civil rights, and provision and

assistance in the psychological and emotional adjustments, as well as the removal of barriers such as transportation, financial burdens assumed in postsecondary and career and technical training enrollment

Not much was mentioned about specific myths associated with those who have learning disabilities that may still be prevalent in education, career and technical vocational and employment settings. These myths include: learning disabilities is just an excuse; it doesn't exist; it takes a lot of work on the part of the instructor or provider to accommodate students who have learning disabilities; etc. (Ketter, 2006; Shaywitz, 2005). Kravets (1997) expounded on one element of these myths, citing that many transition professionals hold to the misconception that a student who has a learning disability does not have the potential or capability to pursue a postsecondary level of education or training. This myth was further perpetuated in the more recent data articulating employer concern that potential employees who have learning disabilities cannot perform the essential functions of the job. The continuation of these myths may in part be due to the fact that individuals who have disabilities generally assume others' low expectations (Anderson, 2004; Hatzes, 1996; National Council of Disability, 2003).

Finally, there were many implications suggesting that transition plan outcomes not focus as much on the disability, but be more goal directed (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997; Koller & Holliday in Vogel & Reder, 1998; Roer-Strier, 2002). As transition services continue to evolve, systems must focus on psychosocial adjustments and self-determination, embracing an integrated life-span approach and stronger service delivery models leading to more meaningful and applicable research in the adult arena (Gerber, 1994; Kavale & Forness, 1996). This is not an

either/or situation, but an interwoven process that must take a holistic approach to ensure promotion of long-term stability and success.

Conclusion

“Comprehensive information about the variety of current ABE [adult basic education secondary] transition activities is not available” (Alamprese, 2004, ¶ 3). The Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (2005) report evaluating transition activities from adult secondary programs to postsecondary opportunities only highlighted the need for such to be more pronounced and definitive. The number of students who have learning disabilities who leave the secondary environment and thus do not have the opportunity of transition assistance who appear to enter and potentially complete adult secondary programs without the likelihood of receiving transition assistance provided a strong foundation for the study. Interpretation of the literature, without integrating factors of personal difficulties, socio-economic conditions, workforce demands and skills challenges, and access to resources (DuBois, 1998; Harvey & Koch, 2004; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1985) gave substantial importance to the potential concept that adults who have learning disabilities and have completed adult secondary education may require transition services.

There was evidence of research supporting what works and what has not worked for secondary in-school youth who have learning disabilities and are transitioning to post-school activity. By comparison, the research pertaining to the needs of adults who have learning disabilities was miniscule in contrast to child and adolescent studies. Discussion in the literature of transition planning and implementation activities for students who have disabilities,

particularly those who have learning disabilities, who have engaged in and successfully completed the GED was non-existent. Furthermore, little is known about these individuals' pathways and activities or accomplishments post-GED completion.

Based on the research question posited several questions ensued including (a) Was the acquisition of GED competencies adequate for successful passage to the next “stage” of transition in post secondary education, training and work activities? (b) What was that stage and how did individuals who have learning disabilities manage and maneuver through the corridors of that stage? (c) Were transition services, formal or informal, provided as a part of the adult secondary education experience and were they perceived as valuable? (d) What was missing or could have been improved upon?

The limited research does not align with the theories of adult learning which hypothesize that adults are self-directed in their learning; have accrued multiple levels of knowledge and understanding creating a strong source for learning; are interconnected to social roles which drive learning aspirations; are involved in learning relationships that are meaningful and support the advancement of knowledge, skills and abilities; and are inspired by intrinsic rather than extrinsic significance (Merriam, 2001). The need for the core of adult learning theory, that being “learner initiative” (Heimstra, 1998), was threaded throughout most of the literature, especially when the perspective of the adult student who has learning disabilities was conveyed.

The objectives of this study were to: identify the post-GED outcomes of candidates who have learning disabilities; identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within previously attended adult education programs; establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation

activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs; and identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development. It was not prudent to suppose that transition planning and implementation at this level is necessary or even desired until such a study is completed.

No matter what the outcomes, the study was critical to dual fields as the literature review presents a substantial void in the research and data regarding these issues and elements. Given this lack of data, the perception was that the results of a study of the post-activities of successful GED candidates who have learning disabilities would add new knowledge to the field of adult literacy, basic education and General Education Development (GED) programs as well as to the field of adults who have learning disabilities; the outcomes either validating or invalidating what appeared to be a secondary special education standard applied at will to the adult secondary education system. Also to be recognized was that the limited research available within the adult secondary education environment investigates the concepts of transition from an external, organizational program perspective. Thus, the consequence of this study may begin a dialogue addressing a variety of questions and biases as well as instigating new ones about the worth and value of transition planning and implementation activities within adult secondary education programs particularly from the perspective of the adult student.

The level of importance and value of transition planning and implementation activities or the lack of such within an adult secondary educational environment has yet to be clearly identified. “A consistent premise of adult education theory and policy is that it should directly contribute to meaningful outcomes for the adult” [who has learning disabilities] (Scanlon & Lenz, 2002, Discussion ¶ 5). Based on this comprehensive literature review, it is assumed that

the results of this study will structure a framework that begins to acknowledge or reject the perceived need that adults who have learning disabilities completing secondary adult education programs can or cannot successfully transition independently.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Even at the lowest estimated levels, the purported incidence of adults who have learning disabilities who are enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) programs appeared to be significant. While somewhat assumptive, given the numbers from the U.S. Department of Education of close to 1.5 million enrolled students (February 2006) in ABE and ASE programs compared to the percentages cited in the literature of those identified with learning disabilities the realization was that potentially somewhere between 350,000 and 1,000,000 enrolled students have some form of learning disability.

At the secondary education level measures have been taken with the enactment of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 (revised 1997 and 2003) to assist students who have disabilities in the transition between secondary and postsecondary education activities by providing specific transitional steps to prepare them for employment that advances independence and self-sufficiency (Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003). While these transitional methods and activities are not always heralded as results-oriented and beneficial to all, there was a body of research that identified that students who have learning disabilities who had access to transition planning services and activities demonstrated better outcomes in postsecondary activities than those students who did not receive transition services (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind, & Herman, 2003; Grigal, Test, Beattie & Wood, 1997; Janiga & Costenbader,

2002; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994). Research also identified that students who have learning disabilities experienced less positive outcomes than their peers who do not have learning disabilities when transition services and activities were not in place (Hager, 2007; Mellard & Lancaster, 2003; Tottle, 2002).

All elements considered the inveterate successes were represented as the result of secondary education transition activities and services directly linked to the evolution of the student's needs and goals merged into a plan of action, referred to as a transition plan, which resulted in a level of success typically not experienced with the absence of such. These evidential components of transition planning led to the impetus and desire to understand whether the same or similar planning and services were critical to the transition of students who have learning disabilities who did not complete high school and were enrolled in adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the research question: What formal or informal transition planning and supports contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities? This question was based on four foundational verities: (a) secondary transition planning for students who have Learning Disabilities had been proven, in research positing varying instances, to have positive effects; (b) there was a significant number of secondary education students who have learning disabilities who did not complete high school, many of whom later entered adult secondary programs such as ABE, ASE, or GED; (c) there were no regulations for transition planning and implementation activities at the adult secondary education program level; (d) research was minuscule when discussing transition

planning and implementation activities for students who have disabilities, particularly those who have learning disabilities who have engaged in and successfully completed the GED. As stated earlier, it was not sensible to presume that transition planning and implementation at the adult secondary level was necessary or even desired until such a study was conducted.

The objectives of this study were framed by previous research and studies conducted within the secondary special education environment relative to the successful outcomes of students who have learning disabilities and had benefited from transition planning combined with the concern that those who exited secondary education without a high school diploma and entered an adult secondary education program may well have needed transition planning. Thus, the objectives of this study were to: identify the post-GED outcomes of candidates who have learning disabilities; identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within the previously attended adult education programs; establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs; and identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development.

Research Design

The research design employed a qualitative ethnographic case study approach that utilized an instrumental or collective case methodology. Ethnography places the emphasis of research on “society and culture” seeking to discover and explain “beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behavior of a group” (Merriam, 1998, p. 12). A case study approach provided

for the in-depth exploration of “a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). Merriam suggests the “case study design can be employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved...to influence policy, practice, and future research.” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). It was anticipated that through this study a clear articulation of individuals who have learning disabilities need for transition planning and implementation would be defined and that the summation of such would influence local practices as well as state and national policies. At a minimum, the expectation was that the study would generate interest in future research that expanded the concepts and further identified explicit transition needs for adults who have learning disabilities and are exiting from adult secondary education programs.

Case studies are bounded systems meaning “that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries” (Creswell, 2005, p. 439). Drawing on the work of Denzin (1997), LeCompte et al. (1993), and Van Maanan (1988) Creswell combines two designs into a type of Ethnographic design termed an Ethnographic Case Study (in Table 15.1 Creswell, 2005, p.438). Defined as “a case analysis of a person, event, activity, or process set within a cultural perspective” (Creswell, 2005, p. 438) a deconstruction of this research design made it decidedly appropriate. The focus of the study was to understand the formal or informal transition planning and supports that predominantly contributed to the post-activities and outcomes of GED candidates who have learning disabilities and had successfully completed the GED. Accordingly, the study aligned with the description and characteristics of a case study. The description of a case study is the concentrated focus on certain aspects or elements of a phenomenon through the evaluation of cases (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). The purpose of the

study, to understand what these individuals are currently engaged in and what activities transpired prior to GED completion that contributed to current engagement, placed the emphasis on “describing the activities of the group instead of identifying shared patterns of behavior exhibited by the group” (Creswell, 2005) which was inherent in the definition of an Ethnographic Case Study. The group, defined as individuals who had diagnosed learning disabilities and had completed the GED successfully, meet the criteria for the culture perspective and the fact that the study looked at the pre-informal and formal activities contributing to post-GED activities created the boundedness. Moreover, the focus of the study was such that it could be referred to as a collective case study which Creswell defines as “multiple cases [that] are described and compared to provide insight into an issue;” in this case, the activities of the successful candidates (Creswell, 2005, p.439).

Sampling Design

A sampling process that represented a homogeneous sampling approach (Gall et al., 2003) was utilized. This ensured that the cultural perspective of a bounded study was maintained throughout the research process allowing for an in-depth understanding of the context, which was the phenomenon associated with post-GED activities. This also presented a more credible perspective to inform policy, practice and future research.

The GED Testing Service provides an opportunity for any candidate who has a disability, who believes that the disability presents a limitation in the demonstration of knowledge, skills, and abilities when taking a standardized test, to apply for and receive accommodations. Candidates who have learning disabilities may apply for accommodations by submitting a

completed Request for Testing Accommodations form to the chosen GED Testing Center which is forwarded to the state GED Administrator or the GED Testing Service in Washington D.C. for approval. Approval of the request is based on a stringent set of requirements that include: (a) a clear diagnosis of the learning disability that follows current standards; (b) the functional limitations occurring as a result of the disability that might affect the candidate's ability to take a standardized test; and (c) the rationale for the requested accommodations. These requirements must come from or be validated by a licensed or certified professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. Given the nature of the study, recruitment of participants for purposes of the study began with those GED candidates who had submitted a Request for Testing Accommodations under the Learning Disabilities classification and had been approved for such by the state GED administrator or the GED Testing Service in Washington D.C. This assured the researcher that participants had a validated learning disability. In addition to having a documented learning disability, the participants chosen for the study also had successfully completed GED testing and received their certificate. Specific recruitment of participants first came from the local GED testing center administrators and test proctors, who with the state director of adult education services and the state GED administrator's authorization and guidance contacted successful GED candidates who qualified for accommodations because of a learning disability, presented them with the researcher's need and request to participate in the study and either had candidates contact the researcher directly or, after obtaining permission, forwarded the name and contact information to the researcher. As this method did not generate enough participants to have an effective ethnographic case study the researcher utilized other recruitment sources such as Payne & Associates, Inc. and Job Corps. These sources offered another way of

accessing candidates who had documented learning disabilities and who had successfully completed the GED. It was anticipated that a minimum of ten participants would be identified and participate in the study.

Measures

The application of a qualitative ethnographic or collective case study strategy allowed for the use of an open interview protocol. Through this medium the researcher sought to understand the formal or informal transition planning and supports that contributed to the post-activities of successful GED candidates which provided “insight, discovery and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28-29). Drawing from LeCompte and Schensul (1999) and Wolcott (1999), Creswell presented various forms of data collection used by ethnographers, several of which were employed by this study.

One of the primary reasons for the selection of a qualitative methodology was that it used “complex reasoning that is multi-faceted, iterative, and simultaneous” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). The utilization of a primary inductive analysis approach allowed for the true essence of the individual’s experiences, perceptions and opinions to be evaluated from the descriptive elements leading to an evolution of themes for deductive planning (Creswell 2003; Merriam 1998). Thus, the study sought to synthesize data in a thematic approach framed by a thick descriptive venue that could inform potential policy, practice and future research through perception, recognition and possible elucidation. By using a research questionnaire and observation that informed the ethnographic text by looking for patterns and insight within the population, the researcher identified shared events, activities and processes of the participants. Instances of suitability were

determined and conversational interviews followed, utilizing a general interview guided approach (Gall et al., 2003). This interview approach was coupled with techniques that captured the contrasts or comparisons of the person, activities and events within a cultural perspective for synthesis and evaluation of descriptive data and themes in order to clarify and conclude those viewpoints, standards and feelings within the activities of the group.

The role of the researcher in this study was one of reflexivity. Creswell refers to reflexivity in ethnography as “being aware of and openly discussing his or her [the researcher] role in the study in a way that honors and respects the site and participants” (Creswell, 2005, p. 448). This was incredibly critical, as a part of each interview and discussion focused on the participant’s learning disability which could have been viewed as a barrier or deficiency, even though successful acquisition of the GED had transpired. Equally, discussion of post-GED activities, which were dependent on “what and how much has occurred”, could have been perceived by the participant as successes or failures related to the perceived deficiency factors of the learning disability or a self-applied inability to “measure up to a standard.” The researcher needed to exhibit “sensitivity and integrity” (Merriam, 1998, p. 42) while taking precautions to ensure that subjective predispositions and assumptions were not projected during the interaction. The researcher worked to ensure that participants felt well-supported and validated in the telling of their story. Of vital importance to the welfare of the participants and the credibility of the study was the veracity of the researcher not to project overt or covert judgments through either verbal or nonverbal means.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher was the primary in the data collection process. In a private interview setting, of the participant's choice, using a one-to-one interview approach, data was collected through the use of a standard interview questionnaire with allowance for interrelated follow-up questions, clarification and dialogue. The researcher took written notes as well as audio-recorded the interview. An observation checklist was completed immediately following the interview and the researcher recorded in journal format any "stream of consciousness" thoughts which might be considered valuable later upon synthesis of the data collected.

The structure of the interview was set so as to ask questions in a sequence or thematic model. Because of the diverse processing styles of individuals who have learning disabilities all participants were provided the primary questions in a readable, printed form on a specific color of paper other than white. Whenever feasible participants were provided the interview questions in advance of the actual interview and, as well given opportunities to clarify and paraphrase questions when needed during the interview protocol. All data was collected in a coded, thematic format so as not to disclose any sensitive data. For example, any reference to location was identified as either urban or rural and all reference to services and places of education or employment used a generic identification.

Ethical Considerations

In determining how to identify potential participants for the study confidentiality and privacy became crucial issues. According to GED Testing Service regulations the disclosure of GED candidates cannot occur without their expressed permission (GED Examiner Manual,

Section 11, 2005). Equally, the disclosure of candidates who have Learning Disabilities falls under the same privacy privileges (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). Given these factors, the method of participant identification was one of referral. Local GED testing center administrators and test proctors asked candidates who have Learning Disabilities (determined by a submission of the *Request for Testing Accommodations, Learning and Other Cognitive Disabilities* application) and had successfully completed the GED if they would be interested in participating in the study. Willing participants were instructed to contact the researcher using one of three methods: (a) phone; (b) email; or (c) signing a release authorizing the local GED testing center administrator or test proctor to email the researcher with the participant's contact information.

At the beginning of each interview, all participants were presented with an informed consent form for signature which described the purpose of the project, the interview procedures and timeframe, the inherent risks, measures taken to ensure confidentiality, the benefits of the study, when signed that the participant was granting permission for voluntary consent as a participant in the study, and finally, that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time without question or ramification. Due to the nature of learning disabilities and possible processing deficits of potential participants all informed consent forms and related privacy information were read aloud to the participant by the researcher prior to requesting a signature of the participant.

Every effort to preserve the highest level of confidentiality was maintained. The names of the participants were not used in any data collection; rather, a numerical and alpha association was assigned to each study participant in order to mask all identity. Equally, any reference to specific counties, cities, towns, or GED testing centers was not made. Confidentiality for this

study also extended to references of services, education institutions and employment which was captured using a generic identification. At the completion of the study, the data collected as a result of the interviews has been properly secured and will be archived for the required period of seven years.

Realistically there are always biases and perceptions that needed to be kept in check, not the least of which is the researcher's nature to inherently agree that the system—whatever that stands for—is responsible for the outcome experienced. However, keeping this bias in the forefront during data collection and analysis helped to minimize its effects. Other, more subtle biases, such as pity instead of empathy, or the sometimes natural desire to disagree with what the participant was sharing, were controlled by advance preparation prior to each interview.

Pilot Testing

After development of the interview questions and the observation checklist, both were submitted for review to two renowned, nationally recognized researchers, who have substantial expertise and background in research related to the field of adults who have learning disabilities. After adding these researchers' input, pilot testing of the revised interview questions and observation checklist occurred with three participants qualified for the study. After each of the three interviews, the participants were asked for input as to the flow and understanding of the questions. Participants' comments were evaluated and added as appropriate. Since there were no substantive changes, the three pilot interviews become part of the case study data and the researcher proceeded with the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The application of a postpositivist or qualitative research approach using a descriptive methodology or “descriptive needs assessment research” (Francis, 1988, p. 30) to collect data allowed, in concert with the theories of Denzen and Lincoln who describe this methodology as “multimethod in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter...[a] study [of] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Gall et al., 2003 p. 24). Data analysis provided, as Merriam postulates “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a...phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). The decision to structure the research study after a qualitative methodology provided a framework that contained structure but offered the opportunity for “insight, discovery and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28-29). It was in the analysis of these three substantive elements that a sophistication of understanding of the meaning of this case study unfolded and laid a powerful foundation for future policy, practice and research.

Analysis using this methodology resulted in a thick description of the phenomenon in an effort to understand the current state of affairs relative to the research question and provided constructs for syntheses into themes which could be used to inform future policy, practice and research (Gall et al., 2003). The terminology “thick description” is cited by Merriam (1998, p. 29) to come from anthropology. Creswell suggests this approach serves well in the writing of the research which uses a combined descriptive and thematic format. The descriptive aspect “incorporate[d] a detailed description of people” lending more power to the themes (Creswell 2005 p. 266). Combining a descriptive approach with a thematic writing model allowed for

“extensive discussion about the major themes that arise from analyzing the qualitative database” (Creswell 2005, p. 266).

After reviewing all the data as a whole to gain a holistic perspective, data was coded into issues or themes for interpretation and evaluation. Simple analysis of data from questionnaires was assimilated using a data base management system. Each question was coded and tracked. Themes were identified by the researcher and a case study interview process conducted. As a part of the analysis, individual participant data was triangulated to establish potential corroboration. Data from case studies was collected through an interview process, preserved by digital recording and summaries by the researcher into themes. The researcher conducted all interviews for consistency of data.

Reliability and Validity

“The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2003b). The application of reliability in research using a case study methodology is a difficult one given the uncontrollable variables in a non-static environment involving human characteristics and behaviors (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (2003b) the standard for achievement of reliability is if the researcher, in replication of the exact same study, arrives at the same results and conclusions. Yin (2003b) further states that external validity is “knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study” (p. 37). The concepts of reliability and validity in qualitative studies must be functionalized through the application of rigorous mechanisms that incrementally allow

movement between research design and implementation promoting a consistency of verification throughout the study (Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J., 2002).

The research available describing formal or informal transition planning and supports that contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities was nonexistent in the literature. Given this fact, it was the researcher's intent to provide a collective case study using in-depth accounting of the activities pre- and post GED achievement and to establish, from the participants' viewpoint, the relationship and perceived value of transition planning and support whether such was provided or not. The global desired outcome of these data collection was to identify themes or threads that bind to a baseline of transition needs and wants from the perspective of the adult who has learning disabilities in hopes of informing future program developments and having a multi-level influence on local practices as well as state and national policies.

Of criticality is the construct validity or the degree a course of action used in the study accurately operationalizes the concepts being studied (Yin, 2003b). A set of coded base questions with probes or subparts of questions served as the primary standardized protocol to guide the researcher during the interview. This framework allowed for additional factors and beliefs or issues of interest to surface as a natural generation from the base questions. Given the limited extant literature, the foundation for the formulation of the base questions was analogous to similar qualitative case study research, albeit different subject matter combined with theoretical frameworks as a result of the transition literature available within the secondary education environment. The researcher was also given permission to model questions and protocol after the Gerber and Price Self-Disclosure Protocol (7/04) used most recently by Price

in research done on a Fulbright Award through Edinburgh University, Scotland as well as previously used in the extensive research completed between 2003 and 2006 and summarized in the following literature: To be or not to be learning disabled: Self-disclosure and adults with learning disabilities; Persons with learning disabilities in the workplace: What we know so far in the Americans with Disabilities Act era; and Beyond transition: A comparison of the employment experiences of American and Canadian adults with LD. These researchers reviewed the interview protocol and offered feedback prior to piloting with three participants.

Gathering from several researchers' strategies (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003b) the researcher focused on ensuring reliability and validity by applying consistent operational measures and constructs specific to external and internal validation protocols. Specific, selected strategies were integrated and occurred parallel to each aspect of the study for ensured accuracy and credibility of the reported findings. Given the intent of the study the following strategies were effective in addressing the tenants of validity referred to as rigor or trustworthiness, authenticity or accuracy, and credibility or integrity of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, Yin, 2003b).

It is believed by the researcher, that the strategies chosen were effective in minimizing misrepresentation and misunderstanding, while presenting a clear, more sophisticated picture of the reality of adults who have learning disabilities post-GED activities. The authentication of these methods was that, after rigorous analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the data collected, the codification was constructed in such a manner that the conclusions are able to withstand constructive and disciplined skepticism (Stake, 1995). To maintain the rigor of validity and

reliability throughout the case study process and reporting of data the following strategies were selected.

Given the multi-case approach to the study, a cross-analysis of cases sought to find binding concepts or ideas that could assume generalizability at least within the cases studied (Creswell, 2005; Stake, 2006). The engagement of a process of triangulation among individual cases began with the imbedded protocol of asking the same base and probing questions of each case (Yin, 2003a). In addition a uniform observation checklist was utilized in each case and a journaling process was conducted by the researcher to record the specifics as well as any observations of the case. These data points were graphed using a multi-case findings approach (Stake, 2006) providing an intersection for cross-case assertions and themes.

A process of pattern-matching (Yin, 2003b) using predominant themes from the literature explicitly describing the transition needs of individuals who have learning disabilities and are entering postsecondary opportunities was utilized. This served as a method of understanding the similarities and differences between transition environments and populations who have learning disabilities, as well as purposefully identified any variables or distinctions in the literature when compared to the perspective of the adult who has a learning disability and left the secondary environment.

Ethnographic research requires a “thick description” of case studies in sufficient detail so the reader can assimilate the data and discussion, identify similarities, and transfer such to comparable situations within their sphere of operations and influence (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2006). Collected case study participant data was assembled into a thick-descriptive report including the reporting of negative or discrepant information.

Throughout analysis and synthesis of data the researcher employed informal peer debriefing with researchers whose primary field of research involves adults who have learning disabilities. This process assisted in validation of the typicality of cases and responses within the study.

In order to build a trustworthy case, the researcher assumed the responsibility of describing the experiences of the participants with truthfulness and accurateness. To achieve this outcome, the researcher recognized the need to build rapport in order to gain a level of trust that elicited a meaningful dialogue between the researcher and the participant. This was accomplished by ensuring the interviews were conducted in an environment where participants were most comfortable; recognizing the need for and putting into place possible accommodations due to the learning disability; using appropriate communications skills including active listening and questioning techniques aimed at removing ambiguity so as to comprehend and document the issues and comments accurately; and demonstrating both empathy and sensitivity during the interview as well as in the presentation of data. Case study processes, while needing specific protocols and framework to support reliability and validity were also designed to allow adaptability and flexibility as no researcher can adequately predict all of the variables. As a final point, explicit descriptions of the researcher's assumptions and biases were elucidated at the onset of the study.

Validity and reliability are built on a detailed evidential accounting or "audit trail" of a study and its specific activities (Merriam, 1998). The intention of the researcher was to specifically illustrate through a comprehensive review how participants were recruited, data gathered, themes and patterns acknowledged, and conclusions determined throughout the study.

A study's overall validity is reinforced when a well-built "chain of evidence" articulating precise, meaningful connections between the research questions, raw data, and findings is presented (Yin, 2003b). Gall, Gall & Borg (2003) describe six types of explicit documentation to consider for inclusion in a chain of evidence or audit trail:

[a] source and method of recording raw data; [b] data reduction and analysis products; [c] data reconstruction and synthesis products; [d] process notes; [e] materials relating to intentions and dispositions; [f] instrument development information. (p .461)

The researcher followed these documentation standards and will keep the materials for seven years after the completed study in the event other researchers would want to review them.

Limitations of Methodology and Strategies for Minimizing Impact

As stated earlier, one of the major limitations could have been a lack of participants agreeing to be contacted. Some GED Center personnel may not have had the time or understood the merit of assisting in the recruitment of participants. As these incidents occurred the researcher contacted other organizations to request assistance in recruitment of participants. The researcher sought support from the State of Washington GED Administrator, leaving Oregon and Idaho as viable options if needed.

Another limitation could have been a result of the inherent behaviors and characteristics of participants who have learning disabilities. These characteristics and behaviors can include poor communication skills; problems with directions or getting lost; and time management or scheduling deficits. In the case of poor communicators, the researcher was prepared to reframe and paraphrase questions, asking more in different ways to gather enough data. Additionally, any

participant who felt the need to follow-up at a later date with information because of demand language processing deficits was encouraged to do so.

Finally, there was some concern that the data collected may be such that it could present a poor image of adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs in regards to informal and formal transition assistance. The researcher has made every effort to report the data candidly and ethically without damage to programs and services or to the study.

Research Study Timelines

The case study process was completed over a five month period inclusive of recruitment. Once pilot testing was complete, interviews were conducted as participants were recruited. After the ten interviews were obtained, the compilation of data, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation was completed within an eighteen month period.

CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The elements of transition planning services and activities for adults who have learning disabilities enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) programs are critical. When formal or informal transition services are not available to adult students who have learning disabilities, the impact penetrates all phases of postsecondary activities and can have life-altering affects. Transition refers to

a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community (Halpern, 1994, p. 117).

Researchers have presented convincing data that secondary students who have learning disabilities who have access to transition planning services and activities demonstrate better outcomes in postsecondary activities than those students who do not receive transition services (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind, & Herman, 2003; Grigal, Test, Beattie & Wood, 1997; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994). Furthermore, researchers contend that the absence of transition services and activities promote less positive outcomes for secondary students with learning disabilities than their peers who do not have learning disabilities (Hager, 2007; Mellard

& Lancaster, 2003; Tottle, 2002). However, research addressing the merits of transition planning and implementation activities for adult students who have disabilities, particularly those with learning disabilities who have engaged in and successfully completed the GED is minuscule.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2003 transition planning is mandated for all students who have disabilities enrolled in secondary education programs. There are no regulations for transition planning and implementation activities at the adult secondary education program level. Thus, the transition mandate does not apply to the significant number of students who have learning disabilities, dropped out of high school, and later enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) programs leaving adult students who have disabilities unexposed to needed services and activities. Despite a significant movement over the past several years to provide transitional activities and supports for adult students, the emphasis has focused primarily on transition to postsecondary college education opportunities for students who do not have disabilities. In 2009, the National College Transition Network developed the College for Adults website, which focuses on transition from adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education programs (ASE) to college. The website features a single page that promotes basic transitional awareness for adults with disabilities.

Consequently, the primary purpose of this study was to understand, from the perspective of the adult, what formal or informal transition planning and supports contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities. The underpinnings of the study were to: a) identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within the previously attended adult education

programs; b) establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs; and c) identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development.

Presentation of Data

The data collected from the participants is presented using a descriptive thematic approach. Through cross-analyses, ten themes emerged which are presented within the context of the research objectives and supported by descriptive statements from the participants. The meaning of each theme is offered as an introduction to the participants' voices and a short summation finishes the narrative.

Each of the ten participants was able to articulate a meaningful definition of what the term transition meant to them without prompting or additional explanation from the researcher. Comments followed a clear, universal definition and included: "a switch; a period of change making; going from one situation slowly into another; move from somewhere out; to move from one position into a new one; going from one step to another." Fay described transition as "big steps; graduating from one thing to accomplishing another." Hal expressed his thoughts as "it means when something is turning into something else, a turning over period of some kind." Ian's description illustrated a commonality among the participant responses. He said:

Transition is just going from one place in your life to a next place and I would think transition in my mind has to be a positive thing. I guess transition could be about things but I don't like to look at it like that.

Data collected through transcribed interviews, an observation checklist, and journal notations from each of the ten participants resulted in the following patterns and emerging themes. The themes are the culmination of the significant events and activities that resulted in insightful responses offered by ten adults with learning disabilities who participated in the study.

1. Navigational Bridges
2. Goal-Oriented Behaviors
3. Independence
4. Determination
5. Self-Awareness
6. Self-Defeating Behaviors
7. Support Network
8. Co-Investigation
9. Academic Supports
10. Career Planning

These themes served as the interpretive value from the responses to the three research objectives that focused this study. They are subsequently described in relation to the specific research objectives.

Objective A. identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within the previously attended adult education programs.

Ten adult participants with learning disabilities contributed to the study results; seven were involved in adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE) classroom

programs, or individual adult basic education tutoring. Six participants reported a history of special education services; of those who advanced to high school before dropping out, none recalled having a secondary level transition plan. The data presented two themes in response to the first research objective: navigational bridges and goal-oriented behaviors. These themes have been well articulated in past research conducted on secondary and adult secondary transition programs available or provided when moving from secondary to postsecondary environments.

Navigational Bridges

This theme specifically relates to the elements of a plan or program where students with learning disabilities receive assistance in navigating through specific systems (Center for Change in Transition Services, 2006; Fabian, 2007; Foley, 2006; Hadley, 2007; Hadley, 2006; Prince & Jenkins, 2005; Roos, 2000).

After dropping out of school in the twelfth grade, Ian worked on an external diploma through a secondary school district program but was unsuccessful. He described the experience:

It was an independent study. ...and it just was my handwriting and my Dyslexia and the fact there was one teacher there and you weren't supposed to, you felt weren't supposed to [ask for help] but she didn't really offer direct help, it was more questions over the course of the packet, like if you got stuck she'd help you. But I really needed help, a lot of it because the packets were just weird to me; it's just not how I'd work especially when they were complicated and in depth packets. I need a lot more visuals, a lot more time to process things...so it just really didn't pan out at all; I really didn't like it.

Ian stated he was not aware of any transition processes or post-GED goal development processes that he could have engaged in, adding “I’m sure there was, of course there was, but not that I was presented to or aware of.” He described thinking he wanted to go to college but throughout his adult secondary experience he was never offered any options or next steps; no transition or navigational assistance was provided.

Ian recounted a number of medical resources and special education services provided during his elementary and secondary school experience, but did not reference any resources or services utilized as an adult except recently when he went through a comprehensive career evaluation. He described the experience:

They’ve offered me a lot [of] career stuff and a lot of stuff that I’m finding on my disability and a lot of stuff of what’s going to work for me in the future and what’s not going to work for me in the future and with more education what I could do and...with more education I could still do but would be very difficult; so that’s what I’ve had so far.

Hal, who finished his GED in 1990 or 1991 and had recently enrolled in a two-year college program stated: “There are some services that I should apply for and that’s something that I’m going to have to narrow down and focus on. I’ve heard about things here in the school [from] teachers and counselors.” Hal explained that he was working with the on-campus TRIO Program:

This is my first semester that I’ve worked with them. They can give the tutoring and they have programs in there that help you with the reading online and they help with scholarships for people that are going through for your school and they help you with your goals or whatever.” The TRIO program is a federally funded outreach and student

services program designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO has programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs (US Department of Education, TRIO Home page).

When asked about trying to get into a GED class, Abby shared the following experience. ...I registered for it [GED class]. I scheduled my whole other classes around it and when it came down to it they [the college/GED instructor] said they didn't have a thing for me; [their] exact words [were] they didn't have a chair. So, when I was supposed to start that quarter I was expecting to go into school and it wasn't so. That's when I went to the library and read every book I could possibly bring and bring it to [a private tutor] and said I got to do this.

It should be noted that the library experience was fraught with barriers as Abby has Dyslexia.

In Abby's case, there was no straight line in referrals or transition functions; no navigational supports to assist in accessing the right mix of services. As a dislocated worker who had dropped out of school at age fourteen, more than twenty years prior, she was faced with a maze of tangled training, work, and placement-based services, none of which were coordinated.

Jane recalled after receiving her GED she wanted to go to college. She confided "I was just taking whatever classes, I didn't really know that you could actually go looking at a syllabus; didn't even know what a syllabus was..." Jane described the ability to muddle through and figure things out: "Yeah I think that for me it's survival—got to do it. I don't have any other resources to pull from and I think that's the biggest difference...I don't know where to go." The

researcher asked Jane if, when she received her GED certificate, there were any letters, brochures or follow-up transition related information, to which she replied: “As for letters I don’t remember...I didn’t read stuff that was extra. I never read things that came in the mail...It’s like I had what I wanted and so I probably disregarded the rest—didn’t follow through.”

As a welfare recipient, Eden was in a comprehensive transition program. Her comments articulate what many of the participants had difficulty expressing.

You just struggle. It was just so hard because I hadn’t been in school since I was sixteen years old; when I went back to [school]...at about forty-five or forty-six years old. And everything was just flooring to me—I mean I had to learn how to use computers... Eden believes the comprehensive vocational program run by the welfare system provided the navigational supports necessary to move forward as well as supplied direct access to “whatever resources I needed to get through.”

Gail was in an adult basic education class, which she referred to as a “family” helping each other. She described navigational supports and transition conversations focusing on post-GED goals articulated prior to GED completion. Gail explained that the program secretary took students “under her wing” (Gail being one of them). The program secretary asked Gail early in her time in the program:

...if I wanted to continue, [go to] college and what I wanted to be when I grew up and I told her that I wanted to be a pediatric psychologist and then she helped me do the application for scholarships and I got a scholarship from the Lions Club, so that was going to be my next step...

The researcher asked Gail about her knowledge of resources and services that might be available to her and her response was:

As next step, one I don't know—I don't know of any. As far as housing, utilities, food, and medical care I know where to go for resources on that but as far as education, life planning, I don't know, I'm just learning where to go.

At the time of the interview, Gail was employed in a federal program that will provide a substantial education stipend at the end of her employment contract. The researcher inquired as to whether Gail has access to career counseling as a part of the process under the federal program; her reply was no. She plans to work with the community college advisor when her employment is complete. Her stated intention is to:

...talk to an advisor to say okay what is my next step because I don't want to spend all this award money on something that's going to wind me up with the same spot that I am now, where I don't know where I'm going, where I don't know what I should do, [that] in my mind would be bogus school work because it would be just a career that I'm not really, I mean it would be a line of work that I'm not really wanting but I'm just taking because it's there.

Bess reiterated the same message of struggling to figuring things out.

I've basically done everything on my own all my life. I felt like I've been by myself all my life. I went up there to the unemployment office and I started looking [for work].

Okay now, what is the most important jobs there are that make money? And somebody told me about [vocational rehabilitation]. They'll send you to school and they'll find out

where you're at mentally so that you can go through schooling. So then, I took all my energy and I went towards [vocational rehabilitation].

Bess proceeded to describe the “merry-go-round” or lack of bridging between vocational rehabilitation and industrial insurance rehabilitation programs. She elaborated that she finally recognized that she has to finish services with the primary provider before seeking additional services from other providers.

Dora did not receive any transition planning or navigational supports either. On the advice of a friend, she started cosmetology training right after dropping out of high school only to realize she needed to have her high school diploma or GED certificate before she could complete training and be licensed. While she successfully completed the vocational training, she found herself in a very uncomfortable work environment and ended up leaving the field. Lacking any information or resources about postsecondary opportunities it took her many years of trial and error to find a suitable career direction.

Collin described no available transition services other than those through one of the rehabilitation hospitals where he was a patient for a time. His goal was to enter a union apprenticeship. When asked about how he established the steps he stated “I did things on my own; I mean I've had some [help] you know...this friend kinda making hints but I've mainly done everything on my own...” Collin started in an adult basic education program but because of his learning disabilities, needed significant additional tutoring support in mathematics. After five years of adult education combined with private tutoring, he passed the GED examination. He tells the scenario that occurred after his accomplishment. “I wanted to get in the union...[on the] waiting list [but the union required a specific GED total score]; I scored lower than what they

were asking...” During the five years that Collin studied for the GED examination and laid out plans to apply for an apprenticeship no one suggested he inquire as to whether there were any union requirements to get on the waiting list for an apprenticeship training opportunity. The day he tried to apply to the union to be on the waiting list he was told he needed higher GED scores and one year of high school or college level algebra. At the time of the interview, he had recently discovered a private trades training program and was try to work through the paperwork.

In many ways the described lack of transition plans and navigational bridges or supports can be perceived as no different from any adult who has completed the GED and is trying to transition to the next level of education, training or work. However, there are significant differences when the individuals trying to transition also have learning disabilities that impact cognitive abilities. Learning disabilities are neurological disorders. Having learning disabilities creates a substantial limitation and can make understanding and interpreting what is seen or heard or connecting information with action extremely difficult. Imbedded in each story is the plea for supports, for navigational bridges to accomplish goals.

Goal-Oriented Behaviors

“One needs the desire to excel in order to excel” (Gerber, Ginsburg, & Reiff, 1992, p. 480). Within the context of adult learners, goal-oriented behaviors are actions involving a desire to explore or being curious, seeking to explore, and striving for openness, which in turn activate important strategies and lead to the expansion of problem solving (Rothbaum, Morling, & Rusk, 2009). For more than fifty years, researchers have evaluated the properties of goal orientations, broadly defining such as “frameworks for filtering information, constructing and appraising the

nature of the situation, creating meaning, and guiding action” (Kaplan & Maehr, 2006). Kaplan and Maehr further postulate that based on the literature over several decades it is not unexpected to imagine that goal orientations are simply manifestations of needs as well as values.

The manifestations of needs and values were evident in participants’ stories. When asked what led to pursuing a GED two prevalent patterns emerged: the need for a job and fulfilling a requirement to access postsecondary education. Underlying those patterns were perhaps the more primary reasons such as the occurrence of a significant life-changing event, the ability to provide for a family, specifically young children and pressure from a system, particularly the welfare system.

Abby was a dislocated worker who found herself trying to get her GED because “I couldn’t go, couldn’t go any further and I thought ‘pick up a GED and [a] proper education’.” In Abby’s case there was no goal development as a part of formal or informal transition because she could never get a seat in the adult education class. However, there were some opportunities presented for college training as a legal secretary through the dislocated worker program, which subsequently enabled her to go to college. She described her college experience as one that was appalling.

Pretty much of what the school instructor told me [is] that I needed to be realistic with myself and just quit and so they’d already established that and I got through all classes except transcribing. [Because of my disability] I could not spell or hear or understand the words.

Abby described a myriad of goal-oriented strategies she pursued in order to complete the necessary coursework. They included various accommodations, investigating industry standards,

meeting with the dean of instruction, asking for a waiver or course substitute, and finally petitioning the curriculum committee; however, in the end the associate's degree she had worked on for three years was not conferred.

Collin articulated how he decided to get a GED after a car accident that resulted in serious injuries and trauma.

You know, some friends, they might have given me some suggestions but I think it was more, you know, it was kind of incentive...I'd like to go and finish high school and that's my first step...in getting my life...together...working on my past, my GED cause I dropped high school..."

Collin independently set post GED goals prior to GED completion. "My goals was after I got my GED then I needed to take some college courses; college math and then I could go and apply for this Union apprenticeship."

Eden described a medical condition that required an appraisal of her work situation and a plan. She stated,

I ended up with some physical problems back problems and I was a full time bus driver and it was just hard to sit in the bus and do it all day. So I had to do something different so I began my work search and realized that I was in the minimum pay bracket where as a bus driver I was making a little above that and it was livable. So soon every job that I checked out was minimum pay. And they were even asking for a GED and I was like 'oh my gosh' I'm in a situation here.

Eden independently focused on post GED goals due to medical needs that required a career and job change.

Ian divulged that while there was no goal development for post-GED “I thought I was going to go to college...” He has been exploring his career options through vocational evaluation and counseling in an effort to begin college in the future.

Dora commented: “It [the GED] was to get me into something else out there or some job-work. There was other jobs out there but pretty low ones with particularly hard work.”

Bess too said, “I need a job; you’re going to have to have a GED.” While there was no formal goal setting provided, Bess responded to goal development question with “I mean that’s just the way for me to push myself to next level.”

Fay expressed the guiding action as “Just being able to provide for my child at a later time if I was ever alone.” When presented with the question of whether there was some process or understanding that getting a GED would help do that, she responded, “Yes of course there always is. Even today [if] you don't have a GED [it will be hard] to get a job that pays more than minimum wage.”

Gail entered the GED classroom in her mid-teens. She explained:

I honestly didn't [think I could pass the GED], I didn't; but then Linda told me that things [GED] would open doors would open for me and that I could do it [pass the GED] because I didn't think I could.

When asked what made her believe she could not complete the GED she voiced her fear:

“Because I dropped out of school when I was in eighth grade, because school was hard and I thought it, [the] GED, you had to hurry up and do it...” When asked about formal or informal goal development, Gail stated “...I don't think, I honestly don't think it was part of the

curriculum...” The development of goal-oriented behaviors is clearly articulated by her ability to appraise the nature of the situation, form a new or different viewpoint, and create new meaning.

Jane was never enrolled in an adult education program, but after leaving the last of approximately thirty foster homes, her analysis presented a fundamental desire to acquire her GED. The desire to exist differently simply became a need and critical value.

...people [with learning disabilities] need success, they are anxious about the possibility of failure, so they set explicit goals to work toward. ...goal setting allows adults with learning disabilities to have realistic, achievable aspirations. Goal setting also provides some sharper focus to individuals who have experienced great difficulty in learning...goal setting feeds on itself. Once even minimal goals are achieved, the feelings of success that are bred can be the basis for more challenging goals in the future (Gerber, Ginsburg, & Reiff, 1992, p.479-480).

Remarkable is that the majority of the participants did not receive formal or informal transition services and, as well experienced a significant lack of navigational supports or bridging between opportunities, systems and services. Yet, goal-oriented behaviors manifested by characteristics embedded in needs and values, dominated their stories. While each participant exhibited goal-oriented behaviors, the fact that the goals set were not part of an active transition plan coupled with the lack of navigational bridges appeared to substantially impact or delay progress toward self-sufficiency; in some instances the delays were described to be more than a span of 25 years.

Objective B. establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs.

Three themes became evident from the data in relationship to the second research objective. The first, Independence, describes the desire of the participants in the study to be self-sufficient. The second emergent theme was that of Determination which, even though their experiences were anything but routine is not surprising given the earlier theme of goal-oriented behavior. The third theme central to the research objective was Self-Awareness defined as the ability to recognize one's strengths and limitations.

Independence

As revealed earlier, the reason for pursuing a GED was either to get a job, get a better job, or get training or education to get a job. Each participant, no matter what stage of life at the point of accessing the GED, saw it as a means toward financial independence and self-sufficiency.

When asked what had transpired since acquiring a GED, Ian responded he did not see an “immense difference [now] that I’ve had a GED, but I haven’t done any training yet so I think it’s just about to come into play...” Ian completed his GED about three years prior to the interview. His opinions about the type and relevance of transition assistance was clear: “Well what we did lately, you know, career options, certification options, short term goals, long term goals, figuring out how to be financially stable in the short term, and then working towards the career in the long term.”

Because of her learning disabilities, Abby left middle school but did not pursue a GED until approximately eighteen years later. She described a muddled path of trying to get a GED through Job Corps as a young adult to numerous jobs including grocery clerk, side-hill equipment operator, caterpillar mechanic, district retail manager, and technician at a nursing home and at a hospital. She painted a vivid picture of striving for independence:

Go to work from eight o'clock in the morning to two o'clock in the afternoon at [the hospital] as a technician and then I would go home for a power nap and then would go back out at six-thirty and go work at the other shop from seven [in the evening] to seven in the morning as a [caterpillar] mechanic. I repaired all their machines; I did them [jobs] both full time.

Given Abby's learning disabilities and the struggles over the eighteen-year span, she agreed that there would have been potential value in being able to access transition planning and implementation activities. Independence for Abby can be summarized with: "...I've always taken jobs—look at financially to provide; never did anything in my life that I loved and I always, and I always looked at being able to ah to be able to provide for my children."

Jane told an equally vivid picture about the thirst for independence. Upon departing the last of thirty foster homes at age fifteen, Jane recalled working in restaurants and babysitting. She described her reality a few years later:

Yeah um at some point I was going through a lot of custody battles and just, I was getting drug into court and I just remember wanting to change my life so that I wouldn't be working in the restaurants for my children...and I remember the judge saying 'work two jobs if you have to'... I was [working] two jobs two full time jobs and a counselor just

happened to walk by and asked me how come I haven't gone to school so that I wouldn't have to work two jobs? And I said I didn't have any money to go to school and that's when he told me about...student loans and so that day I looked into it and it was enough loans that I was able to quit my job—one of my jobs and...went to school.

Over a period of several years, she depicted forward movement, receiving an associate degree in business management and transferring to a four-year university. However, she dropped out because “I started to make good money working in construction so I then, I just stopped taking the classes. I didn't need to make that goal any more and worked.”

For Gail, who completed her GED in 1991 or 1992, her pathway toward independence appears to have been substantially slowed by the lack of access to transition planning and assistance. She has been raising a family and elaborated on the present:

Well right now I think we're doing pretty good. We wanted to be self-sufficient and we are self-sufficient; we've been self-sufficient for probably about eighteen months, maybe two years or so. That was a big huge thing. Now again it's just, well to me self-sufficient is not living off the system and we don't live off the system.

She has taken some college classes in early childhood development, Spanish, and Microsoft Excel software, but in trying to enroll full time performed poorly on the college entrance placement testing, a function she tried to complete without requesting accommodations for the functional limitations of her disability.

Bess got her GED in 1980 after dropping out of school around age sixteen or seventeen. She explained that she married young and was divorced by age twenty-five and as a single parent

raised her daughter. Her story again demonstrated how a transition plan or targeted transition activities might have better assisted her.

Um well I found out that data processing and accounting was something that I really didn't want to do...being a young person and sitting down and trying to study was just too over whelming. So from there I went and did a bunch of odd jobs which paid pretty good and uh then I went to flagging which was excellent money. "I've basically done everything on my own all my life; I felt like I've been by myself all my life...there hasn't been a whole lot of 'hey Bess let me help you out'.

Bess's story exhibits the extreme need for independence and the struggle that can occur without a plan or supports.

Collin's need for transition planning and implementation activities underlies much of the misinformation and distress he has experienced since dropping out of school at seventeen years of age, twelve years prior to the interview. His lifestyle after high school was tumultuous and led to a horrific automobile accident from which he is still recovering. He had been denied enrollment in the electrician union and subsequently could not pursue the apprenticeship-training program. The lack of transition support in the adult secondary program potentially prevented him from becoming informed about the entry requirements of the electrician's union system and the apprenticeship training. At the time of the interview, Collin was aiming for financial independence, waiting for his acceptance to a private training program. Armed with better information, he independently sought out on-the-job training, documenting over 1800 hours, to qualify for the private training program. He elaborated, stating, "Well yea I'm independent. Yea

I'm staying with a friend right now until I get back on my feet financially...um which I'm doing the process, working on the career...um so yea I'm there but I'm very independent..."

When questioned about what had transpired since he acquired his GED, Hal described the time immediately following the acquisition of his GED as a time of "All kinds of things [occurring]...Yeah I went to a semester of college back there [Iowa]; I don't know what year, lots of partying...years and times and dates are faded away..." Hal worked construction and lumber millwork before enrolling in truck driving training and working as a truck driver for fifteen years. About a year prior to the interview, he decided to return to school and work on a degree in writing; at the time of the interview, he had already published a poetry book that is available in seven countries. His comments about transitional supports point to a current understanding of value, a perception not present at the time of GED completion. He stated "I am sure I needed all sorts of transitional services [when in the GED class] you know but what do you do?"

Eden worked from welfare dependence to independence graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology the day before the interview. When asked about the value of transition services she spoke frankly about transitioning from a small two-year college campus to a much larger four-year college campus.

Ah leaving [the two-year] college and going to ha the [four-year] college [was] like a little girl lost in the woods. I could have used somebody to kind of hold my hand through that process. And I don't think that it was just simply being a new student. But a new student with learning disabilities! I mean I just had the 'deer in the head lights' when I got on campus."

The researcher asked about transition plans presently, since she had just completed her bachelor's degree. Eden responded,

So I have to first figure what are my transitioning [actions] from school to work...ah if somebody could just sort of help me figure out how to exactly, how to get to where I want to get. I mean [if] something's missing it's hard to pin point exactly what would have been more helpful if you're not aware of what it is.

Fay was also on the road from welfare dependence to independence. After GED completion, she worked as a certified medical technician for nine years. When asked about the relativity or value of transition services she commented:

Just somebody be there to make sure that you follow through, somebody to encourage [you]. My mom was not there for me; she was not a positive role model throughout my life. ...I had no encouragement, no one to push me, no follow-through, no nothing.

At the time of the interview, Dora was receiving social security disability supplemental income. She had completed a bachelor degree and had just been accepted into a professional artist program, which she was recognizing was not a good fit for her. Dora's independence was that of a different kind, more directed toward long-term financial stability. While she completed the GED and a cosmetology program, more than fifteen years later she found herself still searching for a career pathway, that "good fit." "So that was one of my goals, to actually go back to school, find a way to live in this world that was accessible to me." When asked about the value and relativity of transition planning and implementation activities, Dora responded simply: "That would have been more helpful..."

Research on the success attributes of individuals who have learning disabilities suggests that individuals who have been successful “cut the cord” of parental supports and gradually decreased dependence on others much earlier than their peers who were not successful (Raskind, 2009). Interesting in the studies of the ten participants is that in all but one case the “cutting of the cord” or reduction of dependence occurred extremely early, somewhere between mid- to late adolescence and was typically the result of home environments containing considerable dysfunction. The ability to think and act independently is one demand of adulthood (Trainor, 2002). The attributes of thinking and acting independently were very much evident throughout each story albeit in most cases transitional assistance was nonexistent. Material to the theme of independence, primarily financial independence and improved living situations, was that the span of years from separation of parental or guardian supports to the completion of the GED to present levels of self-sufficiency was extraordinarily long.

Determination

The word determination relates to a set of behaviors or characteristics that emulate qualities of firmness of purpose or direction; a fixed purpose, route, intention or tendency toward an object or end result (Modern Language Association, 2009). In each of the stories, it is evident that participants have high levels of purpose; a resolve to do better, even in the face of adversity and significant failures. Experiences that would have devastated some seemed to spark a kind of true grit and fortitude.

Collin found himself in a precarious situation after his automobile accident: no high school diploma, no GED, no training, no college, no job. He described therapists and medical

providers challenging him as to whether he could obtain a GED, fulfill the algebra requirements and pursue an apprenticeship. His reply was decisive:

...there's a fire in my heart." Again, he reiterated that transition assistance and support would have been very helpful, adding "...complex and stuff—I kinda figured it out on my own; I got out there and investigated on my own and I kinda had it figured out in my head what I needed to do and stuff.

It took Collin about five or six years to figure it all out but by the time of the interview, he was twenty-one on the wait list with the private electrician training program.

Halfway through her associate degree it was discovered that Eden did not have a GED. In order for her to transfer to a four-year college, she needed a GED. She talked about the pressure of needing the GED to move to the next level: "I mean I just, it was just a darn struggle and it was just all I could do to get through it." Nevertheless, get through it she did; the day of the interview was the day after she had graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology.

Dora experienced a myriad of hurdles and disappointments because of her learning disabilities and the lack of transition planning. Her determination carried her through each undertaking from cosmetology school to the military to being an artist with many twists and turns along the way. Her learning disabilities substantially affected her college education and interaction with her peers: "[they] just didn't want to work with me because I only wanted to have oral directions." Dora expressed an explicit or implied lower expectation of her from many teachers, employers, coworkers and friends but added, "I'm so...proud I've been able to grow...and even have a vision like this [as an artist] or pursue it; not that I have yet but I'm on my way."

Fay left high school during the tenth grade to raise her six-year-old sister. Over a twenty-year span, she has dealt with a significant learning disability. She explained, “I can't understand anything, I read it, I don't get it. I might look at it; I have to read, write, highlight, read again a couple times.” When asked if she thought the reading disability impacted her progress she emphatically said:

Oh it held me back for a long time, for 14 years before I came back to school. I had no interest to learn, I wanted nothing to do with it. ...pretty much I worked in a nursing home on the east coast, before I moved here, for nine years and then I get grandfathered in; you know what I mean; everything you learn in a nursing home is hands-on, totally kinesthetic learner you know what I mean. And then I move here and it's not like that; like I don't have somebody here that just holds my hand and brings me along. It's sink or swim here; you need to get out there and do something. I was petrified to come back to school, petrified. I lost sleep, I was sick, [a] nervous wreck. ...for a year I was on medication.

Fay's determination is remarkable. She has completed her GED, worked her way from fast food restaurants and nursing homes to working as a visitation supervisor, mediator and advocate for children. She completed an Associates of Applied Science in Human Services degree at a two-year college where she was honored with the Human Services Award of the Year and at the time of the interview had transferred to a four-year college, weekend program in human services; all while raising two elementary age children. She attributes continued determination and perseverance to the transitional supports received through the TRIO program at the two-year college.

At the time of the interview, Ian was participating in a recovery program and beginning to explore his next transitional steps. His description of some of his needs and the things he would pursue demonstrate evidence of his acceptance of the belief that transition planning and implementation activities are of value.

I definitely want to try to figure out vocational rehabilitation services; but I'm still at that point where...I honestly am not entirely sure what I need yet or what I want yet. So I guess, I guess as far as transition service and be more specific about what's important to me, at this point is for people to present things to me and to open my eyes to what is available through career services and through special education services and through teachers. Basically just being, you know, kind of like eh, there's this out here if you ever want to try that. That's what's important in my transition right now is utilizing what I don't know about.

Jane was displaced because of work-induced back injuries coupled with severe reactions and allergies to chemicals used on construction sites and in office environments. Her comments amply sum up her inner drive and determination, “[you] start all over again but I can do it!” She has returned to school using an on-line environment and is pursuing a bachelor degree in social service. She observed she is still struggling to understand the services and supports available to her. Her thoughts on the relativity and value of transition services are directly related to a need-to-know, as she did not know how to use the assistive technology supplied, was not aware that there were certificate programs she could have entered, and had a hard time describing her learning needs and disabilities. “I think it's really important to individually take a look at the person's circumstances...helping a person get some of those resources...”

Abby demonstrated a total resolve that finally got her to her end goal, which was working in a hair salon as a “successful hair designer.” Through many vocational and college programs she felt as if teachers and service providers were “...brushing me off but for a person that has a learning disorder instead of them saying we’ll find a way to help you get through this.” Abby described the numerous times she would arrive at the GED testing center or one of her vocational or college programs, ready to take the test only to find the requested and approved accommodations would not be set up.

Hal talked about determination from the perspective of his learning disabilities, stating, “But that's the thing, if I could sit down and read for more than five minutes at a time that would be a very good thing; it's kind of hard for me to stay on track like that, I want to get up and move around.”

After fifteen years of truck driving, he entered a two-year college program. At the time of the interview, he was just beginning his third quarter and had connected to the TRIO support program. While Hal believed that there is value in transition assistance, he was not sure how relative transition planning and implementation of activities would be until a person was ready. His comments articulate his opinion:

“...I am sure that there were some services out there that were sitting there waiting for me to take advantage of them...but that didn't happen. Well when you're sixteen and you want to get drunk or high that's probably what you're going to do.”

Gail left school in the eighth grade at fourteen years old. She described a fourteen to fifteen year period of school and work activity, struggling to overcome her learning disabilities. She explained her learning disabilities:

I have a hard time with comprehension. If I read something I don't understand; like kind of like your instruction thing, if I were to read out on my own I would probably just get the first two paragraphs or the last two or the one in the middle. I wouldn't understand it. Her four daughters, each of whom has a learning or pervasive developmental disability, shaped Gail's determination. Her insight was incisive:

We been through enough, we been through enough through our childhood, through our adolescence, and through teenage to where in the adult world don't treat us as if we are still there [child or teen]. I think that's a big thing; it just takes our butts back. Yeah it just puts you back in that frame of mind and eighth-grade or sixth-grade. You are not accepted.

Bess began developing resolve and determination in elementary and middle school where "I was ridiculed a lot" for an inability to perform. As an adult, she was diagnosed with mathematic and spatial learning disabilities. Bess told two stories.

Here's a funny thing. I've been a bus driver since I was like nineteen years old and ah I did school bus which was fine because I was given a little scheduled route and I knew what to do every day. Well I switched to commercial bus driving and...I could handle [drive] the bus perfectly but then all of the sudden I'm supposed to go from city to city and town to town and figure out how to get there and which street and what direction. I don't know how many poor passengers I've had lost with me because when I looked at the map, I just, it looked like a big mess of spaghetti to me. I couldn't figure out up from down, back from right, north, south, east, west; it was just all a big mushy mess. ...I actually did this job for the better part of my life not

realizing that I was dealing with a learning disability was why I couldn't read the map and the other bus drivers could read the map.

Her second story about getting her GED shows even more determination.

I mean I just, it was just a darn struggle and I...it was just all I could do to get through it. Now, what was helpful was the encouragement to have faith in myself because a lot of people I believe that are raised up with learning disabilities, their self esteem is rock bottom because they have been ridiculed, they've been teased, they've been chastised, ah they've been disciplined for being stupid and when you go out in the world and face the world feeling like you're stupid it's difficult to have the faith in yourself to try things. Having that encouragement of somebody telling you that you can, you can be successful, you can; giving you license to try it. Like [the tutor] did with me in that math test. Just telling me, you know, do what you've always done; just go do it. Go do it, you can do it, just try. I couldn't move to say I'll, I'll take the GED test.

Bess described the tutor repeatedly stating that she could do it; finally, she took and passed the GED test. In finishing her story, Bess said "And if she hadn't of done that, almost, almost beat it into me, I probably never would have taken it."

Noticeably, goal-oriented behavior and determination are parallel attributes, the demonstrations of which depicted the enormous energy levels required by the participants to move through each stage of activity. Raskind (2009) postulates that individuals who were successful "could fail, pick themselves up and get going again (p. 2)." In concert with the research, participants in the study were forced by life events or inherently knew when to switch gears or change direction; but none quit.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses. Raskind (2009) states: "successful people were very aware of their strengths and limitations (p. 1)." Raskind further purports that a key element was the ability to "compartmentalize" the disability, seeing the difficulties as only one facet of themselves. According to Gerber, Ginsberg, and Reiff (1992), self-awareness leads to reframing which involves "reinterpreting the learning disability experience in a more productive and positive manner" (p. 481). "It clearly allows for one to identify strengths and parlay them into success experiences, while still being aware of weaknesses that have to be mitigated or bypassed" (Gerber & Reiff, 1996, p. 98).

Hal talked about his learning disability limitations but then shifted to his writing, stating, "I am like in my own little world especially when it involves that writing thing; I am in my own magical spot." Hal elaborated about his self-awareness: "[I operate] definitely on the spiritual side of life—not religious." He agreed with an interpretation from the researcher of spiritual being defined as in tune with yourself and your surroundings.

Eden voiced strengths in working in emergency management and international humanitarian aid; so long as she could effectively manage the stress factors in those stated environments. She also had a clear understanding of how her disability manifested, sharing the limitations: "It's a disability that makes me get overwhelmed a lot. I mean the word overwhelmed just kind of, just packages it all up; to where too many things come at me, I pretty much shut down." As reported earlier, Eden had just graduated with a bachelor degree.

When asked about the limitations of her learning disability, Fay exclaimed "Oh it's sad! It affects me hugely because I just don't feel normal, you know what I mean? It's very sad because

sometimes I mistake things and I, you know, become defensive.” Fay described strengths that included observation and her ability to respond to what she sees; she is able to assess her needs as well as her children’s and those with whom she works as a mediator and advocate.

Dora described the limitations of her Dyslexia, sharing that while her experiences learning in the various adult environments were very difficult, she learned many things about her strengths and weaknesses.

I am learning that I can accomplish things. I’ve learned a lot in the last few years after I recognized this; I do things differently...my eyes have been open to different ways of doing things where before I thought that there were just, for instance, one way or a certain kind of standardized way to do something. So if I couldn’t do that way, I’d just shut down.

Dora spoke of a clearer understanding of her learning styles as well as learning strategies like how to memorize. In college she was encouraged to journal about her interests and what she liked doing.

So I journaled a lot through a program that first year, in a program called Transcending Practices and it was focused mainly around culture, yoga and poetry. I kept dropping the poetry because it was very humiliating for me; I had difficulty with haiku—why did you write that like that?

Dora’s self-exploration through journaling led her to understand her abilities in and love of pottery. She expounded, “I was amazed I could do it; it wasn’t a hard thing for me to learn, I picked it up faster than the other, like beginning students. It was like, wow, I really did find myself.”

Since acquiring his GED, Ian explained he has gained “a lot of self respect.” Ian described being re-evaluated as an adult for learning disabilities. He elaborated,

It answered so many questions, it made me...realize a lot of things I never knew about myself. I didn't want to deny that I have a learning disability anymore because it fit...you know it affects my handwriting and it affects, it doesn't affect my reading too much...spelling and grammar is a big issue with it and sometimes I forget to put words in. ...It doesn't affect me in my personal enjoyment of life; it's just my speaking is clear, I'm very vocal apparently and so I try to stick to that a lot of times.

Ian continued by describing the journey from special education his present orientation about his strengths and limitations. He said:

...I definitely made things a lot harder in high school...I had to work that much harder because I would refuse certain types of assistance like note takers and things like that. And then as I have gotten older and gotten in the college a little bit starting to take those things and now school is becoming, still a challenge, but it is definitely like a normal challenge instead of like an above and beyond challenge—so it's just been my thick head having to understand that that's what I need.

Teachers stated from the second grade that Abby was having problems reading and writing, but Abby reported teachers also said she did not apply herself. Abby's true self-awareness came when a vocational rehabilitation counselor asked her why she did not pursue something that would make her relax and be happy.

Yeah so I finally went back and I do, I want [to admit] it's been rough finding certain jobs that work for me but right now I'm my own happy friend back working again, working on yeah working with women all day long...

As stated earlier, Abby is a hairstylist at a salon.

Jane recounted the accommodations and compensations she has put into place since she learned of her chemical sensitivity and allergies. When asked about her learning disability, she articulated, "It relates to processing information and sequencing, it has to do with auditory processing auditory information so it requires me to have things written down." Jane spoke more about compensations and self-awareness as she described the changes she made in her college classes, choosing those more suited to her interests and learning system.

Gail knew many things about her learning disability, including the significant difficulties she encounters with reading comprehension, writing and math, adding, "I don't know math from China." She further amplified the limitations she experiences within the scope of her work in her AmeriCorps position:

I know that when I bring up a computer or website and there's a whole bunch of info I won't even try, I don't even try. I block out and I just try to catch the little pieces or figure it out from the pictures. If I hear something then, if it's like you and I reading, that I can understand it, but I don't—I won't remember when I walk out the door. ...if I take notes 90% of the time, I don't get all of the notes that I needed to get, and I feel really stupid to ask again so I just try to figure it out, but that doesn't always work... Gail also spoke about the current comfort level she has with her supervisor and co-workers, adding, "I don't want to leave, I don't want to go."

Bess spoke about her artistic side and her desire to pursue landscape design: “I’ve really got a creative side because of my learning disability; and I’m really good at it [the creative side].” Bess had a basic self-awareness of her learning disability, describing that it affected her in reading and mathematics.

Collin described his internal drive and motivation that has been propelling his path toward electrician training. He confided, “I always had learning disabilities before and then when I got in the accident that didn’t help things.” When asked about the impact of his learning disability, Collin said:

Um, it’s, it’s an impact, big impact because it slowed me...I mean I need the repetition...I have a hard time comprehending things. I’ve gotten a lot better, I just have to exercise my brain and stuff...but ah, it ah, it has, it has slowed me down—it has slowed me down.

Each story has buoyancy. The participants’ depictions did not just present a measure of their knowledge of self-awareness, but clear appeal to know and explore more. In several cases access to transition services and activities were supported by comments of relativity and personal value as each completed the GED and moved to the next opportunity.

The case studies of the ten participants contained explicit and implicit characteristics and behaviors of Independence, Determination, and Self-Awareness: three separate themes with comprehensible inter-woven descriptions. Participant dialogue generally presented with positive movement including advanced levels of independence and self-sufficiency, stronger determination and goal-oriented progress, and heightened self-awareness.

Objective C. identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development.

Five themes became apparent from the data in connection to the third research objective: Self-defeating Behaviors, Support Networks, Co-Investigation, Academic Supports, and Career Planning.

Self-Defeating Behaviors

Nicholls (1984) suggests that heightened self-awareness can direct thoughts and actions of competence (or incompetence). Each participant highlighted the need for assistance in reducing or eliminating those behaviors that internalize as negative thoughts. “Adults with learning disabilities have spent years developing low self-esteem as a result of the sense of incompetence in meeting their own and others’ expectations” (Barton & Fuhrmann, 1994, p. 84).

Abby tried to study for the GED numerous times. She explained: “I tried it at Job Corps and tried it everywhere and then I was pretty much ashamed of my learning disorder because I didn’t know how to go about explaining to them [teachers].” She described formally requesting and being approved to have accommodations when taking the GED tests, however, upon arrival at the testing center on days she was scheduled to take a test, the accommodations would not be set up. Several times she took the GED tests without the requested accommodations because, in her words: “I felt overwhelmed and left. I thought it meant I couldn’t do it.”

Gail had incredible insight about the impacts of self-defeating behaviors.

...back then [mid-1980’s] when you're put into special classes you were not really a person in everyone else's eyes, you were something of a freak or a ‘retard’ as they say

it... Pressure is really bad when you're labeled...to where it becomes really strange to even fit anywhere.

Collin looked at things from a different perspective.

I was being hard headed, stubborn; wasn't asking for the accommodations which um, now I look back [and] I wish I would have because I probably would be where I wanna be today if I'd taken em up on the opportunity.

He described frustration with those trying to assist:

...they were trying to tell me, okay you can't do it, you can't do it. I'm just like, okay, well kiss my...this is something I gotta [do], God's got a plan for me and, and ah, he ah. I came this far you know and I'm stubborn you know, I got my mind set you know. I mean, I feel that we're all programmed to do certain things you know and I'm the labor type...

Hal disclosed his thoughts about programs providing assistance.

[Provide] some down to earth, real counselors and teachers. Someone who can get on multiple levels of people's personalities and the talk to them like a human being without degrading them or [accenting] whatever goes on in school that takes the wind out of someone's sails. You know, that's what it did for me. You can only feel so much before, you know [you say], whatever, you don't care...

Eden illustrated her learning disability:

...it's like somebody's, you have an internal person challenging you. You're being challenged and it's like...I can do this I can do this and then you get to a point where the reality of it is well, there's a little part here I can't do, I just can't do it.

She further described living with a learning disability as:

You just struggle...I didn't believe in my heart that I could get a bachelors degree. I didn't believe it. I mean I just, it was just a darn struggle and it was just all I could do to get through it. Now, what was helpful was the encouragement to have faith in myself, because a lot of people I believe that are raised up with learning disabilities, their self esteem is rock bottom...and when you go out in the world and face the world feeling like you're stupid, it's difficult to have the faith in yourself to try things.

She added that critical is "Having that encouragement of somebody telling you that you, you can. You can be successful, you can. Giving you license to try it."

Dora did not have the requirements for graduation. Thus, she dropped out of high school because she was "too embarrassed, I just couldn't go. It was impossible really to get any extra credits and my advisor, the counselor, actually said I shouldn't bother...I totally accepted it because I thought I was so dumb." Dora alliterated several scenarios depicting her struggles as an adult learner commenting at the end, "I know, I used to feel like a failure and it's really hard to get past that."

Ian had parents that were strong believers in for him. He explained:

[My] parents advocated that I needed help yet I didn't show massive signs of struggle, I just struggled. And so they didn't really know a lot about what to do with me and there's a lot of highly specialized people called into the school...it ended up, it was just kind of a guinea pig situation at one time.

Jane's experience was slightly different from the outside.

I just didn't buy into how I was being treated but I was definitely treated differently and I was singled out and plus too I didn't really realize that there was a problem because I didn't know. I just didn't believe them you know [when I heard] you're not listening or you're not paying attention because I knew how hard I was trying...

Jane added she thought "...talking to them [people with learning disabilities] by themselves and just being really encouraging to them and telling them the good things that they've done and giving them the assistance..." was critical. She believed that if people were encouraged to open up they might "try harder" rather than "just give up..."

In the seventh grade Bess was made to stand and read aloud to her peers. She shared her inner feelings:

I cried, I still cry over it. And then they told my grandparents that I...she's [too] retarded to graduate [from] school. She can't learn. Something's wrong with that girl. I mean the only reason I'm not embarrassed about the teacher saying that I was retarded [is] because I've said it enough times. And it was, it's a stigma. Retardation was a stigma. And now I say, hey call me it and I don't care as long as it gets me help. You do what you got to do because I gotta get what I need. So call it pink or purple, but do whatever you need to do; but this is what I need.

When asked about how her learning disabilities affect her, Fay responded:

Oh it's sad. It affects me hugely because I just don't feel normal, you know what I mean? It's very sad, because sometimes I mistake things and I you know become defensive and the instructor that told me that I have this massive learning disability. I just don't comprehend. He, it was just kind of sad because I knew I had it I pretty much. I'm very

outspoken. He says you compensate your learning disability with being so outspoken and that's how I've survived he said.

Fay further shared that her learning disabilities significantly affected her GED testing to the point that she took the tests over two or three times for each of the five tests to get the passing scores. As an afterthought she said “Yes, I probably even cheated to pass it; no I'm not kidding, I am so sick of doing it.”

The portrayal of each story provides a substantive view of the feelings and emotions from the viewpoints of the ten participants. Adults with learning disabilities need to feel successful, and they are apprehensive about the possibility of a continuing pattern of failure (Gerber & Reiff 1994, p. 209). These stories provide critical detail when framing transition needs and wants for future program development.

Support Networks

Research addressing the success attributes of individuals who have learning disabilities suggests that those individuals who have been successful actively seek support from other individuals (Raskind, 2009). Equally, all ten participants left the secondary school system because they were failing or were not receiving support from the education system. This thematic description engages conversation about two forms of support networks, the delivery of service or education and the worth of personal connections.

When asked what types of transition services might have been helpful after acquiring her GED in 1991, Fay commented:

Just somebody be there to make sure that you follow through, somebody to encourage [you]. My mom was not there for me; she was not a positive role model throughout my life. I had no encouragement, no one to push me, no follow-through, no nothing. ...At this point I have great friends and a great support network.

Jane received support from her children.

...they helped me with everything. The writing, the computer, I didn't even know how to use computers. They were like a huge and they were just there when they were younger and you know they were just happy to help me.

Jane also called upon former employers and friends for help. Jane felt it was:

...really important to individually take a look at the person's circumstances...and just follow up even if it's a weekly thing until you get, get it going on your own because I get side tracked so much especially with work and things like that or even helping a person get some of those resources done; making that phone call for the person because it really was so much that I didn't get it. I didn't get what I needed when I was there [school] because I didn't know or I was too overwhelmed to make all those phone calls and make those appointments.

Jane elaborated about the assistance she received from her vocational rehabilitation counselor:

"...she asked me about my appointments and...calendar...but she's not negative about it, very kind and I think it's important." Jane shared the following about non-school and work related resources:

...I just didn't know to go do those things...you know they're there, but you don't really know where to get them... I didn't know to go to the newspaper. I didn't know to go to

an office...I just had no idea. Just all I knew was work and school and the kids and I didn't know where to access any of the information.

Ian's support came from a personal friend and mentor.

There was this one person that was really apparent about me wanting to get my GED and then my family was too, but they were a little more hesitant than he was..." As for future supports, Ian stated "I definitely want to try to figure out DVR [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation]."

Hal noted once in college he had been able to access regular assistance and support. He added however, "...I am sure that there were some services out there that were sitting there waiting for me to take advantage of them..." Hal also felt it was important to have access to "...down to earth real counselors and teachers..." available to talk and support students.

Gail spoke fondly about the support she received in her GED class.

Oh definitely, yes and if you needed help with one subject and [the tutor] wasn't able to help you because she was either doing her reception secretary job, then us students, we would help each other. ...what inspired me to complete it [the GED] was that there was a lady in our center that was 82 years old. So I thought, with all due respect if she can do it I can do it.

Gail spoke further about recognizing whether teachers and providers truly cared about her and about building trust. She stated when these attributes are missing,

I'll look for somebody else and I know that causes some problems but it goes back to that label. You know, no matter who you talk to, you're going to get labeled; but whether they labeled you in a positive or they label you in a negative, that's where I figure out okay if I

am going to take it further with you or I am just going to say to hell with you and find somebody else...

Gail articulated frustration in not knowing more detail about available resources. "You have somebody that you know says hey, this is available to you, that's available to you, but there was no, there was no information, no way of getting information."

Abby gave a different kind of insight. As a parent she stated "...it bothers me that when it comes down to high school or stuff like that I have no clue and I have to lean on my husband." Her concept of a support network that addressed future transition needs and wants was based on the premise that she was not the only person who did not go to high school, and as such believed that the support network concept should assist others in similar situations, providing information and resources.

When asked about assistance and resources, Bess expounded: "There hasn't been a whole lot of hey Bess let me help you out." She believes that a support network could assist in identification of resources as well as "Somebody that would come by and look and you know [tell you] you're doing a really good job on that."

Collin said it would have been extremely helpful if he had been better supported in his decisions to pursue the electrician trade. He also shared if "...it wasn't for [the private tutoring facility] offering the scholarship at that time...I wouldn't probably be where I'm at today, I wouldn't actually."

Eden described a provider who was a support to her during her GED program.

She ah will take the time with you; she'll just look right at you and she'll tell you, you know that you can do this. I mean she just, she is the 'you can do this kind of go team go' but she would

just talk almost on a soul level to where she'd help you...time for you to take a step forward and you know, work beyond this and you can do this, and this is what's out there waiting for you if you do this. You know this is going to open up all these doors for you and just sort of just walked me through; made you start thinking about your life.

Eden also suggested, based on her personal experience that a mentor program would have been very helpful when she transferred from a small two-year college to a much larger four-year college.

“...like a little girl lost in the woods. I could have used somebody to kind of hold my hand through that process. Ah, maybe like a mentor to even go with you for your first couple trips or something.”

Dora found an established support network through the disabilities services office at the college.

...they worked really well with me and accommodations...and I referred back to them often and even, this is an example, when I would have an episode and I couldn't express to my faculty or something the difficulty I was having or the anxiety, they were fabulous.

They were open and they respect that we're different...

Dora also spoke of several services in her community that she was able to utilize, even though it was difficult to figure out what was available to her. She also identified that a support network of individuals who have learning disabilities and have gone before her would be nice to draw on for support and experience.

A study done by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (2006) purports “While some students coming out of ASE (Adult Secondary Education) programs only need help with the mechanics of the transition process, many others need various forms of

academic, personal, and career counseling.” The study highlighted four demonstration projects, one of which designed their transition model to include transition advisors, which parallels with the unified responses from the participants of the need for support networks.

Co-Investigation

Co-investigation can be defined as the exploration or “active effort to find something out” (Modern Language Association). Throughout their stories, the participants underscored a strong basic desire to be understood and recognized, by those providing instruction and services as well as family and friends. Ian frames, what is a very poignant, thick dialogue with the statement that the “individual [with the learning disability] needs to be a part of the whole process.”

Abby emphatically expressed dismay over the lack of understanding people presented regarding her learning disabilities.

I’ve never been that way, I never will be that, it’s not who I am you know. I don’t want to be, I’m not what you call special, but they expect if you can’t read and write you’ve got something, you know, mentally wrong.

Gail was very forthright with her comments, beginning with:

...only someone who's in that situation and really lives it can understand.

...unfortunately, people label people without even knowing who they really are, but that's their loss. To just believe that we are not stupid...I know it's hard for people to understand other people with disabilities and special needs. Me being one, it was extremely hard for me to understand my own daughter with special needs...but then I

learned to look at it in a different way and say okay she's not going to be like everybody else but she's going to be who she is and I got to trust her with that. ...it's hard enough for us in school. Okay, everybody is supposed to be like everybody else, but we are not—we are not! [If] the teachers, the instructors, the office people, would just open up their eyes and say okay, Gail is different from Jennifer; Jennifer is not Gail; our names are not the same; we don't come from the same mind. Just have faith that Jennifer can do what Gail can do and Gail can do what Jennifer does, just in different ways. That's all they need to do is just have patience and wake up, you know, seriously wake up!

When Gail was asked for a few final words of wisdom, she gave freely and simply. She emphasized the need to ask questions and find out what works best for the person. She illustrated her point by sharing:

...paperwork is intimidating...I'm intimidated by the applications and the paperwork.

Because you took the time to read it to me and even to ask which color I wanted [questions were presented on several different colors and participants could choose which they preferred], that was really cool. That's where you build the, 'yeah I'm different but it's okay with you that I'm different', so it's cool.

Jane's comments paralleled others.

...I mean, just back to understanding what their [the person with the learning disability] problem is. You know, maybe they're having family problems or they've got a drug problem. You know all that stuff, finding that out in a confidential manner what people can tell you, 'I've got this problem'. Because I saw a lot of people [who] don't talk...they're afraid to say, you know, this and that. You get locked into this system and I

just don't think that's helping anybody, you know, by labeling them and punishing them for seeking help.

Ian adds to the perspective of getting to know someone and understand his or her mode of operation.

...actually ask that person: What do you want? I think too many people assume that they're [the person with the learning disability] not capable of understanding that or making that decision and so instead of getting what they want, they're told what they need and I think that's a big mistake.

Ian also spoke about the need for compromise between education and services and the person with the learning disability, highlighting "...there needs to be a compromise, definitely, because I don't know everything and you guys don't know everything and so that's the way it is."

Bess put things in a different perspective. "...a lot of people don't know themselves that well...thus guided exploration was important." However, she framed her viewpoint with phrases such as "Don't be afraid, don't be embarrassed" illustrating her concern that a level of comfort between the person with the learning disability and the person doing the co-investigation had to be the first step.

Eden turned the question back to the researcher.

Well look how much you've learned by sitting down with me and asking these questions. So just to sit down and do some kind of a survey with them of what they think could be beneficial. And then again it's kind of hard because it's like if something's missing, you don't really know exactly what you need.

Eden's statements exemplify foundational elements within the theme of co-investigation.

Fay, with her knowledge in human services, suggested that the baseline of transition needs and wants would be different for each person. She expounded, “I would hope that I didn’t have to establish that for them [provider/teacher]. I would hope that they could see that.” The researcher inquired, “Okay, how would they see it?” to which Fay responded:

Well if they see a struggle, you know; if they are working closely with the students that are adults and they see struggle or no follow-through from the student or no interest from the student you know, hopefully they would be observant enough to know that something is not right or they need more help...

Dora described a process of co-investigation that created a triangle between disability student services, her instructors and herself. “They were open and they respect that we’re different and they really tried to help us help ourselves and I did learn a lot I wouldn’t have known...”

Co-investigation has significant meaning to the participants in the study; from building trust to being valued to learning and exploring what one might not know about. Craig Michaels captures the quintessence meaning of co-investigation: “from a community vision and person-centered operating paradigm, it no longer remains feasible to dismiss the vocational goals or desires of young adults as simply unrealistic without assisting them to actively engage in a process of learning and self-discovery” (p. 206). The overarching message conveyed by the participants was not to assume that people with learning disabilities know what’s available and how to access it.

Academic Supports

In a learning environment, the function of academic supports is to assist the student in understanding and using methods and techniques to compensate for the limitations that are the direct result of the learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities must address distinctive challenges as a result of the functional limitations of their disability. Taking advantage of academic supports accessible in classes and programs is one of the ways they can successfully access and move through the coursework or program (Hadley, 2007).

The environment of much of adult secondary education is that of a self-paced, independent study methodology. This approach presented problems to several participants. Bess voice this concern and offered:

Maybe a week of, ah teachers going through the booklet with them [students] so we could kind of skim through it and you could find out what your needs were so that you could do the easier parts either first or last.

Jane gave several suggestions to remove the possibility of intimidation when testing or learning in a group setting. "...just put up temporary screens where a person can feel comfortable with whatever they're lacking in..."

Abby stated she tried to get her GED several times, using a self-study method through a variety of venues (classrooms, television and videos, workbooks) but because of her learning disability found these self-study approaches very frustrating and ineffective.

...you get a teacher sitting at the desk...and if you go up, everybody's there [watching].

...for someone like me, I needed to watch them [teachers] do each step and ask questions

to learn and not separate what you hear from there to there because everyone has a different learning style and that was not me; couldn't do it.

Abby also described the emotional experience when reading to her children. "You know to have a four year old and sit there...with her; I read to her but I still struggle with some of the book."

Academic supports need to be connected to the student's needs and levels. Ian described being in classrooms with:

...people that had severe, severe, severe learning disabilities and I was one of the first one's...that I needed help, yet I didn't show massive signs of struggle. I just struggled and so they [teachers] didn't really know a lot about what to do with me."

Both Fay and Hal accessed academic supports from the TRIO program. The supports received were specific to student learning needs and covered a variety of reading text online, writing, computer skills, and tutoring in other areas as well as external assistance such as scholarships and financial resources.

Fay commented, TRIO has provided a lot of workshops and have been beneficial for us that had hard times in specific areas." Hal followed with "They help you with your goals or whatever; I need like tutoring which I get here at the school..."

Gail described the need for supports outside the education system.

...the first time I took a driving test it took me almost 8 tries before I passed the test...but then I didn't know that they had a verbal thing. It [driver test] was all written and it was a sheet of paper with a whole bunch of questions and I didn't pass it. Here in Washington I took it twelve times before I was told that there was an audio [version].

Dora summed it up eloquently when she said:

Now, I am brilliant in a different way than what I would have expected. They [teachers] do keep saying, you know, be yourselves and do, and do it your own way. But I think if they just right up front state that they are open, but you need accommodations, ...I mean do that. ...if they [teachers] could step back and say, and if anybody needs a different way, then they can given [that]. ...if somebody could just suggest some things that were possible accommodations or if they had a list like the name of the books...that I have about people with learning disabilities—so many different accommodation ideas, the different ways of doing things. Maybe if they [teachers] even handed out a handout at the beginning; different in a way, but we recognize that these are possibilities ...but if you have any these needs we're willing to be flexible.

The participants described the academic supports theme fulfilling two interlocking roles: support in education classrooms, training programs and life skills as well as emotional support. Learning disabilities do not dissipate upon exit from secondary school; rather they persist in different ways presenting new challenges (Roffman, 2000). Adults must comprehend the benefits of using supports, be familiar with the assorted signs that point to needing assistance and become skilled at accessing the help needed (Ford, 2007). “Programs are most effective when they are targeted to the specific needs of the adult learner. They must provide individuals with all the skills they need to function in daily life” (Sturomski, 1996, p. 269).

Career Planning

In order to capitalize on opportunities for employment, individuals with learning disabilities should seek the best possible job match (Roffman, 2000). It is difficult to impossible

for adults with learning disabilities to recognize and articulate key occupational interests and see them leading to a career of some kind (Ford, 2007). By the end of each interview, there was definition about the potential value of career planning as well as the impacts learning disabilities may pack in accessing and benefiting from career assessment.

Ian described his situation and concerns, clarifying that his desire is in ...figuring out how to be financially stable in the short term and then working towards the career in the long term. ...I'm very lost in the sense of what I want to do with my life permanently, so I'm going to be trying this computer certification for six months, because it's only six months, and see how I like the jobs that are presented to me after that. So I guess, I guess as far as transition service and being more specific about what's important to me at this point is for people to present things to me and to open my eyes to what is available through career services...that's what's important in my transition right now is utilizing what I don't know about.

Collin who has encountered significant struggles over a long-term period expressed that figuring it out on his own was rather complex. "I got out there and investigated on my own and I kinda had it figured out in my head what I needed to do..." He agreed career counseling might have been of some value, so long as it was focused on his goals and needs.

Abby talked about her participation in the dislocated workers program, a program available for individuals whose jobs are no longer in demand within an area. "I went through the dislocated workers program which had a lot of writing and a lot of computers and had a lot of reading and stuff like that..." She elaborated, stating she worked hard to meet the expectations and did so without supports or accommodations, because she believed that was what was

expected. Abby described taking a career interest and placement test “So many times and you notice that I should be either a police officer or librarian. Yeah, yeah! Me a librarian. Come on...” She further articulated that she always prioritized her job choices based on financial stability, not strengths or passions. “...never did anything in my life that I loved... This is the first time I have ever done anything that I love doing. ...right now I’m my own happy friend...”

Fay went through career interest testing as well at the local workforce office. Her results—she chuckled: “I should have a farm worker, shipbuilder, cotton picker or something; not a human service professional!

Jane recognized that career planning was important. “It would have been something, I know now, like a guidance counselor to say... ‘give me your goals’ and make it not to be so complicated.”

Bess added “...some people need classes in goal orientation.”

Eden, having just completed her bachelor degree was more direct saying:

...if somebody could just sort of help me figure out how to exactly, how to get to where I want to get. I mean something’s missing; it’s hard to pin point exactly what would have been more helpful if you’re not aware of what it is.

Gail emphatically supported career planning to eliminate “bogus school work” which she described as:

understanding what works for you and not wanting to take bogus school work because you don't want to be where you're at now. You want to be in something you want.

Because I’ve been taking bogus jobs to get there and it's not working. I'm 38 years old

and I'm not where I want to be, as in work wise. Probably a guidance person, someone to say...where do you see yourself in four years and how can I help you get there?

Gail talked as well about someone who guided step-by-step.

...if I did it step-by-step I'd be there a lot sooner. I always seem to take the harder steps first and then try the easier ones later but then I get boggled and then I get caught up in one when I should have done two in order to make three easier instead of four to make two harder, which is where I am at [now].

Dora wants to be a socially conscious artist. "The message is about people that are left out in our society." For Dora career planning feels overwhelming, something she is not ready to begin. "I don't even feel that if I ask for help..." wants and needs would be understood.

"The characteristics of learning disabilities tend to have broad impact within employment environments" (Roffman, 2000, p. 279). The comments of the participants describe that impact relative to pre-employment counseling and career planning. In the book *On Their Own*, Author Anne Ford provides insight from a conversation with a young man.

I had not idea what interested me or what I wanted to be. Finding out what interests you is one of the most difficult things of all for someone with LD, especially if you have had a long history of failure (p. 95).

This quote is cited not to imply a belief that any of the ten participants has failed or is a failure. It is but to echo the struggles that each felt throughout the time between leaving the secondary education system and the interview.

Additional Results

It is important to identify a few additional results suggested as a result of the responses of the participants. In this study, their association to the research objectives was not as significant as the identified emerging themes explicated above. Still, they are important to acknowledge.

Even though none of the participants was ever engaged in a transition plan of a formal nature, all had affirming opinions about the value of transition planning and a desire to make such available for others who will go after them. The interview process seemed to heighten their sensitivity around their own needs from both a practical and emotional perspective. It also exuded a sense of disgust that such needs are not being addressed within communities of practice.

The knowledge among the participants of resources and services was at varying levels; most participants were familiar with such at what could be construed a moderate level. Most participants however presented an implied understanding and did not display an explicit internalization of resources and services known; that is when to engage, how to engage and where to engage.

Responses generated a tenant of substance abuse, alcohol and drugs, on both the part of several participants as well as mothers, fathers or both. While it is recognized that prenatal substance abuse can create learning disabilities and that a causal effect of having a learning disability may be substance abuse, the discussion of a familial pattern of substance abuse and learning disabilities is predominate.

Finally, there were instances where participants revealed strong concern that the premise of ability versus disability is not one readily embraced by people who do not have disabilities.

The conclusion was evident in their minds; systems should change focus, honoring assets and capabilities and not center on the disabilities.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to realize, from the viewpoint of the adult, what formal or informal transition planning and supports contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities. The question was based on four accepted principles: (a) secondary transition planning for students who have Learning Disabilities has been proven, in research to have positive effects; (b) there is a significant number of secondary education students who have learning disabilities who do not complete high school, many of whom later enter adult secondary programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE) , or General Education Development (GED); (c) there are no standards or protocols for transition services at the adult secondary education program level; (d) research is minuscule when discussing transition planning and implementation activities for students who have learning disabilities who have engaged in and successfully completed the GED.

Because it is not reasonable to suppose that transition services at the adult secondary level are necessary or even desired, the study involved critical analyses of the voices of ten adults who have learning disabilities to gain an understanding of the following objectives:

- a) identification of whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within the previously attended adult education programs;

b) establishment, from their points of view, of the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs; and

c) identification of a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development (for adults who have learning disabilities and are engaged in adult secondary programs).

The intent of Chapter 5 is to present a cogent overview and discussion of this study. This will be done in three parts. The first part will offer a brief summary of the study findings highlighting significant practical and theoretical implications, relevance and types of literature reviewed, and the methodology used. The second part will offer conclusions that present the study findings in a broader, conceptual framework. The third and final part will present specific recommendations from analyses of the study data together with recommendations for future research.

Summary and Discussion of Results

Summary of Study

The impetus for this study germinated from a twofold platform. Research purports that in the United States upwards of one-third of all public secondary school students with disabilities fail to graduate (Swanson, 2004) and of that one-third, about two-thirds to almost one-half of the number of secondary students who have learning disabilities leave school before graduating (Cobb, Sample, Alwell & Johns, 2005; Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004; Lichtenstein & Zantal-Weiner, 1988; Mellard & Lancaster, 2003; 26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 2004). Research further supports estimates of adults who have not

completed high school who have learning disabilities who enroll in adult literacy and basic education skills classes or General Education Development (GED) programs within conservative ranges of 15-40% to as high as 50-80% (Ross-Gordon, 1987; Ross-Gordon, Plotts, Joesel, & Wells, 2003; Ryan & Price, 1993; Vogel in Vogel & Reder, 1998; White, W. & Polson, 1999). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (revised 1997 and 2003) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 clearly articulate mandated transition planning for all enrolled students in secondary special education programs who have disabilities. On the counter side, there are no mandates for transition planning to occur in adult literacy, basic education or General Education Development (GED) secondary programs for adults who have disabilities.

The framework for transition exists within the secondary education system for students with learning disabilities who remain in high school. However, that same framework collapses when an adult with a learning disability enters an adult secondary program. The barriers preventing students with learning disabilities from successfully transitioning from high school secondary to postsecondary activities and the attributes needed to promote success have been widely researched (Alamprese, 2005; Hart, Pasternack, Mele-McCarthy, Jimbrich, & Parker, 2004; Kavale, 1996; Kravets, 1994; Skinner & Linstrom, 2003). By comparison there is a substantial lack of data and information about the activities and effects of transition services in adult literacy, basic education or General Education Development (GED) programs for adults with learning disabilities, because the concept of transition planning in these environments, is comparatively new and limited studies provide little insight. Moreover, not much is known about adults with learning disabilities who transition from GED completion to post-activities in postsecondary education, career and technical training, or employment, especially from the

perspective of the adult (Gittleman, 2005). Gerber corroborates these circumstances unequivocally by stating, “Unfortunately, [secondary/IDEA] transition planning does not help those who have dropped out of school” (Young, Gerber, Reder & Cooper, 1996, p. 10).

Almost 1.5 million adults (excluding English as second language [ESL] learners) were enrolled in adult secondary programs in 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, February 2006). Given the estimates cited earlier of students enrolled in adult secondary programs who have learning disabilities, one could speculate with some degree of accuracy that an estimated 350,000 to 1.1 million has some form of learning disability. As contrived, one of the intentions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 (revised 1997 and 2003) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is to promote opportunities for success through transition planning and activities in preparation for employment, independence and self-sufficiency (Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003). Longitudinal research articulates the demonstrated positive outcomes of students with learning disabilities who were exposed to transition planning (Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind & Herman, 2003; Wells, Sandefur & Hogan, 2003; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Benz, Lindstrom and Yovanoff (2000) documented that “the combination of time in the [transition] program, paid work experience, and completion of transition goals—with completion of four or more transition goals—have an especially powerful effect” (p. 523). These high school and longitudinal data combined with the reality that IDEA secondary transition planning mandates do not apply to adult students who have learning disabilities, dropped out of high school, and later enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) programs were the impetus for the study. The inquiry is about whether adult students who have learning disabilities who are unexposed to transition services could indeed benefit.

This ethnographic study investigated ten adults between the ages of twenty-two and fifty-six who have learning disabilities. The mean age of the participants was thirty-nine years of age. Three were males and seven were females. Seven were White, one White/Hispanic, one Puerto Rican, and one Black. Each of the ten participants had successfully completed the General Education Development (GED) and all had learning disabilities creating a homogeneous sampling for a bounded case study. Of the ten participants, eight dropped out of high school after the IDEA became law and the mandate of transition services in secondary special education programs was in place; two dropped out before the advent of IDEA. Compiled demographics of this sample are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Compiled Demographic Data

Characteristics	Responses									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Participant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Age	42	53	29	37	56	36	38	36	22	45
Ethnicity	B	W/H	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	PR
Gender	F	F	M	F	F	F	F	M	M	F
Grade left school	8	10	11	11	9	10	8	10	12	9
Age left school	14	16-17	16	17	16	15-16	14.5	16-17	18	15
Age completed GED	34	25	27	20	53-54	19	21-22	19-20	19	38
ABE / ASE / Tutoring	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Used GED accommodations	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Reason pursued GED	S	S	S	S	J	J	J	J	J	S
Some college classes	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
AA/AS in process	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
AA/AS completed	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
BA/BS in process	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
BA/BS completed	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Employed	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
Received special education	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Under IDEA Transition services required	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Received transition services	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
Living independently	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y

Note. Letter correspond to the first letter of participants' names, e.g. A= Abby, B = Bess, C = Collin, D = Dora, E = Eden, F = Fay, G = Gail, H = Hal, I = Ian, J = Jane; B = Black, W/H = White-Hispanic, W = White, PR = Puerto Rican; F = Female, M = Male; S = School, J = Job; Y = Yes, N = No.

The study purpose and the three objectives of the research were developed from a thorough review of the literature concentrating on transition planning and related services for students who have learning disabilities in high school environments as well as adult students in literacy, basic education and General Education Development (GED) programs. In both the high school and adult student arenas, transition from secondary education to postsecondary education, career and technical vocational education and training, and employment literature were reviewed. A collective case methodology using a formal interview protocol consisting of twenty-four open-ended questions was created to conduct this qualitative ethnographic case study. Participants were recruited through the GED state administrator office, GED testing centers, community colleges, and Payne & Associates, Inc. In a setting of the participants' choice, private, face-to-face oral interviews that allowed for interrelated follow-up questions, clarification and dialogue with participants were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. An observation and behavior checklist was developed and used immediately following each interview noting key elements and characteristics consistent with predominate themes from the literature review. To accommodate for participants who had diverse processing needs, the result of the learning disability, the researcher supplied the primary interview questions in a readable, printed form on four different colors of paper other than white. The researcher also asked each participant at the beginning of the interview if there were any accommodations needed and encouraged dialogue when questions or vernacular was not understood.

The transcribed interviews, data from the observation and behavior checklist and journal notations made after the interviews served as the primary data sources for the research. Each question asked by the researcher was triangulated using cross analyses and pattern matching to search for shared events, activities, and processes from the perspective of the adult who has learning disabilities that resulted in emerging themes that would bind to a baseline of transition needs and wants in an adult secondary environment.

Ten themes emerged from the data that seemingly address the research question and related objectives.

1. Navigational Bridges
2. Goal-Oriented Behaviors
3. Independence
4. Determination
5. Self-Awareness
6. Self-Defeating Behaviors
7. Support Network
8. Co-Investigation
9. Academic Supports
10. Career Planning

Table 2 presents a graphic representation of the identified themes relative to the specific research objectives. It was identified, that while individual variations in responses were represented within and among the ten themes, there were clear patterns of shared actions, behaviors and experiences.

Table 2. Research Objectives and Emerging Themes

Research Objectives	Emerging Themes
a) identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within the previously attended adult education programs	Navigational Bridges Goal-Oriented Behaviors
b) establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs	Independence Determination Self-Awareness
c) identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development	Self-Defeating Behaviors Support Network Co-Investigation Academic Supports Career Planning

Discussion of Results

Objective a) identify whether transition services were available and provided in an informal or formal manner within the previously attended adult education programs.

Interview questions were the data sources to investigate the participants’ engagement in any aspect of transition services, specifically in adult secondary education programs. Each interview began with an exploration of the definition of transition to assure the researcher that the questions regarding transition services would have meaning and relevance to the participants. Questions concerning how participants found out about adult secondary and GED programs and

what led participants to want to get a GED resulted in an understanding that for the most part, family and life circumstances combined with informal information led to either a structured program provided by a school or college district or organization or independent self-study. Three of the ten participants went to the GED testing center and acquired their GED certificate without entering an adult secondary education program. The remaining seven entered adult educational experiences that, for the most part were void of formal transition planning or goal-oriented assistance other than passing the GED. Further questioning about the experiences of informal transition assistance, accessible pre- and post-GED goals development, exposure to resources and services, and experiences participants were involved in at the time of the interview created a rich dialogue that described many differences. Underlying these difference two common threads were explicitly identified: the need for navigational bridges and the universal display of participants' goal-oriented behaviors.

In each interview, participants spoke intelligently about their learning disabilities and the experiences they had encountered between leaving the high school education environment and the present. It was an interesting and frequently troubling factor of the study to recognize that each of the participants had significant invisible learning disabilities creating substantial barriers to education, work and opportunities for success, especially as each was able to respond with extensive detail to the questions posed and clearly exhibited goal-oriented behaviors throughout the time of their self-directed transitions. The poignant and sometimes painful descriptions of their paths led the researcher to ponder whether the described difficulties in navigating the adult secondary system and transitioning to postsecondary education, training, and work was more difficult because the right questions are not asked of individuals when first enrolling in an adult

secondary education program. Adult learning theory and research suggests that adults have “accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education” (Lieb, 1991). In an adult education professional development training program entitled *Effective Instruction for All Adult Basic Education Student Including Those with Special Needs*, developer Neil Sturomski emphasizes the significance of “initial student and teacher meetings” elaborating that the first step when working with adults is to gain their confidence through a five to ten minutes structured interview. His viewpoint is that by asking positive, strength related key questions the adult secondary education instructor initially learns enough about the student in order to meet specific needs and directly improve the educational experience (Sturomski, 1997). Perhaps the emphasis of targeted interviewing students to understand more about their backgrounds, experiences, needs and goals should be introduced as a best practice in adult secondary education programs.

Four of the ten participants enrolled in an adult secondary program after being out of school between 20 and 38 years. The remaining participants had been out of school for one to eleven years. The longer participants had been away from school, the more explicitly they described fears about returning to school as well as the difficulties and struggles upon entry into adult education secondary programs. These feelings and behaviors combined with special education dropout data justify the need to develop dropout recovery programs specifically for students with disabilities.

Assistance in navigating adult secondary education environments and systems was another element that rose to the surface. It was perceived that navigational assistance would have been easier to access if the participant knew what was available and could articulate what he or

she needed. In most situations, this was not the case. Instead, an underlying trepidation was that if one asked or articulated perceived need it might not be understood or received well, or would inconvenience the instructor or program. Many adult secondary education programs use an independent, self-paced study model within the framework of a classroom with an instructor who can assist as requested. The premise is that each adult student enters the program at a different education level and needs different things in order to achieve goals. This independent, self-paced learning dynamic appeared to foster feelings or perceptions that participants should be able to learn and progress without much assistance from instructors, thus further feeding the fears and trepidations while continuing to diminish access. These concerns suggest the need for initial and ongoing transitional assistance that addresses the non-apparent and cognitive needs of adult learners with learning disabilities.

The current notion of transition in many environments is one of resource lists and referrals. The needs of adults who have learning disabilities are frequently neither well understood nor acknowledged. This makes for inconsistency in student progress, discouragement on the part of instructors and students, and poor retention rates. Participants repeatedly articulated their frustration regarding the lack of options, personally directed trial and error methods, lack of coordinated assistance, and the deep struggles and energy it took to keep things moving in the right direction.

Each participant specifically identified the desire for an articulated path, a navigational bridge that provides assistance in navigating through the complexities of each specific system. The literature supports this concept to ensure success for all individuals transitioning from high school to postsecondary activities. The difference in these participants' circumstances is that the

learning disabilities presented substantial barriers to processing and reasoning functions that made comprehending, applying and evaluating in the absence of a transition plan and implementation activities extremely difficult.

While each participant could have benefited significantly from navigational bridges to accomplish goals, even in the absence of such, all ten participants exhibited goals-oriented behaviors. The primary reason for each of the participants pursuing adult secondary education was to complete his or her GED, which was a pre-requisite for college admission, training and employment. The literature suggests that in the absence of transition plans, achievement of goals is difficult for individuals who have learning disabilities. Adult learning theory expounds that intrinsic values rather than extrinsic motivate adults (Merriam, 2001). An important conjecture from the events and activities of the participants that led to acquiring a GED is what is referred to as “learner initiative.” Learner initiative is described as the development of goal-oriented behaviors and characteristics driven by the learner’s acceptance of responsibility and desire to control the planning, implementation and evaluation of the activities and processes connected with the learning need (Heimstra, 1998). While participants clearly agreed formal transition planning and related services were of vital importance and were missing in each case, each participant exhibited undeniable ability to transition independently to the next level or stage with general informal assistance. The question that will remain unanswered is whether formal transition planning and services inclusive of navigational bridges would have substantially shorted the length of time and energy it took for each participant to transition to the next level.

Objective b) establish, from their points of view, the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and implementation activities (whether provided or not) during adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs.

Again, structured interview questions together with objective follow up and probing techniques gave way to a level of understanding not fully represented in the literature. At the center of the dialogue was the aspiration to validate, through the voices of the participants, the perception that adults with learning disabilities need and see true worth in being able to access transition planning and services. As stated earlier, the literature only minimally speaks to the concepts of adult secondary education transition planning and services for adults with learning disabilities and does not specifically address any established need or want from the perspective of the adult who has learning disabilities.

To introduce a framework of understanding, several demographical questions that addressed the age and grade that the participants left high school, as well as why each of them left, created the backdrop for the center of the information. Additionally, at this juncture it was important to understand more about the specifics of their learning disabilities: when diagnosis occurred, how it impacted learning overall and more specifically the GED process, and whether accommodations were known about, accessed and used when taking the GED tests. These questions led to open and descriptive information about their school, training and employment experiences prior to, during and after accessing adult secondary education and GED programs. The heart of the dialogue was to uncover the types of transition services that would have been most important pre- and post-GED completion.

The participants articulated a common thread in their stories, which can be summed up as: not knowing what one needs to know, so how does one know? Learning disabilities are regularly referred to as processing disorders. While these processing disorders commonly affect reading, writing, mathematics, verbal expression and receptive language, they are also known to substantially impede higher order thinking skills. Thus, more frequently than not an individual with a learning disability will encounter a range of difficulties involving the functions of problem solving, critical thinking, insight, planning, organization, association and generalization (Johnson & Blalock, 1987). The participants universally described these characteristics and the related behaviors throughout each of the interviews, particularly expounding on the consequences of various deficiencies. Of critical interest was an observed disconnect between the manifestations of the participants' learning disabilities and the effects on their ability to plan and execute. The frequency of reference to this fact was generally constant, yet many times without comprehension of the connection to potential deficiencies in higher order thinking skills. For many individuals with learning disabilities, deficiencies in higher order thinking skills lead to a frequency of substantial gaps in performance. These gaps occur as a result of not always being able to adequately process and connect implicit information (McCue, 1994). Several participants illustrated this in their descriptions of progress or forward movement, explaining that the first step of realized progress was figuring out what was happening, which usually followed the event or experience, occurring as more of an after thought or learned post-exposure; certainly not at the moment of occurrence. The second step following the realization was a need for guided or facilitated help, someone to assist but not enable or do it for the individual. Without exception, each participant echoed this premise, painting a vivid picture of how

incredibly difficult it is to recognize what is missing or what should occur if one is not aware or exposed to what it is.

This condition is further compounded by the non-apparency of learning disabilities, the invisible nature. Instructors and counselors may sincerely believe that the individual who has a learning disability has processed and connected disseminated information and understands how to use the received information. However, as described by the events and experiences of the participants, this is frequently not the case. Thus, the need for clearly designed transition plans with explicitly stated goals, objectives and steps.

Most generally, transition plan development and services are based on a set of premises about the wants, needs and desires of the individual. For example, transition planning involving postsecondary education articulates the steps involving placement and entrance testing, financial aid, classes needed for a certificate or degree, and so forth. Transition planning for training or work is directly related to a set of pre-determined competencies that an employer or training program requires. It may be safe to presuppose that, for the most part, the general transition plan development and provision of services assumes that adults know enough about themselves to see where they fit, and what they are capable of doing. Given the nature of learning disabilities and the descriptions of the events and activities through the stories of the participants from the point of exiting high school to the time of the interview it is comprehensible that this assumption cannot be applied universally. Moreover, while each story was fraught with twists and turns, unique to the participant, there was a significant commonality. That commonality was the need for a dynamic transition plan that builds explicit links between the strengths, needs, wants, and desires of the individual and the transition points of education, training and employment, but

only after the individual has had adequate exposure and experiences to make competent, well-informed judgments and decisions.

The participants highly embraced the relativity and value of transition planning and related services in adult secondary education programs as evidenced by their personal determination and self-awareness. There was an unequivocal sense that their levels of success were based solely on the need for independence, their unwavering determination and resilience, albeit gut wrenching sometimes, and their openness to self-awareness and commitment to growth and development. Their stories were amazing and the researcher could only wonder what accomplishments might have occurred if transition planning and services been available. The critical element that surfaced in each story is access to individualized transition plans that meet the unique needs of the individual. The second observation is that due to the substantial impacts of the learning disabilities, there is a central need to provide adequate exposure and authentic experience, which should in turn become the driver of a transition plan and services. Finally, the development of the steps and details of a plan appear to need a much higher level of support when the plan is for an adult who has a learning disability than a peer who does not have such.

Objective c) identify a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development. The last of the objectives in answering the research question was extremely insightful.

Even though only two of the ten participants received some level of informal transition planning and services, each accentuated the importance of such in future development of programs. Participants openly engaged in an active dialogue about the types of transition services

that, from their experiences and perspectives, would be important to make available to adults who have learning disabilities and are enrolled in secondary education programs. The themes of self-defeating behaviors, support network, co-investigation, academics support and career planning emerged from the participants' stories to create the backdrop for some adjustments in thinking.

Current adult secondary education transition practices employ a regularity of “get and do” methodology. In other words, adult students are presented with resources and opportunities and expected to work semi-independently to independently through the steps, making competent choices along the way. While the themes recapitulated academic supports and career planning, which are common elements in most general transition planning functions, the emerging element was the need for transition planning activities and services to be front-loaded with exposure and experience to authentic environments. The premise for most participants was that self-defeating behaviors diminish when meaningful, explicit activities and events form the foundation of the plan. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for the essence of transition planning to focus on the adult's strengths and accommodate for the limitations caused by the learning disability, a process that can further minimize self-defeating behaviors.

The America Poet, Audre Lorde is quoted to have said: “There are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt” (Great-quotes, n.d.). This statement articulates the internalization and interpretation of the final two themes emerging from the stories. Most of the transition literature as well as longitudinal studies conducted with high school students who have learning disabilities explicitly address the need for the presence and use of support systems. The literature also frequently references the imperative requirement for individuals with learning

disabilities to be active participants in the quest of establishing a “goodness of fit” between their strengths and limitations and education, training and employment choices. Gerber, Ginsberg & Reiff (1992) referenced the term “reframing” meaning to recognize, understand and accept the disability and develop a plan of action to accomplish predetermined goals. Even federal laws such as the IDEA require that students with disabilities be actively engaged in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Transition Plan development. Concurrently, research continually cites situations where parents, families, counselors, teachers and many others enable or “do for” individuals with learning disabilities rather than facilitate exploration and guide an active effort to reframe and find the “goodness of fit” (Lavoie, 1994; Lee & Jackson, 2001; Roffman, 2000; Silver, 2006).

Embedded in each participant’s story is a consistent message of the want to be unconditionally accepted; to be an equal throughout the whole transition process. This message underscores the themes of support networks and co-investigation. The desire to be understood and recognized as competent adults is like a flame burning brightly with no threat of being extinguished. Over and over messages of looking at adult education students who have disabilities as individuals, helping to identify their strengths, being treated as their peers who do not have disabilities, and giving praise for accomplishments, no matter how small or insignificant echoed throughout the stories. The researcher asked participants to recall any influencing persons or processes that affected their adult secondary education process. In each case, there was a definite influential, sometimes transformation event or person; in some instances these were positive and uplifting, in other cases not.

Co-investigation aptly articulates the relationships desired through the participants descriptive chronicles. This concept, not found explicitly in the research portrays an equality and respect between two or more individuals, in this case an adult who has a learning disability and an instructor or counselor. Co-investigation and collaboration are vernacular not typically heard or written about in the adult secondary education world. Sturomski (1997), in his professional development series *Effective Instruction for All Adult Education Students Including Those with Special Needs* refers to the process of the student and teacher co-investigating as an equal partnership; the instructor is gaining knowledge about the strengths, needs, wants, and desires of the student and visa-versa. This concept is consistent with the evolution of adult learning theories, which postulates a mosaic of foundational theories embracing independent self-concepts, the ability to direct his or her own learning, vast life and learning experiences, alignment with social roles and responsibilities, and problem oriented with a desire for immediate application of knowledge (Merriam, 2001). Participants suggested instructors in an adult secondary education program must recognize that neither they nor the adult with learning disabilities know everything; thus embarking on a co-investigative process that addresses strengths and creates a meaningful transition plan is vital.

Participants in the study clearly identified several baseline factors they believe should be primary to adult secondary education transition planning and services:

1. minimize embarrassment and remove the stigma in the education environment of having a learning disability;
2. recognize that most adults with learning disabilities can describe, albeit maybe not eloquently, what works when learning;

3. eliminate the independent, self-study and self-directed models in programs as participants who experienced them cited them as frustrating and ineffective;
4. connect to the student's needs and levels using their strengths and attributes;
5. develop plans that facilitate and guide exploration for "goodness of fit"; and
6. provide ample opportunity for networks of support, mentoring, and praise.

Lastly, participants voiced a need for developers of transition programs to recognize that each plan and respective activities and services will be different for each student, especially those who have learning disabilities.

One final note: despite the circuitous pathways and the time spans between leaving the secondary school system and the interview, all ten adults were moving progressively toward successful outcomes. Four individuals were engaged in various college classes, one was pursuing an associate of arts degree, one had recently completed a bachelor of arts degree, and three were enrolled in four-year college programs. Of the ten, four were employed, one was looking for work, and one was awaiting placement in an apprenticeship-training program.

Conclusions

The outcome of the research was to identify, from the viewpoint of the adult, what formal or informal transition planning and supports contributed to the post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities. Ten themes emerged from the data which can be generalized to form a conceptual framework for transition planning and services for adult secondary education students who have learning disabilities. The research focusing on transition planning for adults with learning disabilities is virtually non-existent. However, there

is available transition research that focuses on in-school and out-of-school youth with learning disabilities. There is also substantial research that explicates the heterogeneity of learning disabilities in adults and follows with articulation of specific characteristics, manifestations and behaviors. When considering these elements, the themes extrapolated from the study data parallel with the literature from the field regarding much of the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

In examining the literature, the variables contributing to successful transition outcomes for adults with learning disabilities illustrated similar themes as data collected from the study. However, the transition implementation framework appears to be different. Some of the literature depicted a model that used an external approach to implementation meaning that, the systems adults with learning disabilities transitioned into regulated the activities and services, and as a result, were in control. Other research targeted to youth and adults with learning disabilities highlighted the development of internal processes involving building skills in confidence, communication, self-advocacy, self-determination, goal-oriented behaviors, self-directed responsibility, decision-making, resilience, persistence, and social skills, as well as knowing and applying compensatory strategies that could reduce the limitations of the learning disabilities.

The data from the study validated the concepts of external and internal controls showing consistency with adult learning theory research, which hypothesizes that the core of adult learning theory is “learner initiative” (Heimstra, 1998) and self-directed learning (Merriam, 2001). Participants described the best and most productive environments as those where they were in control of their learning and processes. The themes described through their stories involved goal-oriented behaviors, independence, determination, self-awareness, reduction of

self-defeating behaviors, academic supports and career planning, all consistent with the literature.

What was inconsistent with the literature was the notion that adults with learning disabilities are able to self-direct and initiate based on external models that rely on a resource identification and referral approach. Three themes, while not new, emerged with variable differentiation. Participants engaged in substantial conversations describing experiences that illuminated the criticality of internal processes needed for learner initiative and self-directed learning to be of value. Explicit needs for navigational bridges to assist navigating through systems, support networks to enhance resource and referral models and foster personal connections, and co-investigation to relieve assumptions that adults with learning disabilities are supposed to know what is available and how to access it were evident.

The data from the study mirrored and expounded on each of the ten themes, giving more credibility to a conceptual framework that acknowledges the heterogeneity of learning disabilities and the need for interwoven approaches that integrate the strengths, needs, wants, and desires of the adult and are able to respond with flexibility and individualized approaches. Furthermore, the data from the study begins the processes of establishing relativity and value to the rationale that those who provide instruction and services to adults with learning disabilities should not only apply the concepts of andragogy and self-directed learning within the context of transition planning, but should be prepared to offer a universal learning approach that moves toward a modeling and facilitator role (Center for Change in Transition Services, 2006; Koller & Holliday in Vogel & Reder, 1998; Murray, 2003).

The astounding element for the researcher was the poignant descriptions of stigma related to learning disabilities and the continued and perpetuated description of myths. The evidence of concern on the part of each participant was evident, again in the stories and emotions portrayed during the interview. Unfortunately, these concerns were consistent with the literature. The one redeeming difference was that at the time of each interview each participant could describe positive experiences that negated some of the stigma and myths. However, who is to say what leads to anyone at any time assuming others' low expectations (Anderson, 2004; Hatzes, 1996; National Council of Disability, 2003).

Recommendations

The study was aimed at understanding and identifying, from the perspective of the adult, the formal or informal transition planning and supports that contributed to post-GED activities and outcomes achieved by GED graduates who have learning disabilities. The objectives included identification of the post-GED outcomes adults who have learning disabilities; identification of available formal and informal transition services within previously attended adult secondary education programs; the relativity and perceived value of transition planning and services during enrollment in an adult literacy, basic education skills or General Education Development (GED) programs; and identification of a baseline of transition needs and wants for future program development. The explicit nature of the data highlights substantial need and sound rationale for transition planning and services in adult secondary education programs for individuals who have learning disabilities. The data further suggests that external models

consisting of exposure to resources and referrals may need to be developed differently in order to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

The study has begun to identify the level of importance and value of transition planning and services within the adult secondary educational environment for adults who have learning disabilities. The data from the ten participants puts clarity around what would be useful to them and perhaps to others. It is anticipated that this data and the following recommendations will assist in beginning to change perceptions and provide input into future research, policy formation, and program practices.

Recommendations from the Data

The themes that emerged from this study suggested several considerations that warrant the attention of the adult secondary education community. The following recommendations are presented in categories of theory, practice and research and were developed as the corollary of a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the data developed throughout the course of the study.

Recommendations based on Theoretical Considerations

Recommendation 1.

The disparity between the high school secondary transition mandates under the IDEA and the lack of such within the adult education secondary system must be addressed. Of those enrolled in high school special education services and eligible for transition planning, students with learning disabilities comprise the highest dropout rates. The reasons for leaving high school systems are numerous and root causes are deeply embedded in a variety of circumstances. The

primary reasons for the participants' leaving high school were because they were failing or were not receiving support from the education system. Other influencing factors may have been parental substance abuse, and significant family dysfunction. To have an absence of transition planning and services for adults with learning disabilities in an adult secondary education program is to suggest that the need is only evident at the high school, adolescent level that is a premise neither the literature nor the data support.

Recommendation 2.

Move away from learning models that are independent self-paced models and focus on remediation. Of those participants who entered an adult secondary education classroom environment, all stated they struggled to learn. Some left, returning years later to struggle again in the same learning environments. The literature addressing learning models for adults with learning disabilities specifies the need for well-structured levels of academic support that focus on strengths and attributes in order for student to make reasonable progress.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation 3.

Adult secondary education programs should collaborate with the secondary special education programs to develop a dropout recovery program for students who have disabilities, particularly those with non-apparent disabilities, such as learning disabilities. The length of time between leaving the high school environment and accessing an adult secondary education program was significant in the majority of study participants. In many instances, gaining access

to information about adult secondary education programs was difficult. Adult secondary education programs are should be the gateway to postsecondary educational opportunities, training programs and employment. In each case, no matter what stage of life, participants sought the GED as a means to financial independence and self-sufficiency. The responsibility of access to such should be a significant priority of education communities.

Recommendation 4.

Explore the concepts of and develop systems to address the need for navigational bridges and support networks. The needs of adults with learning disabilities are heterogeneous and far-reaching. Equally, the desire to be independent, goal-oriented and self-aware is strong. Based on the stories of the participants it is clear that the cognitive and metacognitive impacts of learning disabilities can and will significantly affect processing, creating substantial limitations and making understanding and interpreting what is seen or heard or connecting information with action extremely difficult. The need for a system that goes beyond the external model of exposure to resources and referrals is evident.

Recommendation 5.

A model of co-investigation must be developed and implemented in all adult secondary education programs. The baseline for this recommendation is the significance in the actions of co-investigation, the explicit meaning gives way to equal partners in learning. Important in the development and delivery is the overarching message of not assuming individuals with learning disabilities know what is available and how to access it. Co-investigation should begin with a set

of questions that elicit a dialogue together with guided or facilitated assistance that continues throughout the learning experience. Seemingly, the place to start would be a framework for the design and presentation of the questions together with response and follow-up protocols.

Recommendation 6.

Address the stigma and myths noted by the participants and cited in the literature. Adult secondary education systems are diverse communities with adult learners who have multiple needs. The stigmas and perpetration of myths described both by the participants and the literature leads to an array of self-defeating behaviors and manifestations, the greatest of which are slow growth, no growth, or lack of retention of students. The study revealed participants' strong concern that many in the education and training systems primary focus is on disability, not ability.

Recommendations for Further Research

Without question, qualitative research focusing on transition planning and services for adults with learning disabilities in adult secondary education programs should be continued. In the researcher's opinion, the research should take a two-pronged approach that seeks to hear the voice of adult learners who have learning disabilities and are accessing adult secondary education programs together with the voice of the adult secondary education community and systems. The suggestions for future research incited by this study are as follows:

1. Conduct the same study in different locations and with potentially larger samples.

Several of the implications emerging from this study supported data and trends reported in the

literature of adolescents and adults with learning disabilities and transition planning and services. Given the meagerness of research data, the significance of studies that replicated the research would be of true value to the development of effective adult education transition planning and services. It would be beneficial to the field to determine if these results would be similar or different when investigated in different geographical areas and with an increased number of respondents.

2. Conduct a study that analyzes the differences of transition planning and services need between learners in adult secondary education programs who have learning disabilities and those who do not. Frequently the literature cited best practices for individuals who had learning disabilities as equally best practices for those who do not. A study of this type could avoid multiple systems and create a unified, universally accessible process.

3. Conduct a study that compares the transition patterns of adult learners who have learning disabilities and receive structured transition planning and services as a part of the adult secondary education curriculum with other adult learners who have learning disabilities and does not have access to or receive structured transition planning and services. There are no data suggesting transition planning and services will assist adult learners with learning disabilities. This study is the first of its kind known to the researcher; it only addresses a perception that transition planning, and services would be of benefit.

4. Conduct a study that explores policy implications between IDEA mandates of transition planning for special education students who have disabilities and the adult basic and secondary education federal regulations where transition planning for adult students with disabilities is not required. The literature addressing transition planning and services in high

school and youth populations purports positive results as do the longitudinal data where students received assistance through transition planning. Some in depth research and exploration of policies and future development should occur to give individuals who left the secondary system as adolescents and are returning to secondary education as adults parallel opportunities.

5. Conduct a study measuring retention in adult secondary education programs when transition planning and services engage in both external and internal concepts of navigational bridges, goal-oriented behaviors, self-determination, self-awareness, support networks, academic supports and career planning. The data supported the need for a stronger internal alignment of transition services. Retention of students in adult secondary education programs is a reportable outcome measured by the federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

6. Conduct a study that investigates what happens to the students who leave the special education high school setting. The participants in this study frequently spoke of their fears and trepidations as they re-entered secondary learning systems. A study of this kind might lead to a better understanding of the reasons students leave and data that could be used in developing a more suitable system.

Conclusions

The results of this study are far-reaching and have many meanings with varied implications. The data is substantial and ties directly to the research, albeit limited. The voices are strong and poignant; each speaks an inspiring story that provides a starting point from which to learn. Through the words of each story, the researcher hopes that the courage and spirit of the

participants are realized and honored and contribute a better understanding of the strengths and attributes of adults who have learning disabilities.

This study should not be regarded as what has not been done or what is not right about adult secondary education systems or transition services. Its sole purpose is to strengthen the opportunities for adults who have learning disabilities and who are pursuing literacy programs, adult basic education services and GED completion by bringing attention to their concerns and honoring their voices. John Maynard Keynes is quoted to have said: “The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones” (Brainyquote, n.d.).

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APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM

Capella University
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Minneapolis, MN 55402

Informed Consent Form

Researcher: Nancie Payne, M.S.; Doctorial Candidate
205 Lilly Road NE, Bldg B, Ste A, Olympia, WA 98506
360-491-7600 or napayne@att.net

School and Specialization: School of Education, Adult Education
Title of Research Project: Adults who have Learning Disabilities: Transition From GED to Postsecondary Activities Qualitative Case Study

Mentor: Howard R. Jacobs, Ph.D.
School: School of Education

As a requirement of my doctoral studies I am engaged in a study of adults who have learning disabilities who have completed the GED examination. You were selected to participate based on the completion of your GED and your identification of having a learning disability. I am interested in understanding what formal or informal transition planning and supports contributed to your current activities post-GED and the outcomes you have achieved since passing your GED. To help me gain further insights into this subject I will ask you to verbally respond to a series of interview questions. It will take approximately two to three hours to complete the interview.

The benefit of participation is in the contribution of information, from the perspective of the adult who has learning disabilities, that could assist others who may benefit from the development of adult secondary transition services.

This process does not expose you to any physical risks. If discussing your learning disabilities or your activities prior to or after completing your GED makes you uncomfortable, you may feel free to stop at any time. If you need an accommodation during the interview process please feel free to request such.

The data you will provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used in any data collection; a numerical code will be assigned in order to mask all identity. No reference to

specific counties, cities, towns, GED testing centers, schools, services or employment will be made.

The information you provide will be archived for a period of seven years after completion of the study at which time it will be destroyed by shredding and incineration. Data collected (consent forms, notes and observations, audio-recordings, etc.) will be secured in a locked, metal filing cabinet; all computer data will be password protected. All computer documents will be saved on a CD and placed with paper materials in the file; electronic records on the computer will then be deleted.

I welcome questions about the process and interview at any time. Your participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and you may refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at the above address, phone or email. Questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research project may be directed to Howard R. Jacobs, Ph.D., Capella University, 225 South 6th Street, 9th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55402.

Signing your name below indicates that the above information has been read aloud to you, that you understand the contents of this Consent Form, and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

A copy if signed form will be provided to participant prior to beginning the interview. If copying is not accessible, two forms will be completed and signed.

APPENDIX B. PERMISSION TO AUDIO RECORD

Permission to Audio Record

Date: _____ Log # _____

Researcher: Nancie Payne, M.S.
School and Specialization: School of Education, Adult Education
Study Title: Adults who have Learning Disabilities: Transition From GED to Postsecondary Activities Qualitative Case Study
Mentor: Howard R. Jacobs, Ph.D.
School: School of Education

I give researcher/interviewer Nancie Payne permission to audio record me. The recording(s) will be used only for the following purpose: research.

1. When will I be audio recorded?

I agree to be audio recorded during the time period from _____ to _____

2. How long will the recordings be used?

I give my permission for these recordings to be used from _____ to _____

3. What if I change my mind?

I understand I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audio recording(s) will no longer be used without consequence or prejudice.

4. Other

I understand I will not be paid for being recorded or for the use of the recording(s).

5. For further information

If I want more information about the audio recording(s) or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact: Nancie Payne, 205 Lilly Road NE, Bldg. B, Ste A, Olympia, WA 98506, 360-491-7600 or Capella University, 225 South 6th Street, 9th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55402.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Permission to Audio Record form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Adults Who Have Learning Disabilities: Transition from GED to Postsecondary Activities

	Participant Name _____	Assigned Number _____
	Date _____ / _____ / _____	
	Time Interview Began _____ Time Ended _____	
	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> How would you describe your race/ethnicity? _____	
	Could you tell me your age?	
1.	When did you complete your GED?	
2.	How did you find out about the GED? What led you to want to get a GED?	
3.	How did you prepare for the GED examination? Program? Self-Study?	
4.	What age and grade did you leave secondary school? Age Grade	
	Why did you leave?	
5.	Were you in a special education or resource program? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Describe:	
6.	Talk about your current living situation <input type="checkbox"/> Independent <input type="checkbox"/> Dependent	
	Describe:	
7.	What were you doing <u>before</u> you began the <u>GED</u> process?	
8.	What are you doing right now? <u>Current Activity</u>	
9.	Tell me about your <u>learning disability</u> : When were you diagnosed? How does it <u>impact</u> you?	
10.	Did your <u>learning disability</u> affect your <u>GED</u> progress? Describe: Did you apply for/use accommodations?	
11.	What has transpired <u>since</u> you acquired your <u>GED</u> ? School Training Work	
12.	<i>Appropriateness of question based on earlier responses</i> Earlier you said you were enrolled in (<i>identify type of program</i>): Tell me about your experience: Was there any <u>influencing person(s) or process(es)</u> in the program?	
13.	What does the term transition mean to you? Have you ever <u>received transition</u> services (secondary/adult secondary)? Describe:	

14.	Was there any <u>transition process</u> or <u>post-GED goals development process</u> that you got/could have gotten involved in? Describe:
15.	What kinds of <u>exposures to resources</u> and services have you had?
16.	Did you <u>set post-GED goals</u> prior to GED completion? Describe:
17.	What are your <u>current goals</u> ? How are you doing in pursuit of those goals? What's your next step?
18.	What kinds of <u>services</u> are you aware of in your community? Have you tried to access or use any? Describe:
19.	If you could have accessed any types of <u>transition services pre-GED</u> completion what would they have been?
20.	What types of <u>transition services</u> would have been <u>important post-GED</u> completion?
21.	What types of <u>transition services</u> are <u>important at this point</u> ?
22.	How would you suggest <u>programs</u> establish a baseline of needs and wants with adult secondary students who have learning disabilities?
23.	Tell me a little about your background: Parents/guardian Working Schooling Siblings Working Schooling
24.	Any thing else:

APPENDIX D. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol

Observation & Behaviors Checklist - (based on themes from literature review)	
Key: Observed = O Not-observed = NO	
O NO	Demonstrated goal-oriented behaviors
O NO	Has developed mentors or appears to understand how to develop mentors
O NO	Demonstrated well-developed self determination
O NO	No transportation barriers apparent
O NO	Understands rights under American's with Disabilities Act
O NO	Knows how to access and obtain accommodations
O NO	Showed self-advocacy skills in the ability to identify accommodations needed for specific environments and circumstances
O NO	Is in control of environment and situations
O NO	Is self-directed in post-GED activities
O NO	Demonstrated the ability to understand and accept responsibilities
O NO	Demonstrated decision making abilities and skills
O NO	Described independence and self-sufficiency or progression toward self-sufficiency
O NO	Presented with confidence – displayed confidence
O NO	Demonstrated an understanding of vocational skills and has/is planning to pursue
O NO	Knows how learning disability affects various activities and learning environments and uses compensatory strategies
O NO	Demonstrated tenaciousness and persistence
O NO	Appears to generally well-adjusted (emotional/psychological adjustment)
O NO	Appropriate social interaction
O NO	Presents financial understanding for self-sufficiency
O NO	Demonstrated resilience and spirit
O NO	Described situations depicting the ability to take responsibility and make decisions
O NO	Did not portray myths or false perceptions of his/her learning disability
O NO	Displayed personal concern regarding ability to achieve due to learning disability
O NO	Understands disability disclosure procedures
O NO	Recognized needs for higher or advanced levels of academics in adult secondary programs
O NO	Described dependence on parent/guardian
O NO	Described dependence on spouse, significant other, relative or friend
O NO	Described participation in transition planning in secondary or adult secondary programs
O NO	Had opportunities to give feedback to transition team/teachers during transition planning

O NO	Noted specific referral methods utilized in program services
O NO	Referenced referrals were provided with specific contact information
O NO	Described a continuity or bridge between adult secondary programs/GED completion and transition to next activity
O NO	Received navigational support
O NO	Was assisted in development of relationships
O NO	Exhibited adequate communication skills
O NO	Was exposed to career exploration and guidance
O NO	Described employer-related difficulties or resistance due to disclosure of learning disability or other disorder
O NO	At time of interview, self-declared income was at federal poverty level
O NO	Presented positive self-image
O NO	Demonstrated knowledge and use of academic supports systems
O NO	Displayed appropriate use of assertive behaviors
O NO	Has a foundation level of knowledge of self
O NO	Has an advanced level of knowledge of self
O NO	Displayed a level of anxiousness about future
O NO	Presented adequate confidence
O NO	Appears to be able to exercise self-control
	Other:

APPENDIX E. IRB APPROVAL

From: SchoolofEd@capella.edu [mailto:SchoolofEd@capella.edu]
Sent: Friday, February 29, 2008 5:27 AM
To: napayne@att.net
Cc: howard.jacobs@faculty.capella.edu
Subject: IRB Application: Nancie Payne



Dear Nancie:

Congratulations! The School of Education has approved your IRB Application. Please review the attached "Approval Letter" for details of this approval, including information about its duration (one year only), instructions for renewing the approval next year, and instructions for how to proceed if unanticipated problems or harms to participants arise.

You may now proceed to your proposal conference call. Doctoral learners in the School of Education are responsible for arranging all conference calls with their respective committee members. For your convenience, information about preferred long distance providers is attached.

Further information on the conference call can be found in the Dissertation Manual or the Dissertation Quick Guide on Learner iGuide.

Please contact your advisor with any questions.

Kind regards,

School of Education

CJ

When responding to this email, please perform a reply with history so that the following conversational identifier "[THREAD_ID:40790979]" is included in your response.



Capella University | 225 South 6th Street, 9th Floor | Minneapolis, MN 55402
www.capella.edu | Toll Free: 1-888-CAPELLA | Fax: 612-977-5060

Privileged/Confidential Information may be contained in this message. If you are not the addressee indicated on this message, (or responsible for delivery of the message to such person) you may not copy or deliver this message to anyone. In such case, you should destroy this message and kindly notify the sender by reply email. Please advise immediately if you or your employer does not consent to Internet email for messages of this kind. Opinions, conclusions and other information in this message that do not relate to the official business of my business shall be understood as neither given nor endorsed by it



CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

02/29/08

Dear Nancie Payne:

Congratulations! Your application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the study titled “ADULTS WHO HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES: TRANSITION FROM GED TO POSTSECONDARY ACTIVITIES” has been approved as Study # ED-08-0218-193-1. Please take special note of the conditions of approval described below.

- Approval of this research will remain in effect until 02/28/09. In order to continue the research after that date, you must submit an application for renewal. (The [Request for Renewal Form](#) is available in the Research Center on iGuide.) Please note that there is no provision for a grace period on or after the expiration date.

We recommend that you, with the signed approval of your mentor, file the Request for Renewal application at least six weeks in advance of the expiration date, if you have not successfully completed your Dissertation Conference Call. Failure to receive approval for a renewal application before the expiration of this approval will mean that all work with the participants' data must stop at the expiration date of this approval.

- If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur (e.g., incidents affecting participants or complaints about the study) you must notify the Capella Institutional Review Board within five business days of the incident or complaint. You may direct these reports to me at the contact address listed below.
- Monitoring of the consent process or data collection may occur. The IRB will notify you if your study will be audited.
- If you plan to make any changes to this approved study that will affect interactions with the participants, change the level of potential risk or discomfort, alter the activities the participants will engage in, or change the nature of the participants' experiences in any way, you must submit an [Application Revision](#) (also available in the Research Center on iGuide) for review and approval **before** initiating the modification. The IRB Application Revision must be completed in its entirety and submitted with a cover letter that lists the changes from the originally approved protocol.

On behalf of Capella University's IRB, I am pleased to extend my congratulations to you on the achievement of this major benchmark toward completing your doctoral program.

Sincerely,

Larry Reynolds

Core Faculty, Research
School of Education, Capella University

phone 612.659.5100 • *toll free* 1.888.CAPELLA • *fax* 612.659.5061 • *email* info@capella.edu • *web* www.capella.edu
225 SOUTH SIXTH STREET • 9TH FLOOR • MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55402

Fulbright Protocol

Gerber and Price Self-Disclosure PROTOCOL (7/04)

Introduction to the Protocol

I. **INTRODUCTION:** My name is Dr. Lynda Price. I am on a Fulbright Award which is sponsored by Edinburgh University. We are interested in your thoughts and experiences about how adults with dyslexia receive assistance throughout the United Kingdom. It was suggested that I talk to you about this because you have information that would help us understand this area better. I will be asking you some general questions about dyslexia in your community, but first, let's get some background information.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name _____ Date of Interview _____
Gender _____ Age _____ Interviewer _____ Location _____
Role: Postsecondary Educator? _____ Employer? _____ Policy maker? _____
Adult with dyslexia? _____ # of years working with dyslexic adults _____

III. QUESTIONS FOR EVERYONE:

1) What is your definition of dyslexia?

* PROBE: Do you know what dyslexia is?

2) Are you familiar with these laws: a) The Disability Discrimination Act? And b) the Special Education Needs and Disability Act?

* PROBE: Do you understand how they impact the daily lives of dyslexic people in the UK? (For example: getting further job training, managing finances, arranging appointments and social activities, etc.).

3) Do you think appropriate support is available for dyslexic adults in your local community? In your country?

* PROBE: Examples: Appropriate assessment? Finding work through Job Centres? Study skills courses available through local colleges or technical schools?

4) What would you do differently or the same to support dyslexic individuals in your local community?

* PROBE: Are there a variety of supports available to adults with dyslexia? Do you have enough resources (staff, funds, etc.)? Are resources available for issues in the home, work, and postsecondary education?

+++++

FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATORS or EMPLOYERS only:

- 5) Do you use any of these best practices in your work with dyslexic adults:
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual tutors | <input type="checkbox"/> extra time for tests or assignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> who understand dyslexia | <input type="checkbox"/> scribes or dictate work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tape recorders | <input type="checkbox"/> alternative ways to take exams |
| <input type="checkbox"/> time management | <input type="checkbox"/> use multi-sensory techniques |
| <input type="checkbox"/> use calculators | <input type="checkbox"/> for training or teaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> screening or assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> personal counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> proofreaders | <input type="checkbox"/> spell checkers, word processors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> large print or different colors | <input type="checkbox"/> flex work hours/job sharing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accept "alternative ways" to complete tasks or assignments | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____ | |

- 6) Do you know if the "Disability Statement" (as mandated by law) is on file at your facility?
>>>Need a PROBE here?

- 7) Have you asked the students/employees how they feel about their dyslexia?
* PROBE: Have they self-disclosed their disability to you? (Please describe that experience.....)

+++++

FOR POLICY-MAKERS only:

- 5) How successful do you feel the laws have been to provide support for people with dyslexia?
*PROBE: Locally? Nationally?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual tutors | <input type="checkbox"/> extra time for tests or assignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> who understand dyslexia | <input type="checkbox"/> scribes or dictate work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tape recorders | <input type="checkbox"/> alternative ways to take exams |
| <input type="checkbox"/> time management | <input type="checkbox"/> use multi-sensory techniques |
| <input type="checkbox"/> use calculators | <input type="checkbox"/> for training or teaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> screening or assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> personal counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> proofreaders | <input type="checkbox"/> spell checkers, word processors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> large print or different colors | <input type="checkbox"/> flex work hours/job sharing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accept "alternative ways" to complete tasks or assignments | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____ | |

- 6) Do you have adequate resources to provide assistance for dyslexic adults ?
*PROBE: If not, what do you need? (Examples: materials, more funds, more time, etc.)

- 7) What would you do differently or the same to support dyslexic adults?
* PROBE: Locally? Nationally?

+++++

FOR DYSLEXIC ADULTS only:

5) What types of personal experiences have you had living with your dyslexia?

*PROBE: Positive experiences? Neutral experiences? Negative experiences?

6) Do you think the disability laws have influenced your life in any way?

*PROBE: Why? or Why not? (Give examples if possible.....)

*PROBE: Has anyone given you help to transition from school to adult life?

7) Have you talked with anyone (self-disclosed) about your dyslexia?

* PROBE: Why? or Why not? (Give examples if possible.....)

8) Do you believe there is a stigma attached to having dyslexia?

*PROBE: Why? or Why not? (Give examples if possible.....)

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS FOR EVERYONE:

What advice do you have for people with dyslexia in the UK?

Is there anything else that you want us to know about dyslexia in the UK?

Summary of interviewer impressions: