

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS IN
RELATION TO THEIR ABILITIES TO SELF-ADVOCATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR
SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Colleen Marie Rojas entitled *Students with Learning Disabilities and their Perceptions in Relation to their Abilities to Self-Advocate: Implications for Secondary and Post-Secondary Education: A Qualitative Analysis* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my parents, William and Arline Brown. They taught me about perseverance and always believed that I could do whatever I wanted to do.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	8
ABSTRACT	9
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	10
Statement of the Problem	11
Research Question	11
Research Design and Method	14
Definition of Terms	16
Limitations of Study	18
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	19
Self-Advocacy Skills	19
Cross Validation of Studies: direct instruction, retention, and good practice	21
a. Direct Instruction	21
b. Retention	23
c. Good Practice	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	28
Research Methodology Rationale	28
Description of Setting	31
Selection of Participants	32
Data Collection	33
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE STUDY	37
Participants	37
Themes	38
1. Students' ability to self-advocate	39
a. Dependence on parental and/or teacher assistance	39
b. Disclosure and accommodations	41
2. Perceptions of disability	42
a. Students' self-perceptions	42
b. Stigma and bias	43
3. Involvement in educational planning	44
a. Limited involvement in IEP meetings	44
b. Disability support services	45
4. Indicators of success in academics	47
a. Hard work and persistence	47
Summary	50

TABLE OF CONTENTS- *Continued*

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	50
Summary.....	50
Discussion.....	52
1. Students' ability to self-advocate.....	54
a. Dependence on parental and/or teacher assistance	54
b. Disclosure and accommodations.....	55
2. Perceptions of disability.....	56
a. Students' self-perceptions	56
b. Stigma and bias.....	57
3. Involvement in educational planning.....	59
a. Limited involvement in IEP meetings.....	59
b. Disability support services.....	60
4. Indicators of success in academics	61
a. Hard work and persistence	61
Summation	62
Recommendations.....	64
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER.....	67
APPENDIX B: SUBJECT'S CONSENT FORM.....	68
APPENDIX C: SAMPLE: TRANSCRIPT OF ONE STUDENT INTERVIEW	71
REFERENCES	82

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1, Interview Instrument for my Qualitative Research Study	77
Table 3.2, Student Demographic Characteristics.....	79

ABSTRACT

Open-ended interview questions were asked to ten college freshmen with learning disabilities (LD) to provide the primary source of data in this qualitative study. This was done to explore their perceptions in relation to their abilities to self-advocate. Student participants were chosen based on meeting the criteria of having a diagnosed specific learning disability, having qualified and received special education services in high school, and at the time of the study were receiving accommodations through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at the University of Arizona (UA). Students were further identified as members of a “successful” group with a first semester grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher, or members of “jeopardy” group with a first semester GPA of below 2.0 and the academic status of probation. This was done in order to ensure that I included perceptions of students at the high and low range academic status levels in this sample, not to compare or contrast the two groups. Interviews yielded information about students’ perceptions of their ability to self-advocate, their perceptions of their disability, their involvement in educational planning, and what they considered to be indicators of success. Data were analyzed to determine themes related to student success and difficulties. Suggestions for further research and information for future practice are offered.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Inadequate transition planning or lack of any planning at all may explain why students with disabilities often experience poor outcomes in higher education (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) mandated that high school educators prepare students for movement after high school graduation to postsecondary education, vocational training, employment, independent living, and community integration. This Act has encouraged a greater number of students with disabilities to pursue further education after high school (Adelman & Vogel, 1990). Although resources exist at both the high school and college level in the form of accommodations, counseling, assistive technology, and self-advocacy curricula, students with learning disabilities (LD) often struggle to succeed in higher education. This research study will seek to determine how students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of and “successful” participation in postsecondary education at the University of Arizona. I will be using a qualitative research design to examine those experiences of students who have identified themselves as students with LD. The purpose designed to understand how students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of “successful” participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona.

Statement of the Problem

The research has examined various self-advocacy models, curricula, instructional strategies, teachers' knowledge of self-advocacy training, and the short-term effects of self-advocacy training. After an exhaustive review of recent professional literature, I however, found that there was a lack of research as it relates to the understanding of how students are utilizing self-advocacy, specifically with regards to the transition and participation in a postsecondary education. This study will address and add knowledge to that gap in the research. The construct of "success" at the postsecondary level is defined as those students who are in good academic standing as indicated by a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or greater. I will interview and record students who are in that category as well as interviewing students that fall below that, with cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) of less than 2.0.

According to this review of recent professional literature, the needs of students with LD transitioning from high school to college are associated with four central factors; student self-advocacy skills, inadequate transition planning, academic preparation of students with learning disabilities, and guided educational programs. This study will examine the themes that develop through interviews with students, and these themes will be explored as my subjects voice their experiences.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: How do students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of "successful" participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona? The intent of this study is to provide professionals with a better understanding of the impact of self-advocacy training

for students with LD, and may therefore drive effective programs that implement and address the salient features of self-advocacy.

Izzo and Lamb (2002) notes that the high rate of students with disabilities who fail to complete postsecondary programs suggests that student-advocacy skills, such as the ability to articulate one's strengths, challenges, and necessary supports, are critical. As high school ends, so does the structured environment and pre-college support systems (Burns, Armistead, & Keys, 1990). Consequently, students with LD in postsecondary settings need to have developed an understanding of their own learning processes, including individual strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge enables students to improve their opportunities in making a successful transition from high school to college (Merchant & Gajar, 1997).

Inadequate transition planning or lack of any planning at all may also explain why students with disabilities often experience poor outcomes in higher education (Grigal, Test, Beattie & Wood, 1997). Secondary school personnel acknowledge the transition needs of students with more severe disabilities, but often leave the students with more invisible disabilities, such as LD and attention deficit disorder, without adequate transition programming (Reiff & deFur, 1992). These students may be placed in general education classrooms with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) reflecting a small amount of special education contact. Looking at the changes over time between the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) (1987) and NLTS2 (2005), demonstrates that a majority of students with LD spend most of their instructional time in a general education classroom. The NLTS2 shows that 31 percent of students with LD at the secondary level receive all classes in general education classrooms. The NLTS2 also

found that within special education classrooms, only 23 percent of students with LD receive an individualized or special curriculum, the lowest of any disability category. Almost 22 percent have no curriculum, which may mean that the focus of their special education classes is more oriented to study skills. As a result of such an orientation, these students may not receive special education or transition planning because it is assumed that these students should be able to grasp the skills they need to succeed in college in the same manner as students without disabilities.

According to the NLTS2 (2005), significant numbers of students with LD at the secondary level function substantially below their actual grade level. Also, older students are further behind than their younger peers, indicating that students with disabilities, including LD, continue to lose ground as they progress through school. Assisting students with LD in mastering the rigorous academic content required for eligibility for college admission is also an important need, as well as a complex issue. According to Wolanin and Steele (2004) many students in special education receive substandard secondary curricula content in their special education classrooms. In addition, much of special education is individualized and students are not able to easily generalize this learning to other settings or to larger groups which has a direct impact on their transition to college classes that may be very large (Wolanin and Steele, 2004).

Another concern in the area of transition is related to guided educational programs. Most students with disabilities have been on the caseload of a special education teacher and this teacher has guided the educational program of the student. The teacher often views his or her responsibilities as ensuring the success of the student and, therefore, acts as a liaison and a buffer between the student, other teachers,

administrators, and sometimes parents and employers (Reiff & deFur, 1992). Although these teachers may have good intentions, it is possible that this buffer doesn't encourage independence or help to develop self-advocacy skills. When these factors are combined with the student's desire to be independent, he or she may want to hide their disability which may prohibit them from seeking assistance and services at the college level. The dramatic difference in the levels of support that students with disabilities receive while in high school, as compared to the accommodations provided in college may contribute to the difficulty that students with disabilities have within college (Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002).

Research Design and Method

The intent of this study is to examine how students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience at the University of Arizona. Qualitative research methods were employed in this study for three main reasons. First, qualitative research is “an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2002). The central phenomenon studied here is the phenomenon of self-advocacy. According to Creswell (2002) “to learn about this phenomenon, the inquirer asks participants broad, general questions, collects the detailed views of participants in the form of word images, and analyzes the information for description and themes” (p.648).

A second reason for using qualitative research design is to gather information-rich data from participants (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002) “qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail” (p.13). It is the intent of this study to understand how students with LD are utilizing self-advocacy. Since there are

limited studies on how students with LD are utilizing self-advocacy in the transition to, and participation in, postsecondary education, this information is best obtained through qualitative methods. The qualitative information obtained in this study can then form the basis for further quantitative and qualitative research.

The final reason qualitative research methods will be used in this study is to give voice to the individuals with LD. For hundreds of years, the value of individuals with disabilities was discounted by society. In some countries, individuals with disabilities were killed, in others they were locked away in institutions so that they would not have to be seen (Snow, 2001). Society's view of individuals with disabilities has evolved over time; however, even today, individuals with disabilities are "still looked upon as inferior and less productive members of society" (Wappett, 2002).

Federal laws over the past 30 years have facilitated great strides in how society views this historically oppressed population. More recent federal laws have given birth to a disability rights movement. People with disabilities across the country have begun to self-advocate for their rights, resulting in the emergence of a mantra, "nothing about us, without us" (Patton, 2002). This mantra clearly emphasizes an individual's right to be included in decisions that impact his or her life. Therefore, recognizing value for all individuals, and respecting the present disability culture, this research will use qualitative methods to invite individuals with a disability to have a voice in the process.

Definition of Terms

The following is an alphabetical list of definitions that were used for the purposes of this dissertation. These terms will appear throughout the dissertation.

Access Consultant: The Access Consultant provides counseling and accommodations for college students and staff with disabilities at the UA.

Disability Resource Center (DRC): Disability Resource Center is the office designated by the University of Arizona to lead the community in the development of a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for students and staff with disabilities.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): An Individualized Education Program (IEP) describes the educational program that has been designed to meet that child's unique needs. Each child who receives special education and related services must have an IEP. Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when age appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities.

Postsecondary education: an educational institution that: (a) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; (b) is legally authorized to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (c) provides an education program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree. (Higher Education Act, 1965)

Self-advocacy: a conceptual framework of self advocacy includes four components (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of rights, (c) communication, and (d)

leadership (Test, D., Fowler, C., Wood, W., Brewer, D., & Eddy, S. 2005). The construct of “self-advocacy” also includes the demonstration of independent decision-making and the ability to express one's needs (Goldhammer, R. & Brinckerhoff, L. C., 1993).

Special education: 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; (b) instruction in physical education (IDEA, 2004).

Specific learning disability: a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations: (a) disorders included- includes conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia; (b) disorders not included- this term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA, 2004).

Transition services: a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that: (a) is designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment including supported employment, continuing and adult education, audit services, independent living, or community participation; (b) is based upon the individual student needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and 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 (IDEA, 1990).

Limitations of Study

The findings in this study will need to be viewed in light of several limitations. First, many of the studies on self advocacy are based on students' self-report on information about themselves. In reality, this information may not be a true reflection of the individual's strengths and needs. Second, measuring self advocacy in relation to objective criteria is also difficult. Self advocacy is more about how a person contributes towards their goals rather than a score on a test. And third, the student, family or teacher's culture will not be researched as a variable in learning, supporting, or teaching self advocacy.

In addition to these, there are a number of limitations specific to this study. This research will consider its students with learning disabilities, at the University of Arizona, as one homogeneous group. Individuals with learning disabilities, however, range in complexity of their disability and how their disability affects their individual academic functioning. An additional limitation that should be addressed is the small sample size and the selected population of study. The small sample size impacts the power of the results and the generalizability of the study to other populations. Since the population will be from the University of Arizona, located in the southwest United States, the demographic variables may be different than those at other universities throughout the United States. Finally, the biases that stem from my experiences as a professional, teaching both at the high school level as well as at the college level, may influence the outcomes of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The transition to college can be challenging for students who received special education services in high school. The number of students with disabilities attending college is increasing and, therefore, there is an unprecedented level of support needed to ensure the academic and social well-being of these students. Self-advocacy is one factor that is consistently cited in the literature as crucial for a successful transition for students with disabilities (Merchant & Gajar, 1997; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). This review of literature is presented in two sections. The first section examines the limited research on self-advocacy skills as they relate to the “successful” transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to postsecondary settings. The second section will focus on cross validating my research by triangulating information from college profiles, literature related to retention and literature related to “good practice.”

Self-Advocacy Skills

Traditionally, students with disabilities have struggled with the transition from high school to college, facing the obstacles that other students face as well as unique academic and social challenges. The literature suggests that one of the fundamental factors to success is the ability to self-advocate (Merchant & Gajar, 1997; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Self- advocacy can be defined in many ways. Examining the specific skills of self-advocacy as identified by college students with LD is the purpose of this study.

Brinckerhoff (1993) suggests that the most important aspects of self-advocacy are the student knowing what they want, what they are legally entitled to, and being able to

effectively achieve their goals. Specific skills needed to be successful at this include self-determination, independent decision-making, and communication skills. Brinckerhoff (1994) describes key components of self-advocacy training which include helping students understand their disability and their rights under current legislation, how to negotiate with faculty, and how to select and use appropriate accommodations. Several researchers, (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Lynch & Gussel, 1996) note that students need to learn how to appropriately self-disclose and to communicate strengths and weaknesses to professors in order to secure accommodations. Yuan (1994) indicates that the foundation for self-advocacy comes from having a thorough understanding of one's own disability and its associated strengths and weaknesses, impact on learning and possible compensatory strategies. Other researchers have supported the importance of each of the above mentioned skills, but not all knowledge and abilities are emphasized by each researcher. Self-advocacy skills can include a variety of definitions and competencies, and do not look the same for every individual.

Although definitions and necessary components of self-advocacy skills vary, common elements do exist. In a review of programs designed to teach self-advocacy skills, Merchant and Gajar (1997) found four common elements: “(1) understanding one's own disability (strengths and weaknesses); (2) knowledge of individual rights under law; (3) accommodations needed; and (4) effective communication skills.” Essentially, self-advocacy skills include what the student must know and be able to do in order to ensure an equitable education.

In college, obtaining accommodations falls on the students rather than on the school or on the parents, as it did in high school. This shift from other-advocacy to self-

advocacy can be the most difficult part of the transition, as students have been accustomed to depending on others to implement special accommodations or services (Brinckerhoff, 1993; Merchant & Gajar, 1997; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). According to legislation, colleges are under no obligation to provide accommodations until the student provides documentation and requests the services. Self-advocacy skills are critical in helping students obtain the services that are within their rights.

Legislation has mandated improved transition services for special education students. Unfortunately, the literature has shown that secondary schools often fall short in providing the mandated transition services (Hitchings et al., 2001; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Merchant & Gajar, 1997). In a recent survey of transition readiness, college disability service coordinators ranked incoming students' self-advocacy skills as their greatest weakness (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Many students at the high school level may not be getting the training they need.

Cross Validation of Studies: direct instruction, retention, and good practice

Direct Instruction

The experiences of students with disabilities in making the transition to college have improved since the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Students with learning disabilities are attending institutions of higher education in increasing numbers. The National Council on Disability (2003) found that the percentage of college freshman with a disability had more than tripled over the last twenty years. However, according to Ward, 2005, even though there are increasing numbers, too many students with disabilities are experiencing limited success and exiting college without completing their programs. Ward (2005) notes that many of these students don't make it because they

don't know how to navigate the system. Too many students with disabilities are exiting high school with limited self-advocacy skills because, as mentioned earlier, the school and parents assume the responsibility for advocating for their educational needs rather than fostering the development of these skills in students (Izzo & Lamb, 2002).

A recurring theme that emerges from the literature is the critical importance of student independence, specifically as it relates to developing independence in the high schools through direct instruction in time management and organization (Lerner, 1993). Vogel, Hruby, & Adelman (1993) attest to the essential nature of being proficient in learning strategies, including study skills, problem solving skills, test-taking strategies, note-taking skills, strategies for reading textbooks, and memory skills, as critical means of fostering student independence. When students receive direct instruction in these areas, the resulting independence and self-reliance can sometimes make accommodations unnecessary. Lerner (1993) suggests that high school personnel design programs that provide students with opportunities for practicing independence and self-advocacy skills in school setting in preparation for college. Summer transition programs for students, such as those at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater and the University of Minnesota, provide an optimal opportunity to practice these skills in the college setting, an important step toward a successful transition into college (Dalke, 1993). Vogel et al., (1993) point out that high school students' with learning disabilities can be taught how to develop learning environments that enhance autonomy and self-reliance. Ward (2005) describes two self-advocacy programs that include college disability counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and a transition specialist working collaboratively with both high school and college mathematics and science teachers to increase

accessibility for students with disabilities pursuing scientific and technical careers in community colleges. All of the activities focus on developing skills in self-advocacy, self-awareness, self-efficacy, decision-making and self-evaluation and adjustment. This program is specifically designed to be directly instructed and students are able to practice the skill with the instructor and in role plays with other participants.

To summarize, teachers, students, curriculum and parents are the focal points of investigations of academic success of high school students with learning disabilities. Teachers should have high expectations for students' efforts and accomplishments as they help students learn to cope with failure and to learn strategies that will lead to success. While in high school, students need to be directly taught and provided opportunity to practice the skills of self-advocacy, independence, time management, and study skills. Curricula should be rigorous to prepare for the requirements of college, foster successes not failures, build on students' strengths and promote an understanding of their disability and its impact on their education.

Retention

It seems responsible to care about retention rates if one is going to care about students, learning, and success. Astin (1997) explains that the Federal Right-to-Know Act of 1991 requires colleges to report certain information including completion and graduation rates, information that students, parents, and college counselors may use when shopping for colleges, interpreting data that indicates the quality of the college programs. Astin (1997) suggests that retention rates may be misleading and offers formulae for calculating actual and expected retention rates, taking into consideration student characteristics (high school grades, admission test scores, gender and race,

socioeconomic status, religion, hedonism, and political orientation), and environmental factors (including major field, whether a student lives in a residence hall, and institutional size).

Bean and Vesper (1992) offer Dependency Theory to explain how retention decisions are made. They find that retention is influenced by the degree to which a student is dependent on external forces such as parents, high schools, friends, and the degree that those forces encourage the student to stay in college and to be a successful student. Bean and Vesper (1992) view continued connections that approve of the student's experience at college and provide encouragement to the student as critical to the student's ability to adapt to college.

Tierney (1995) takes a different stance suggesting that rather than expecting students to adapt to the institution, postsecondary institutions should adapt to the needs of its students, specifically American Indian students. Failure, he says, is a construct unique to the United States. Rather than continue with an education system that stratifies, sorts, and fails students, he makes recommendations for institutions, students, and families that would promote persistence through active involvement in culturally specific ways without students feeling that they have to sacrifice their heritage by assimilating to a mono-cultural system. While students are responsible for developing and using study skills and routines, faculty, staff, and administrators must be involved by creating culturally sensitive classroom where success is measured by student success and where failure is not an option.

Sanders and Burton (1996) focused on students' perceptions of satisfaction. This model allows for connecting retention efforts to student development efforts as well as

making informed decisions leading to improvement of programs, policies, and the quality of the students' college experiences. Overall academic satisfaction (being challenged, preparing for life, being satisfied with the reputation of the institution, having made the right decision to attend) was the key predictor of the overall satisfaction, followed by student/social life (relationships, activities) and environment (awareness of cultures, equal opportunities, feeling welcomed and encouraged to get involved).

In summary, factors associated with retention in higher education include, but are not limited to: the extent to which students receive support and encouragement from significant others (Bean & Vesper, 1992); the institutions' willingness to adapt to the needs of the students (Tierney, 1995); and overall student satisfaction with the college, student/social life, and the college environment, (Sanders & Burton, 1996).

Good Practice

Scholars in the area of good practice literature regard Chickering and Gamson as the experts in the field. Their principles of good practice (1987) have been widely distributed and frequently quoted, and include: (a) student-faculty contact; (b) cooperation among students; (c) active learning; (d) prompt feedback; (e) time on task; (f) high expectations; and (g) respect of diverse talents and ways of learning. Obstacles to learning occur when there is no individualization; no collaboration in learning; no opportunities to apply ideas in areas in which students play a role of responsibility, (Chickering and Gamson, 1987).

Braxton, Olsen, and Simmons (1998) investigated the degree to which these principles are descriptive of instructors in various disciplines. More specifically, they examined various disciplines and determined whether they were high paradigmatic

disciplines (having strong, narrow norms for appropriate teaching, such as chemistry, biology, and physics), or low paradigmatic disciplines (having less agreement on how a course should be taught, such as history, psychology, and sociology). It was predicted that low paradigmatic disciplines would apply elements of Chickering's and Gamson's principles of good practice more frequently than the high paradigmatic disciplines because of the tendency to attach importance to student development, critical thinking, and student-centered teaching approaches. High paradigmatic faculty would not be so willing to delve into new approaches to teaching. The findings of this investigation did not indicate a difference in the ways high and low paradigmatic faculty provided prompt feedback, encouraged cooperation among students, or emphasized time on task. It was suggested that perhaps there was no distinction made between active learning and encouraging participation. Faculties of the two paradigms do vary in teaching goals, teaching practices, and their perceptions of the relationship between teaching and research. Faculty in low paradigmatic disciplines encouraged student-faculty contact, and planned for active learning, emphasized high expectations, and demonstrated respect of diverse talents and ways of learning. Before high paradigmatic faculties are likely to adopt these principles of good practice, they must first view them as appropriate strategies for them to implement in their disciplines. For campus-wide acceptance of these principles to occur, an organizational culture that values improvement in faculty development must exist.

Cross (1996) also identified characteristics of good teaching emphasizing the importance of skill, knowledge of the subject, the ability to provide clear explanations, the ability to establish rapport with students, being accessible, caring about the students,

having and following an organizational plan, considering the difficulty and amount of work required, facilitating discussion and interaction, and providing feedback. Good teachers make connections between what the students already know and what they are expected to learn. Good teaching also depends on concern for students, knowledge of subject matter, stimulation of interest, availability, encouragement of discussion, ability to explain clearly, enthusiasm and preparation. Effective learning is the ultimate criterion of good teaching, “The purpose of good teaching is to involve the students actively in their own learning and to elicit from students their best learning performance” (p. 20). In summary, Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) work in good practice continues to dominate the field. Characteristics of good practice include (a) student-faculty contact; (b) cooperation among students; (c) active learning; (d) prompt feedback; (e) time on task; (f) high expectations; and (g) respect of diverse talents and ways of learning. Cross’s (1996) requirements of good practice emphasize understanding the learning process and demonstrating enthusiasm in addition to many of the essentials already listed. Finally, having the ability to promote good practice principles campus-wide. Encouraging agreement of the members of the campus community that faculty and staff development is important and expected, and that good teaching and student-centered techniques are campus priorities (Braxton, Olsen, & Simmons, 1998).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study will attempt to answer the following research question: How do students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of “successful” participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona? Within this chapter, the reader will find the rationale for selecting a qualitative analysis for this research, a description of the setting, information about the selection criteria, and a description of the makeup of the participants. A description of the data collection and data analysis will conclude this chapter.

One of the consequences of having a learning disability label may be in the way that people see themselves in relation to others. This self- perception might include personal beliefs about their strengths and weaknesses, the feeling of control they have over their lives, in the choices they make, or in their personal goals. A qualitative method of using unstructured, personal interviews is necessary in order to explore students’ perceptions of self-advocacy in their lives and their effect on their academic outcomes in college. Open-ended interview questions are a way to understand their experiences and the meanings they attributed to them (Seidman,1991). Open-ended, in-depth interviews allow the researcher better understanding of the unique experiences and their significance within the student’s personal narratives.

Research Methodology Rationale

A qualitative method will be used for this study. This research design was chosen because of the need to understand behavior from the participant’s point of view, within

his/her frame of reference (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). A case study approach will allow for the opportunity to gain “insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam 1988). In-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions will be utilized in order to allow students to consider their learning disabilities and their experiences with academic success and failure within their own frame of reference. This approach is designed to lead to an understanding of “...how students think and how they come to develop the perspectives that they hold” (Zambo, 2004). Furthermore, many qualitative studies in the field of learning disabilities have been conducted to identify “...problems and processes that would help to improve education, to reveal weaknesses, point out needs, and to demonstrated to the educator what is possible...rather than what already is” (Zambo, 2004). This outcome is consistent with the goal of this research study.

Although qualitative research can vary, qualitative inquiry often involves a few common elements. Qualitative studies seek to answer exploratory and descriptive questions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Exploratory research questions explore topics in which very little is known. Generalization is not the goal in this type of study, but rather it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

In order to answer questions about the phenomenon, studies are conducted in the natural settings of the respondents (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). For this reason, qualitative inquiry is often called “naturalistic” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Patton, 1990). Studies are conducted in a natural, real-world setting because the context is considered

important in understanding the phenomenon of interest (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Another feature of qualitative studies is that a human instrument is used for data collection and the data that is collected is often in the words of the respondents (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). In data collection, the researcher is trying to discover meanings, or how people make sense of the world and their lives. The researcher is interested in the unique perspective of the respondents (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). The data collected are then typically in-depth and detailed (Patton, 1990).

In qualitative research, data analysis is inductive (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Patton, 1990). This means that the researcher is not testing a pre-conceived hypothesis, but building patterns from collected data (Patton, 1990). An understanding of the phenomenon then is not fitted into a pre-conceived framework, but evolves from the respondents. For this reason, qualitative research involves an “emergent” design, or one that evolves with the progression of the study (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Patton, 1990). This type of research has the ability to be empowering to the students, in this case, those students with learning disabilities at the postsecondary level. As noted by Lincoln (1995) this type of research experience can be especially empowering for members of oppressed groups and marginalized populations. LeCompte (1993) also asserts that there is a duty to involve marginalized populations in qualitative research, as he encourages qualitative researchers to “seek out the silenced” for inclusion research. Parker and Bolton (2005) state that; often, qualitative research, particularly emancipatory research, focuses on gender, culture, and marginalized groups- topics that are emotion laden, close to people,

and practical. The researcher asks open-ended questions that may change during the research process, leading to a progressively greater understanding of the problem (p.336).

This literature review coupled with the lack of research formed the rationale for this qualitative study. This qualitative study is designed to identify and analyze self-advocacy factors that determine academic success and/or failure of college students with learning disabilities. An understanding of what determines this academic success will come as a result of identifying the perceptions of college students with learning disabilities regarding their academic success or failure as it relates to their self-advocacy skills.

Description of Setting

The setting for this study will be the University of Arizona (UA), a large public research university located in Tucson, Arizona. The University has approximately 334 degree programs. 36,689 students attend the UA full time (UA fact book, 2005-2006). There are two programs that provide services to the students with learning disabilities on this campus: one that provides services required by law, the Disability Resource Center (DRC), and one that provides services, with a fee, that are beyond those mandated by the law. For the purposes of this study, the research will be conducted utilizing the DRC, so as to include a full range of students rather than limiting the study by including those who, financially, are able to afford additional support.

The DRC provides all students with properly documented disabilities appropriate accommodations including testing accommodations (extended time, computer, reader, writer), and instructional accommodations (including note-takers, recorded textbooks, academic counseling, and adaptive technology) that are mandated by Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. State monies and federal funds from grants fund the DRC.

According to the DRC data base, 1470 of students were identified as eligible for accommodations at the end of the fall 2005 semester. 632 or 43% of these students had a primary diagnosis of LD as indicated by the documentation of disability that was presented to the DRC.

Selection of Participants

In the spring of 2007, I will begin the process of soliciting volunteers from the DRC. This study is designed to include 10 freshman students with a primary disability diagnosis of Specific Learning Disability (LD). These freshmen will all be receiving support through DRC. Freshmen were chosen for this study because they have recently transitioned from high school to the university and they also will have experienced a semester at the university level. I will want to interview those students with “successful” GPA’s, that is 3.0 or higher and those with a GPA of 2.0 or less, those that are considered to be on academic probation for fall semester, 2006 (See Table 3.2).

Having developed the decision rules for the participants, the director of the Access Consultants at the DRC will be contacted, permission and assistance identifying a pool of DRC participants will be requested. After receiving approval from the director, the Access Consultants will be contacted, a meeting arranged, and details of the study and the selection criteria will be discussed. Obtaining the names of the DRC students who fit the selection criteria will occur, thereby protecting student confidentiality. A list of DRC students who fit the selection criteria will be compiled. The list will be submitted to the researcher with the understanding that the initial contacts with the students will be made

by the Access Consultants. If the students agree to participate or indicate their interest, contact information will be provided to the students and the researcher.

Although a small sample of college students with learning disabilities at this university may not be representative of those in other colleges and universities, the personal perspectives of these students may be useful for self-advocacy planning.

Data Collection

Participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form explaining the study's purpose (See Appendix B). Permission will be requested to audio tape their answers and to use the interview as data to be transcribed and analyzed. Participants will be assured that they can withdraw from the study at any time and that their confidentiality will be ensured. All participants will be assigned pseudonyms and personal identifying information will be deleted from the final manuscript.

Interviews will be held at the DRC facility. Questions will be open-ended and follow-up questions will be asked for clarification and further understanding (See Table 3.1). Skinner (2004) conducted a qualitative study of the high school to college transition experiences of 20 college graduates with LD. He used a semi-structured interview instrument as his tool for collection. It is my intention to use a similar structure and focus on the impact of self-advocacy that may have impacted the success or failure of students at the postsecondary level.

Areas that I would consider questioning include:

1. What is your disability and how has it affected you in the classroom?
2. Tell me about your high school years, specifically as it relates to your special education and/or accommodations.

- a. Were these useful?
- b. How were they determined?
- c. Are they accommodations that are useful to you now?

3. Describe a situation in high school in which you were able to express your needs.

What were the results of this expression?

4. Did you participate in student-led IEP meetings? If so, can you tell me how.

- a. Please describe meetings.

5. To what do attribute your academic success and failure in high school?

- a. What determines whether you will succeed or fail in your academic pursuits?

6. Discuss your transition from HS to college:

- a. Who helped to guide you? Describe the discussions.
- b. What were some of your difficulties?
- c. Was the transition easy or hard, please explain.

7. Now that you are in college, what does having a learning disability mean to you?

- a. Do you disclose your LD to your instructors? If so, please describe.
- b. Do you use accommodations? If so, please describe.

8. Describe the support services that you are receiving in college?

- a. How did you become involved with the DRC?
- b. Why did you become involved with the DRC?

9. Describe a situation in college in which you were able to express your needs.

What was the result of this expression?

10. Is there any other information that you would like to share concerning your

experiences as a student with a learning disability?

Data Analysis

The process of analysis will be continuous throughout the data collection while interviews are being completed. After the interviews are transcribed, they will be analyzed by relevant text, coded using open and axial coding and searched for common themes. A process of coding to label these categories will be used throughout the interviews. These codes will help in later organization and interpretation, forming a link between the data and the ideas about the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Open coding will involve developing categories based on patterns of responses that might be common to most participants, without making assumptions regarding what is emerging. A more complex analysis, referred to by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as “axial” coding will be used in order to make connections between categories. Categories can then be organized and analyzed for specific themes. Themes will be organized and reorganized in the process of looking for connections, commonalities, and salient features. Common themes across all students will be identified when the majority of participants show a similar pattern of response. These themes will be refined through multiple coding procedures. In summary, during the process of conducting and transcribing the interviews, I will read and reread the data, sort them by relevant text, code them and search for common themes shared by the majority of participants related to self-advocacy. In the final analysis, themes and concepts will be evaluated alongside concepts from other research that relates to college students with learning disabilities and their perception of self-advocacy.

I am choosing to not make use of qualitative analysis software, such as Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (Nud-ist), or other

similar software, because this software is more commonly used as a data management tool for storing, organizing, and retrieving data. These programs do not perform analysis (Barry, C. A., 1998). As the researcher, I will be conducting the analysis using keywords, common themes and relationships as they emerge. The credibility of this type of qualitative research will depend on my judgments as the researcher, and that cannot be programmed into software packages.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This chapter describes the students as well as highlights the perceptions and abilities of the students as they responded to research questions related to the role that self-advocacy has played in their success at the post-secondary level. As the researcher, I assumed that the research questions would generate themes that would respond to the question: How do students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of “successful” participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona.

Participants

Ten freshman students were interviewed in the second semester of their freshman year of college. These were all full-time students with learning disabilities at the University of Arizona, all of whom were currently receiving services through the Disability Resource Center (DRC). These students were to meet the criteria for academic “success” (college cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher) or academic “jeopardy” (college cumulative GPA of less than 2.0). Of the ten students interviewed, four were identified in the category of “success” and the remaining six were identified in the category of academic “jeopardy”. Of the six students who were in academic “jeopardy” at that time, four continued on with an earned a cumulative GPA at or above a 2.0 at the end of the spring semester. The other two students continued at the UA and were placed on probationary status. Of the four students who were making “successful” academic progress during the middle of their first semester, two of them had deteriorated and received GPAs in the 2.0 category and two of the students had maintained a 3.0 or above.

A total of eight male students and two female students participated, representing no racial or ethnic minorities. Two students came from Arizona, five came from California, two from Illinois, and one from New Jersey. Seven of the ten students interviewed had declared majors, and one student, after being in the “jeopardy” category in the fall semester, changed his major to “undecided” in the spring semester. There were no substantial differences between the groups.

I was granted access, by the students and the DRC, to student records, high school IEPs, and records of accommodations at the UA. I used this information to affirm information from students, to help clarify information that students were unsure of, and to assist in drawing conclusions based on any similarities of differences with the students.

Themes

The themes that emerged seemed to suggest that students varied in their perceptions of success or lack thereof in their ability to self-advocate, perceptions of their learning disabilities, perceptions of their involvement in their educational programs, and perceptions of their success in academics. Themes that emerged from the analyses of the interviews were:

1. Students’ ability to self-advocate
 - a. Dependence on parental and/or teacher assistance
 - b. Disclosure and accommodations
2. Perceptions of disability
 - a. Students’ self-perceptions
 - b. Stigma and bias

3. Involvement in educational planning
 - a. Limited involvement in IEP meetings
 - b. Disability support services
4. Indicators of success in academics
 - a. Hard work and persistence

The information presented in this section represents the interviewees' responses and other relevant comments and explanations that emerged during the course of the interviews. The themes were consistent across the "successful" and "jeopardy" students. These common themes are discussed in the following section, including excerpts taken from student interviews. Each theme is described, examined, and discussed as general experiences that were common to the research sample, regardless of their academic status.

1. Students' ability to self-advocate

a. Dependence on parental and/or teacher assistance

Participants were asked directly about their ability to advocate for their academic and social needs at the high school level. Eight out of ten students reported high levels of dependence on their teachers and/or parents to help them with this. One student, who qualified as "successful" said,

In high school the resource teacher would do all the talking about my accommodations and that is the big thing about college to high school- is that you have to do it. But, um, I've talked to some other students about this and they said it was the same way, if they needed help they could go to their resource room

teacher and they would do it. I would tell them what I needed and then hear the results.

An “unsuccessful” student reported that in order for her to receive her accommodations in high school, she would “...tell (her) parents and they would discuss it with school officials.” This same student when asked to what she attributed her success to in high school responded,

It’s sad, but I don’t really give a lot of credit to myself because I glided by, I really did. I mean when I worked hard, I worked hard. I give a lot of credit to my mom for always being there whenever I needed anything taken care of -- being late to class, making my schedule- anything, she, you know, took care of it. Both my parents really took care of it.

Another “unsuccessful” student reported that she relied more on her parents to help her get her accommodations in high school. She stated:

In high school, my sophomore or maybe freshman year, actually in my math class- I really struggled. I asked her, I was like- I am trying to do the best I can- I have a tutor every single day of the week, like what can I do? I tried to talk to my teacher to see what I could do, and because they couldn’t accommodate me, my parents had to have a meeting so that I could have more time on the tests and sometimes a little less on my homework.

At the college level, this student’s approach is more reactive as she only talks to her instructors if “there has been a problem on a test, so I can explain why.” One young man stated that “...one of the reasons I picked Arizona (was) because of the help of the

DRC.” He then noted that he would not be successful without the support of such systems.

b. Disclosure and accommodations

In this study, all ten of the students reported that they identified themselves as needing accommodations to their professors with the support of their Access Consultant at the DRC. Only three of the ten students referenced their own ability to self-advocate and described some of the pro-active strategies that they employed in identifying themselves to their professors. In order for students to use approved classroom or testing accommodations (note taker, recorded books, extended time, etc.), they must disclose to their instructor the fact that they are using accommodations approved based on their documented disability. One “successful” student reported that he thinks that it is important to talk to the professors and communicate with them early in the semester. He said,

The first day of class, I, if they’re there, I go down there and talk to them. The first semester I looked up all my teachers and tried to find their offices- before classes had even begun. I found two of them out of four. I always email them once class happens. At the end of class, I go down there and I am like, ‘Hi, my name is blah, blah, blah. I am with the DRC, uh I emailed you a few days ago or a week ago. And then I say my accommodations are note-taking, and blah, blah, and blah. Then I ask if they prefer a hard copy ‘cause some teachers prefer hard copies to emails.

Seven of ten reported that the only means of identifying they do is through the email with the support and assistance of their Access Consultant.

2. Perceptions of disability

a. Students' self-perceptions

All of the students communicated that their LD continues to negatively impact their education. Students described their disability as it impacted them in the classroom, both in high school and at the postsecondary level. These descriptions were conveyed as stressful and difficult. One young “successful” student identified himself as dyslexic and described some of his anxiety with timed tasks.

I'm dyslexic. I have troubles with taking tests within a certain amount of time.

Say, ah, if the class is an hour long, sometimes, I might take longer than that. Uh, let's see. For the longest time I had a hard time reading. I have eventually gotten better at that through a lot of work. Depending on which class it is, I sometimes have a hard time taking notes.

An “unsuccessful” student described her learning disability in terms of processing information; including her difficulties with short-term memory. She really has felt and continues to feel the academic impact of her disability.

I have a math processing disability. I think it is just a processing disability. It has affected me since 2nd grade. I have, it's where- I'll have tutoring in math or actually in any subject and I'll know it and the next day I will go in and 'blank,' I won't know anything. It's very frustrating because I am very intelligent. It has really affected every grade, every class, I don't know, throughout my life. It still affects me.

Another “unsuccessful” student said that he didn’t really understand his disability, but that he has experienced years of difficulty related to taking notes and his auditory processing.

Basically, I have a hard time taking...or basically, I think it all comes down to listening skills. Like, sometimes a professor will speak, or even a teacher... my teacher will stand up in the front of the room and lecture for 50 minutes or an hour and we were expected to take notes on his lecture. Like, he didn’t put it on the board or an overhead, he just expected us to write down stuff from lectures. Writing down notes and listening is really hard.

b. Stigma and bias

Eight of ten students talked at length about the negative perceptions that others had and how that had had an impact on them. In this interview, six of the students were “successful” and two were “unsuccessful.” These perceptions were mostly rooted in stereotypical stigma and bias related to having an “invisible disability.” One “unsuccessful” student described her concern about instructor bias:

The thing is, I think that my disability works against me sometimes because I took this class and I don’t know how I got a B rather than an A. I beat the other students on every exam. I got the same average on homework and quizzes, and whatnot. They got A’s and I got a B. When I was asking the professor, she was like “Well, you got extra time.” I let it go. It wasn’t--to me it’s frustrating because it wasn’t fair.

This perception appears to be influenced by a lack of understanding of the “invisible disability.” Another male student with dyslexia briefly spoke on this and

reported that he changed his English class this semester because his teacher "...did not sound supportive at all, and once I heard that I said I am changing it."

An "unsuccessful" student discussed at length about being singled out in school because of her learning disability. She said that she refused services when she was in high school because she didn't want to have anything to do with other students in special education. She wanted to be like everyone else and not stand out. Not many of her friends knew that she had a learning disability, but now she realizes that, although she does not need to dwell on it, she has to focus on her disability and know her strengths and weaknesses in order to achieve success.

3. Involvement in educational planning

a. Limited involvement in IEP meetings

Eight of ten students reported that they did not participate in IEP meetings and did not think that there were any regular meetings about their individualized education plan. Four of the students were "unsuccessful" and four of the students were "successful" and all commented that they did not feel as though they were a part of the planning of their education and that they did not contribute much to their educational goals. One "unsuccessful" student stated,

Well, I think that there were some meetings every couple of years. My mom went and, I think the person that tested me went and my teacher. I didn't go. I didn't see any reason for me to go. They probably talked about my grades, I don't know, maybe, if I was in trouble or something.

When I questioned him further, he didn't really understand or remember hearing the phrase "IEP meeting," and he responded with the fact that his "mom would do all that stuff."

Eight of the ten students answered "no" when asked if they participated in IEP meetings. Two students claimed that there were no such meetings. One "unsuccessful" student stated,

Uh IEPs...I don't think we had an IEP. I knew there were other students with dyslexia and LD. If I ever had a problem, I could talk to the Vice Principal, he was very supportive. Uh...IEP meetings, I don't think I actually ever had an IEP meeting.

Another "unsuccessful" student said,

I remember getting tested, but those were every three years. I am not sure about the IEPs—those were kept confidential.

Students discussed the difficulty of having to learn about their disability, strengths and weaknesses after high school, while they are entering the post secondary setting.

Three students observed that having had a better understanding of their disability and its impact would have better helped them self-advocate. This sentiment is reinforced by McGahee, Mason, Wallace and Jones (2001) as they reflect this perception by noting that the use of active involvement in the IEP process can help smooth the way for success in their lives after high school.

b. Disability support services

Seven of the ten students interviewed agreed with the following sentiment and commented that they came to the University of Arizona because they heard that "... the

UA had the best college program for LD.” The consultants at the DRC fulfill a variety of needs depending on the individual student. These needs include helping students to become articulate in explaining the unique impact of their disability, having someone to help pick out classes, having someone to “cheer them on” through academic successes, and having someone to talk to on campus. One “successful” student explained how his Access Consultant at the DRC helped him to understand his disability for the first time.

(Access Consultant) helped me to understand learning disabilities and to focus on them-not to dwell on them. You know, realize that this is what I have and deal with it- work with it, you know. Either work around it or work with it, whichever is more successful for you-whichever is better. You know? You’ve got to go with what you got to do. Sometimes, she will go with me to meet my teachers and, kind of, well- she will talk to them about my disability. It is really helpful.

An “unsuccessful” student who was in the “jeopardy” group first semester said that meeting with her Access Consultant helps her stay more on top of things, “just knowing that someone else knows.” She noted,

I call (Access Consultant) like five times a week and I go there a lot. I can go there and discuss ideas and get ways of accomplishing what I need to do. I also like how she tells me about classes and different things so that I don’t forget things.

Another “unsuccessful” student described her Access Consultant as a “mom” because her mother is so far away.

(Access Consultant) is like a second mother to me. I don’t know how I’d gotten through college without her. I see her whenever there is a problem. She helps me

with the professors, like one time she went with me to meet with my Nats professor to talk about my disability, and I think that was really helpful.

A “successful” student reported that it was a helpful feeling that he can “count on” someone at a time when he is so far from home. He meets with his Access Consultant throughout the semester, mostly to discuss which degree and major is the best route for him to achieve his career goal.

All participants in this study referred to their Access Consultant in a positive sense and described some level of dependency on their consultants. Three of the ten students acknowledged that they didn’t utilize the DRC services much in their first semester, but have made efforts to use the center more in their second semester. The majority of interviewees noted that their parents were responsible for doing the research with regard to the UA and DRC. Most assumed that they would have accommodations, but that they were initially unsure as to how to access them. All of the students indicated that they use one or more accommodations (see Table 3.2).

4. Indicators of success in academics

a. Hard work and persistence

Eight of ten students said that having a learning disability required that they spend hours doing homework, much more time than their peers spend. These students discussed their need to decide how to spend their free time taking into consideration the need to study and time obligations for participating in extra curricular activities. One “successful” student indicated that he must spend more time studying. He stated,

You have to make the decision whether you are going to study or go out and party. I mostly study, due to my learning disability. I study a lot more than everyone else.

An “unsuccessful” student reported that her disability was a factor in her time management decisions. She stated,

Well, I definitely had to decide on how many groups I could join. Because of my disability, I am constantly fatigued and I’m always tired. So it’s like, I guess, when you wake up in the morning before you have your coffee, that’s how I feel all the time, even when I drink coffee. So I had to decide how much I could handle, how many classes I could take and still be able, you know, to study real hard, and how many organizations and how often they meet each week.

A “successful” student says he tends to work really hard. A lot of his friends are a lot smarter than he is, but they are not pursuing things that require his intellectual ability. He has always had to stay focus and persist on his major, Business, and he is getting there with hard work. He keeps doing his work until he understands it. He says it is not intellectual ability on his part. He works hard- “it’s hard work.”

An “unsuccessful” student discussed how she has had to adjust her decisions regarding working harder and studying more often by explaining,

Well, some things are trial and error. Some things I have learned because I made a mistake. My partying went a little too far. Well, it didn’t go too far, but my grades faltered and I still am trying harder this semester. I think that I am not going to party as much and completely stay focused to my studies. I guess part of it was truthfully I was looking for guys because, I don’t know, I always like to have a

guy around as a boyfriend and part of it was that it is so hard 'cause of my learning disability. And I am very social so I try to get myself involved as much as possible. But that kept me away from paying attention to what it was that I was really supposed to be doing. Not so much that I dropped out of school or that I really got my grade point average real low, but it did falter.

This student's GPA was 1.7 in the fall of 2006, and she was able to bring her spring GPA up to 2.7, making her cumulative GPA, for her freshman year, a 2.2. All eight students considered their learning disability as a factor that needed to be taken into consideration when reflecting on the amount of hard work and persistence.

Summary

This section of the research identified the students and reported the shared perceptions of the students as they responded to questions about the role that self-advocacy played in their success at the post-secondary level. The experiences that students shared with me varied in terms of their perceptions of their "success" or lack thereof in their ability to self-advocate, perceptions of their learning disability, perceptions of their involvement in their educational programs, and perceptions of success in academics. Their responses yielded several themes and each theme was considered and presented from the perspective of the students. This information generated several fundamental themes, as earlier described, that can be seen as important elements in the development of self-advocacy skills.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter, in this study, is designed to summarize the key findings of the study, present conclusions drawn from the findings, and provide implications for future policy, practice and research. This study was designed to investigate the understanding of how students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in pursuing “successful” participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona. The purpose of this research was to identify student’s perceptions of their ability to self-advocate in relation to their “success” at the UA. At the onset of this investigation, I indicated that, by understanding how students with learning disabilities utilize their ability to self-advocate, in order to succeed in academics at the post-secondary level, measures might be taken to help improve/increase the direct instruction of self-advocacy skills in high school education. The development of these self-advocacy skills may then improve and/or increase the transition to post-secondary settings and perhaps improve graduation rates for those students with LD. This study was designed to understand how students with LD perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of “successful” participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona.

Summary

I recruited ten students with LD through the use of a flyer descriptive of the study, then obtained their informed consent to interview them and access their student records, and conducted face-to-face interviews of 45 minutes to one hour in length. Based on an adaptation of Seidman’s (1991) three-tiered approach to interviews, the interview

protocols were designed to gain information and perceptions related to life history, current experiences, and a synthesis/analysis of perceptions. Students were then interviewed in an attempt to determine their perspectives regarding the role that self-advocacy plays for themselves as college students.

I interviewed the first ten students that responded and they included four students that were identified as “successful” and six students that were identified as in “jeopardy.” There were a total of eight male students and two female students. These interviews were recorded and transcribed and were the primary source of data for this study. I also analyzed student records that included documentation of LD such as psycho-educational evaluations, high school Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and records of accommodations at UA.

Throughout the process of conducting and transcribing the interviews, I categorized, grouped, and clustered the data in order to interpret it and find common themes. I attempted to find themes that were relevant to self-advocacy as it related to “successful” participation in the post-secondary setting at the University of Arizona. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended a bottom-up approach in which data is broken down into its smallest units, systematically coded and collated into categories which are extrapolated into meaningful themes. Each theme was then uncovered as a topic reported on by at least seven of ten participants. From this, I concluded that each theme was an important aspect of the participants’ experiences. The themes together represent the range of experiences that constitute the basic elements of self-advocacy skills. Discussion for these findings and recommendations for further research are discussed in this chapter.

Data from the interviews suggested that students shared common experiences in the development of their self-advocacy skills and its relationship on their education at the post-secondary level. A majority of the “successful” and “unsuccessful” students statements were consistent with what is reported on in the literature. From these common experiences, four themes that were directly related to their personal experiences with self-advocacy were developed. These themes can be seen as important elements of self-advocacy.

The four themes identified in this study were:

1. Students’ ability to self-advocate
 - a. Dependence on parental and/or teacher assistance
 - b. Disclosure and accommodations
2. Perceptions of disability
 - a. Students’ self perceptions
 - b. Stigma and bias
3. Involvement in educational planning
 - a. Limited involvement in IEP meetings
 - b. Disability support services
4. Indicators of success
 - a. Hard work and persistence

Discussion

Research in the area of learning disabilities and higher education has shown that the number of students with diagnosed learning disabilities attending post-secondary settings is on the rise. Further, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to the

understanding of how students are utilizing self-advocacy, specifically with regard to the “successful” participation in postsecondary education. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the experiences of students with learning disabilities in a post-secondary setting as it related to self-advocacy skills and their success or lack thereof at the UA. According to a review of recent professional literature, there are four central factors that affect the needs of students with LD transitioning from high school to college; student self-advocacy skills, inadequate transition planning, academic preparation of students with learning disabilities, and guided educational programs. This study did not uncover issues directly related to the academic preparation of high school students, but students did address the ability to self-advocate and guided educational programs. They also addressed inadequate transition planning, noting that, for the most part, it was their parents who did the research and not the student nor the student with the support of a school counselor. Moreover, this study uncovered the lack of student involvement in the IEP process in high school, noted by the fact that 8 of the 10 students interviewed did not recall ever participating in an IEP meeting. Studies have shown that in order to become effective self-advocates, students with learning disabilities must be able to define and explain their disability to others, which is an integral piece in the IEP meeting (McGaheem Mason, Wallace. & Jones, 2001).

Many of the themes uncovered in this analysis support those assumptions that students who demonstrate an awareness of their disability and the ability to self-advocate will likely feel success related to the postsecondary setting. Participants in this study described how their LD has impacted them both in high school and at the UA. These students with LD described their ability to disclose information about the disability and

discussed the level of support needed in order to experience success. Most notably, a majority of the students said that they either did not participate in their IEP in high school or that they did not think that such a meeting existed. A discussion related to each theme is provided as follows:

1. *Students' ability to self-advocate*

a. *Dependence on parental and/or teacher assistance*

Eight of ten students interviewed reported that their parents' and/or teachers' support extended well into their academic studies. This was reinforced throughout the student interviews. Of those eight students, one was classified as "successful" and the other seven were "jeopardy." Those seven students noted that not only did their parents/teachers help with homework, but they also designed and implemented the educational programs and special education placements without the awareness or input of the student. In further discussion with these students, it became clear that all of those years of parental and educational direction left these students struggling to understand their learning disabilities and the impact that the diagnosis might have on their educational choices. This finding highlights the literature of Brinkerhoff et al (1993) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) that describes the value of developing knowledge of one's self and knowledge of one's learning disability. Often times students with LD are not able to adequately describe their disability and its impact on their education and, as a result, others may be influenced by this lack of understanding and associate it with a lack of motivation and an unwillingness to perform. Students should be directly taught how to explain their disability, share their strengths and challenges, and talk about their future. A male student described his dependency on the resource room in high school:

The resource room helped me a lot. That is one of the reasons that I picked Arizona because of the help of the DRC. Plain and simple, if I didn't have the resource room in high school, I wouldn't be successful.

Providing students with a well-developed sense of self-advocacy at the high school level will allow them to gain a greater understanding of themselves and their disability, as well as enhancing their ability to experience success.

b. Disclosure and accommodations

All ten students interviewed were able to recognize the effects of their learning disabilities and did exercise their right to accommodation services. Of these ten students, four were in the category of "success" and six were in "jeopardy". Each of them used accommodations for classes and/or exams. In my interviews, all of the students attributed a portion of their success to the utilization of accommodations. However, seven of the participants felt that they were perceived by campus peers and faculty as not requiring accommodation services because their disabilities were not readily evident. These students noted feeling awkward in requesting and using their accommodations. Some of these students were unable to identify their disability and others had difficulty describing the impact of their disability. These findings are consistent with the literature that suggests that a hidden disability can present barriers to appropriate assistance or accommodation because it may be considered less legitimate and less significant than an apparent disability (Olney and Kim, 2001). Disclosure of hidden disabilities, such as learning disabilities pose unique implications for students with disabilities often involving labels which carry significant stereotypes and societal stigmatization (Lynch & Gussel, 1996). Self-advocacy related to disability documentation and disclosure is often a

major issue for many students. Lynch and Gussel (1996) assert that self-advocacy and appropriate disclosure are ultimately the responsibility of a postsecondary school student with a disability. For example, if accommodations are needed within a college setting, a student is required to disclose the disability and related needs, but multiple dilemmas arise for the student, including when to disclose, how to disclose, how much to disclose, and to whom to disclose. A student may make considerable effort to keep a hidden disability private and reasons may include anxiety and fear due to anticipated attitudes of faculty, staff, and peers (Lynch & Gussel, 1996).

The issue of disclosing is a personal decision, one that must be made by individual students. All of the students in this study chose to disclose only if they were going to be using accommodations or if they felt that their LD would impact their progress in specific classes.

2. *Perceptions of disability*

a. *Students' self perceptions*

All ten students interviewed articulated that they perceived that their LD negatively impacted them in their education. Of these ten students, four were in the category of "success" and six were in "jeopardy." These students expressed the impact of their LD in terms of its effect in the classroom, or they described functional limitations such as processing deficits. Three of the students expressed information about their disabilities in neutral terms, simply explaining the effects. Others spoke about significant others who did not believe that the inability to comprehend concepts was a true feature of the disability. There was also mention of how other people don't understand or misunderstand their disabilities, which overlapped into another theme of "stigma and

bias.” The way in which students perceive their learning disabilities is a critical component in the social construction of learning disabilities. How students perceive their learning disabilities influences their approaches to their academics including whether they take an active or passive role in academics, the degree to which they are dedicated to their academics, the way in which they communicate with instructors, advisors, and other staff. Several studies of college graduates with learning disabilities indicate that individuals were more likely to ask for assistance and to develop compensatory strategies when they understood the specific problems associated with their disabilities (Rogan & Hartman, 1990; Vogel, Hruby & Adelman, 1993; Morrison & Cosden, 1997). These studies support other research that cites the importance of understanding the effects of a learning disability as an area of specific weakness. It is this awareness that allows an individual to accept the deficits associated with the diagnosis while at the same time recognizing the strengths that may offset them.

b. Stigma and bias

The discussions in this section were very unique in that negative attitudes and perceptions were readily sensed by students as evidenced through the responses of students to the interview questions. When these students were asked about their LD, and about others who either assisted or impeded their transition, eight of ten talked about how others’ negatively viewed their disability. Of these eight students, three were in the category of “success” and five were in the category of “jeopardy.” These students talked of others seeing them as lazy or unmotivated. One student talked of teachers “singling her out.” This is consistent with current literature that appears to emphasize others’ perceptions rather than self perceptions (Barnes, 2003; Linton, 1998; Mercer, 2002;

Oliver, 1996.) In 1994, Baines, Baines, and Masterson conducted research and found a negative attitude toward inclusion in classrooms. This is consistent with a large survey conducted by Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher & Saumell (1994) in which a majority of teachers expressed negative feelings toward inclusion. In 2005, Dupoux, Wolman and Estrada stated that some secondary teachers openly admit that accepting pupils with disabilities is a burden. Often times, general education teachers regard special education teachers as being more qualified to handle students with disabilities in pullout programs or self-contained classes than general education teachers in inclusive settings. This is consistent with the work of Semmel et al. (1991) that indicates that the most common resistance to inclusion is the belief by teachers that they lack the skills needed to teach a child with a disability. Troiano (2003) also observed that individuals identify various degrees of stigmatization associated with their learning disabilities, which took place initially during childhood. Participants in his research also reported stigmatization in the post-secondary settings especially when explaining about their disabilities and the accommodations they required to professors.

Stigmatizations lead to feelings of hopelessness, and at times a loss of self-confidence, for students who were singled out or labeled different. Students who experienced a high degree of stigmatization were more likely to allow the learning disability to define their weakness, rather than their unique learning style. These students also tended to view their disability as a permanent condition that would continue to affect every aspect of their academic and social lives. (p.412)

The attitudes of teachers in the learning process are crucial, particularly as it relates to motivation. Therefore, teachers who hold less than positive attitudes towards inclusion may have less than optimum motivation to work with included students.

3. *Involvement in educational planning*

a. *Limited involvement in IEP meetings*

Eight of ten students in this study reported that they had little to no involvement in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Of these eight, two students were in the “success” category and six were in the “jeopardy” category. This theme is directly correlated to studies that indicate that few students in special education perceive themselves to be included in the IEP process (Lovitt, 1994). Increasingly, autonomy and self-determination are mentioned as goals for students with learning disabilities.

Participation in the IEP process encourages these skills. deFur et al., 1996; & Vogel, Hruby & Adelman (1993) agree with this observation and assert that students who are involved in planning their own programs gain needed practice in self-advocacy and goal setting, skills that are fundamental to their success after high school. The literature on students with learning disabilities indicates that many of them do not fully participate in IEP meetings or choose the goals and objectives that personally affect them (deFur et al., 1996; Lovitt et al., 1994). Frequently, transition service providers assume that college-bound students with learning disabilities will make successful adjustments because of their high school success. Therefore, these students are less likely to receive effective transition planning (Dunn, 1996; Reiff & deFur, 1992; Rojewski, 1992). The responses of the students, in this study, supported that notion. Although they were successful in high

school, the students explained that they had problems adjusting to the academic requirements at the university.

Lack of involvement in the IEP process in high school is a significant theme in that the participation in an IEP meeting can provide students with a well developed sense of self-advocacy (McGahee, M., Mason, C., Wallace, T., and Jones, B., 2001). The ramifications of failing to acquire self-advocacy skills can be very debilitating. At the university level, these students may be unaware of their needs, unaware of how their disability impacts them and therefore unaware of how to describe, adequately, their strengths and challenges. Eight of these students did perceive that a better awareness of their own disability and better understanding of accommodations would have helped them with their transition, in that they could better advocate for themselves.

b. Disability support services

Seven of the ten students reported high levels of dependency and involvement with the DRC and their Access Consultant in order to help with requesting accommodations and interacting with professors. Of these seven, three were in the “success” category and four were in the “jeopardy” category. This theme has been highlighted in previous literature by the work of Dalke and Schmitt (1987) who expressed that students’ whose parents and teachers advocate for them, instead of allowing them to experience their own decision-making limit them with the belief that they may expect significant others to guide them through education. Unless students experience both success and failure, they will not be able to understand their assets and limitations, an awareness that is critical to adult success. As described by Seligman (1975) one of the biggest deterrents at the postsecondary level for students with learning

disabilities is a factor called “learned helplessness,” a phenomenon that occurs when a person perceives that he or she has no control over the consequences of his/her behavior. This theme is also addressed in the works of Izzo, Herzfeld & Aaron (2001) as they confirm that many college students with disabilities report that they are not comfortable requesting accommodations from faculty. Often times, students must advocate for accommodations with faculty who may not understand the nature of specific disabilities, nor the accommodations that are appropriate. Many students with disabilities do not understand their strengths and limitations well enough to explain how some compensatory strategies will “equal the playing field” but will not grant “unfair advantage” (Gordon & Keiser, 1998). I found it interesting that these students acknowledged their dependence on external sources and have yet been able to take on the onus of obtaining independence with regard to their education. More than likely it is as a result of the lack of proper preparation and active involvement and understanding of their disability.

4. *Indicators of success in academics*

a. Hard work and persistence

Eight of ten students indicated that motivation and persistence were important for success at the post-secondary level. Of the eight students, four students were in the “success” category and four were in the “jeopardy” category. This theme is emphasized through the work of Gerber et al., (1992); Hagborg, (1996); Sands & Doll, (1996) as they explain that the willingness to persevere and put forth extra effort to achieve personal goals is cited as an indication of self-determination and belief in control over positive outcomes. These students perceived their families to be supportive and encouraging,

however, they felt that their belief in their own abilities and their inner drive is what motivated them to spend the time and energy required to make their college degree a reality. None of the students expressed doubts that they would attend college. While family expectations played a large role in their decisions, these students also mentioned goals based on personal interests and their belief in the benefits of a college degree. They chose UA for the degree programs that fit their interests and areas of strength. Several participants said it was their only college choice.

Summation

This section of the research provides information about the perceptions and experiences of ten freshman students with learning disabilities at the University of Arizona. The purpose of this study was give a voice to students with learning disabilities in describing their perceptions of the role that self-advocacy plays in their experiences in pursuing “successful” participation in post-secondary education at the University of Arizona. In examining the gaps in the development and teaching of self-advocacy skills as presented by the information in this study, it would appear that the concept of “learned helplessness” is at the root of many of these gaps and that measures that incorporate the direct instruction of self-advocacy skills in both high school and college would serve to overcome many of the barriers to success. One of the ways in which this can be accomplished is to encourage students to take part in their IEP planning in high school. Students with disabilities in higher education must become self-advocates. They are encouraged to take part in their IEP planning in high school but they will still receive services if they do not actively participate. IDEA is the law which mandates services for students with disabilities until they leave high school. The laws that affect them in

college have a different focus. Section 504 of the 1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990) places the responsibility on students for initiating services. These federal laws address modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities in higher education. Among these accommodations are, providing for alternative testing formats, the use of learning aids deemed necessary for a particular student, developing course substitutions or waivers, reduced course loads, and allowing students extended time for degree completion (Jarrow, 1992). Academic requirements are to be considered on a case-by-case basis to allow equal educational opportunities for all.

In summary, themes that emerged from this research study related to students' experiences both in high school and in college. The students' feedback and their perceptions in relation to their abilities to self-advocate were consistent with the research. The ability to self-advocate was accentuated by the participants and addressed specifically as it relates to the literature. The ability to understand and accept the LD diagnosis, the ability to set goals which incorporate strengths, and the ability to persist and demonstrate extra effort were all given attention in this study and are consistent with what I found in the recent professional literature. The development of self-advocacy skills is an on going process and one that should be directly taught and regularly reinforced. Students' responses reflected a desire to understand more about their disability and the ability to communicate about it more effectively.

Recommendations

The themes expressed by these students as self-advocacy, involvement in IEP planning, and how success could be indicated suggest that high schools take a more proactive approach to teaching the skills of self-advocacy and that post-secondary schools use a more practical approach when working with students. Recommendations are provided specific to self-advocacy programming and future research.

Recommendations specific to self-advocacy programming include the following:

- Create and implement a school-wide direct instruction program designed to address the salient features of self-advocacy and teach them in a meaningful way to students beginning at the pre-school level.
- Prepare all high school students for transition. For students with learning disabilities enrolling in higher education, this involves the skills they will need in the new setting.
- Assist students with learning disabilities in understanding their learning disabilities. Encourage them to participate actively in setting their transition goals and objectives in their IEP's.
- Collaborate between high school transition specialists and college or university services for students with disabilities personnel. Coordinate transition plans. Ease the adjustment for students by helping them learn of the changes in their rights and responsibilities at a college or university before enrollment.

- Participate in college preparatory classes, practice using similar accommodations, goals and objectives directly relating to understanding legal rights and responsibilities, and practice in self-advocacy. These initiatives increase the chances of a student's successful adjustment to college.
- Encourage parents to support and encourage the positive characteristics and strengths of their children in their home environments in order to positively affect their self-advocacy skills. Social support from parents and families is important to the development of positive self-concepts in children.
- Provide parent training in support of providing choices for their student, thereby increasing the student's opportunities for decision making and development of independent skills. In this way, students develop skills of autonomy and self-advocacy that are necessary for success after high school.
- Encourage parent involvement at all levels of a student's education. Effective educational programming for students with learning disabilities should incorporate efforts to assist parents in understanding the strengths and weaknesses associated with their children's learning disability diagnosis. In this way, parents can help their children develop an appreciation of their particular skills and aptitudes, as well as ways to compensate for their academic deficits.

Recommendations specific to research include the following:

- Conduct a study to replicate this study utilizing a more heterogeneous sample. This might provide richer data from broader cultural backgrounds. This study's sample was representative of the population of U of A DRC students. However, some other four-year colleges have more culturally heterogeneous population and this may produce different findings
- Compare the perceptions of college students with learning disabilities and their parents concerning the influences of family environments and educational experiences on students' academic choices.
- Conduct a qualitative study of college students with learning disabilities who were dismissed for academic reasons from a four-year university to offer a comparison to this study, by exploring similarities and differences in perceptions of the family environments and educational experiences of those individuals.
- Conduct longitudinal studies of students with learning disabilities who are still in high school and extend until they have successfully completed college, to assist educators and parents in developing self-advocacy skill programs.
- Conduct research of college students with learning disabilities in other higher education settings such as community colleges and smaller colleges in order to provide insight into additional factors that may indicate academic success for this population

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Volunteers Needed for Interviews for Research Study

Are you a freshman receiving accommodations from the Disability Resource Center (DRC)? Did you receive special education services in high school? If so, you might qualify to participate in a research study conducted by a doctoral student to complete a dissertation.

Requirements for this study:

- You must be a freshman at the University of Arizona
- You must be a student receiving services at DRC
- You must have been diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability (LD)
- You must be at least 18 years old
- There are also GPA requirements (either 3.0 or above, or below 2.0) that will be discussed when you inquire about the study

If selected, you will participate in an interview that will be about one hour long. You may also be called after the interview to clarify things that you said, if needed. All interviews will take place in a private office at DRC. Your interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed. All information will be kept confidential. All participants will be compensated in cash upon the completion of the one interview.

Benefits to you:

You will have the chance to participate in research that is intended to assist students with LD in transitioning from high school to college. You will be able to share what the researcher learns and assist her in formulating the actual study. You will be invited to learn helpful strategies for college success if you desire, following your interview. You will also earn a cash stipend for completing the interview.

Please contact:

Colleen M. Rojas

(520)275-3622 cmrojas@u.arizona.edu

APPENDIX B

SUBJECT'S CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Perception of Self-Advocacy on Students with Learning Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Qualitative Analysis

You are being asked to read the following material to ensure that you are informed of the nature of this research study and of how you will participate in it, if you consent to do so. Signing this form will indicate that you have been so informed and that you give your consent. Federal regulations require written informed consent prior to participation in this research study so that you can know the nature and risks of your participation and can decide to participated or not participate in a free and informed manner.

Purpose

You are being invited to participate voluntarily in the above-titled research project. The purpose of this project is to complete the dissertation requirements of the Ph.D. degree program for the Principal Investigator. The value of this research is intended to fill a gap in existing research about how students with learning disabilities (LD) perceive the role that self-advocacy plays in their experience in the pursuit of and "successful" participation in postsecondary education, and to examine their experiences as reliable informants who are the best authorities on their own lives. Answering the research question could inform and drive effective programs that facilitate the development of self-advocacy skills and help to ensure a smooth transition process for students with LD.

Selection Criteria

The Principal Investigator (PI) will discuss the requirements for participants in this study with you. To be eligible to participate, you must be a freshman who (1) receives accommodations through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at the University of Arizona (UA), (2) received special education services in high school, including some level of transition services, (3) have a diagnosed Specific Learning Disability (LD), as indicated by documentation of such disability presented to DRC, and (4) is at least 18 years of age. Participants will also have to meet certain study-related criteria related to their Grade Point Averages (GPA). A total of ten individuals will be enrolled in this study overall.

Procedure(s)

The following information describes your participation in this study which will last up to one semester. You will be interviewed by the PI in the privacy of an office at DRC. You will be asked open-ended questions about high school and college, and your transition to college. Your answers will be tape recorded and transcribed so that the PI may analyze all participants' answers. You may be called or contacted by email following the interview, if needed for clarification. I will also need access to your academic and DRC records.

Procedure(s) continued

In your academic records I will look for your GPA, number of credit hours obtained and academic status (probation, college DQ, continuing probation, etc.) and in your DRC records I will be accessing your disability status, intelligence quotient (IQ), and accommodations provided.

Risks

The only potential risk is psychological. You will be asked about experiences that may have been difficult for you and may cause you to feel badly in recalling these experiences. If you disclose academic problems or stress related to this, the PI will offer the opportunity to work with her to develop strategies for academic success if you choose. You will also be referred to your DRC access consultant for academic counseling if you choose.

Benefits

The benefit to you from your participation is increased knowledge of self-advocacy and the transition process after the PI has analyzed the data, exposure to previously published literature about self-advocacy and transition if they are interested, and the offer of instruction in academic strategies if you choose. This can be done by appointment(s) with the PI, who can also provide written materials about these strategies. You may also have access to the findings of this study in writing and/or in a private meeting with the PI. The broader benefit of this research will be to inform and drive effective programs on self-advocacy skills as they relate to the transition process for students with LD.

Confidentiality

The PI will need access to your academic for research purposes. Signing this consent form will allow her this access. She will keep this information confidential, for use only for this research study. Only the PI and the faculty advisor will have access to your name and the information that you provide. In order to maintain your confidentiality, your name will not be revealed in any reports that result from this project. Interview information will be locked in a cabinet in a secure place. All tapes, transcripts, and linked data will be destroyed following completion and defense of the dissertation. The results will be shared with the DRC to use in improving the program, but you will not be identified by name.

Participation Costs and Subject Compensation

There is no cost to you for participating except your time. The interview will take approximately one hour. Follow-up calls or emails will be very brief, probably less than ten minutes, if needed at all, simply to clarify specific questions. You will be compensated for your participation by being paid \$10.00 upon completion of the interview. Your willingness to participate, or your declining to participate, will not impact the services or benefits you receive from DRC.

Contacts

You can obtain further information from the PI, Colleen M. Rojas, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate, at (520) 275-3622. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.)

Authorization

Before giving my consent by signing this form, the methods, inconveniences, risks, and benefits have been explained to me and my questions have been answered. I may ask questions at any time and am free to withdraw from the project at any time without causing bad feelings or affecting my eligibility and services at DRC. My participation in this project may be ended by the investigator for reasons that would be explained. New information developed during the course of this study which may affect my willingness to continue in this research project will be given to me as it becomes available. This consent form will be filed in an area designated by the Human Subjects Committee with access restricted by the principal investigator, Colleen M. Rojas, M.A., Ph.D Candidate, at (520)275-3622 or authorized representative of the SERP Department. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form. A copy of this signed consent form will be given to me.

 Subject's Signature

Date

Investigator's Affidavit

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

 Signature of Presenter

Date

 Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C**SAMPLE: TRANSCRIPT OF ONE STUDENT INTERVIEW**

3/21/07- Male student in the jeopardy group

CR: Can you describe your disability and how it has affected you in the classroom?

Student: I have attention deficit disorder. I have a lot of trouble sitting and listening.

Uh...let's see, I have a hard time reading and doing math.

CR: Ok. Can you describe your high school years, specifically as it relates to special education and your accommodations?

Student: I was in resource classes. There wasn't timed tests. You could work on the stuff for as long as you needed, I think. I didn't get special accommodations, everyone got the same thing. Uh, high school—well, it wasn't very hard. I had good teachers. I know I didn't have a lot of homework because I would do it in a study skills class- so that was kind of good.

CR: What kinds of things would you do in your study skills classes?

Student: Well, you know... the teacher would help us with our homework, if we needed it and um, we had to keep a calendar and write down stuff, like what we were doing that week and stuff. Sometimes she would talk about keeping our notebooks neat and once in awhile we would do grade reports.

CR: That sounds like it might have helped you to learn some organization skills.

Student: Yeah, I guess so. Mostly, I liked not having a lot of homework.

CR: Okay, back to high school. Did you find that getting extra time on your tests was helpful?

Student: Yeah, it was nice not to stress about running out of time. Sometimes, I read slow and don't get all of the information. Sometimes, the teacher would even read part of the test out loud.

CR: Do you use accommodations now?

Student: Yeah, I have extra time on tests, a note-taker- that I don't really use, and I take my tests upstairs here (DRC). My teachers send the tests here (DRC) and then I have extra time.

CR: Great. Okay, describe a situation in high school in which you were able to express your needs and what were the results of that expression?

Student: Um, I didn't really do that I don't think. Um, I don't really know what you mean.

CR: Okay, for example, if you needed to talk to your teacher and let her know that you needed something, for example, a break from work, or maybe to type an assignment versus writing it- what would you do?

Student: Oh, I guess I would tell my mom and then she would talk to the teacher. I didn't really do stuff like that. My mom would come to the school and meet with the teachers.

CR: Okay.

Student: I guess, I could- well I don't remember doing that.

CR: Okay. Did you ever participate in your IEP meetings?

Student: Well, I think that there were meetings every couple of years. My mom went and, I think that the person who tested me went and my teacher. I didn't go. I didn't see any reason for me to go. They probably talked about my grades, I don't know, maybe if I was in trouble or something.

CR: Do you know what an IEP meeting is?

Student: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't really understand what that is and I don't think I have ever heard of that phrase. You know, really, I think that my mom did all that stuff."

CR: Alright. Now, to what do you attribute your academic success and/or failure in high school?

Student: Well, all in all I did okay in high school. I guess you could say that. I had mostly B's and C's. My teachers helped a lot.

CR: How about anything that you did to help yourself out.

Student: Um, yeah- I worked hard at getting all of my work done. Sometimes, I used a tutor at school, if I ever had any problems. But, pretty much everything was okay.

CR: What determines whether you are going to succeed or not in you academic pursuits now?

Student: Well, now I have to do it. I do see (Access Consultant) sometimes and she helps me out. Also I have study time in my frat. (fraternity) that I have to do—sometimes that is a drag and also time consuming. Um, pretty much, I use extended time and the testing center too.

CR: Okay. Let's discuss your transition from high school to college. Was there anyone that helped to guide you?

Student: Oh my mom helped me with that. It was a lot of work- writing essays and answering all of those questions and stuff. I pretty much knew that I was coming here though. My mom looked a lot on the computer and found the University of Arizona and thought that it would be good for me.

CR: Did anyone in school discuss college with you?

Student: No, not too much. I always knew that I would be going to college because that's what my parents told me. And, well I don't mind – it is kind of cool.

CR: Did you have any difficulties transitioning to the U of A?

Student: Well, no not really. I knew a couple of kids that came here too. Everyone here seems really nice and I like the weather compared to the cold and rain where I live. And, in my classes, I would say, that there are a lot more kids and stuff in my classes, but I don't think that that has really affected me. I don't think that I had difficulties transitioning from my high school to here.

CR: Great. So in general, you would say that your transition was easy or hard?

Student: Oh it was easy. Sometimes, I might get a little homesick (laughs), but all in all it was easy.

CR: Okay. Now that you are in college, what does having a learning disability mean to you? Do you disclose your disability to your instructors?

Student: Um, well...what I did last semester was that I came here and met with (Access Consultant) and we, well, she and I sent out emails and stuff to my teachers to tell them that I have a disability and then that was really it. I don't really go and tell the teachers anything, I don't think that it would really matter. My tests are sent to the testing center and then I come here and take them.

CR: Okay, can you, again, describe the accommodations that you use?

Student: Well, like I said, I use the testing center for my tests and so I can get extended time. I have note-taking, but I don't really use it because a lot of the teachers hand out their notes to us- and that is about it. My grades weren't the best last semester, so maybe

I should use the DRC more and study more. You know, it is just a lot time that I am doing other things that I should spend more on studying and stuff.

CR: Okay. Describe the support services that you are receiving in college. How and why did you become involved with the DRC?

Student: Well, I didn't really know what it was until I came here. I had no idea what it was. (laughs) I thought that it was for getting accommodations, I guess that's what it's for. I like being able to come here and meet with (Access Consultant). She is really cool and helpful. I think that it was my mom that figured out about DRC when she was looking on the computer. She knows that I need more time on tests and stuff so that is why I am here.

CR: Okay. Can you describe a situation in college in which you were able to express your needs and what was the result of that expression?

Student: Um, let's see. (pause) Well, this semester, I was having problems understanding in my Nats class and I went and talked to my teacher about it and she gave me some of her notes and helped me understand stuff better. That was nice, because I usually don't go to see my teachers, but I think that I probably should so that I can get better grades for this semester. Last semester, my grades weren't so great. (laughs)

CR: That sounds great. I am glad that you went to meet with your teacher. I think that you will find that it is very helpful to meet with your teachers when you are struggling. They can always offer some more insight or clear up any confusion for you.

Student: Yeah, I think that I should do that better.

CR: Okay, is there any other information that you would like to share concerning your experiences as a student with a learning disability?

Student: Well, just that going to college is a lot different than high school and stuff. It is a lot bigger and there is a lot you have to know. I am lucky because I can come here (DRC) if I need to, not all kids can do that. I think though that, in general, it is important to use your accommodations and it is important to study regularly, so that stuff does not pile up on you, like sometimes it has on me. Other than that, it has been good.

CR: Great. Thanks so much for your time.

Student: Thank you.

TABLE 3.1

Interview Instrument for my Qualitative Research Study

1. What is your disability and how has it affected you in the classroom?
2. Tell me about your high school years, specifically as it relates to your special education and/or accommodations.
 - a. Were these useful?
 - b. How were they determined?
 - c. Are they accommodations that are useful to you now?
3. Describe a situation in high school in which you were able to express your needs.

What were the results of this expression?
4. Did you participate in student-led IEP meetings? If so, can you tell me how.
 - a. Please describe meetings.
5. To what do attribute your academic success and failure in high school?
 - a. What determines whether you will succeed or fail in your academic pursuits?
6. Discuss your transition from HS to college:
 - a. Who helped to guide you? Describe the discussions.
 - b. What were some of your difficulties?
 - c. Was the transition easy or hard, please explain.
7. Now that you are in college, what does having a learning disability mean to you?
 - a. Do you disclose your LD to your instructors? If so, please describe.
 - b. Do you use accommodations? If so, please describe.
8. Describe the support services that you are receiving in college?
 - a. How did you become involved with the DRC?
 - b. Why did you become involved with the DRC?

9. Describe a situation in college in which you were able to express your needs.

What was the result of this expression?

10. Is there any other information that you would like to share concerning your experiences as a student with a learning disability?

TABLE 3.2

Student Demographic Characteristics

(Abbreviations follow table)

Student Age Gender	Home	GPA Fall 2006	GPA Spring 2007 & Cum GPA	Total units earned by Spring 2007	Disability diagnosis	Accoms.	Major
1. 19, M	NJ	3.0	2.071 2.5	28	NVLD, Mobility	1,2,3,6,9	Und.
2. 19, M	IL	1.667	2.5 2.222	19	LD, ADHD	1,3	Und.
3. 18, M	CA	1.933	2.8 2.367	31	LD	1,2,3,4,6,10	Micro- biology
4. 20, M	AZ	3.769	3.8 3.786	45	LD, ADHD, Psych.	1,2,3	Poli. Sci.
5. 18, F	CA	1.5	1.75 1.636	18	LD, ADHD	1,2,3,4,9	Pre- Comm.
6. 18, M	IL	3.545	2.8 3.115	23	LD	1,3,6	Pre- Bus.
7. 18, M	CA	1.3	0.6 0.88	17	LD, ADHD	1,3,5,7	Pre- Eng./Und.
8. 18, F	CA	1.7	2.7 2.2	21	LD, ADHD, Psych.	1,2,3	Und.
9. 18, M	CA	3.769	3.294 3.5	30	LD	1,3,4,5,8	Pre-Bus.
10. 18, M	AZ	1.4	2.25 2.136	25	LD, ADHD	1,2,3	Pre-Eng.

Abbreviations:

DQ = Disqualified from college
 Prob. = Probationary status (academic jeopardy)
 ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
 VIQ = Verbal Intelligence Quotient
 PIQ = Performance Intelligence Quotient
 FSIQ = Full Scale Intelligence Quotient
 PCC = Pima Community College
 UA = University of Arizona
 LD = Specific Learning Disability
 NVLD = Non-verbal Learning Disability
 ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
 Und. = Undeclared major
 Pre-bus. = Pre-business
 Pre-Comm.= Pre-Communication
 Pre-Eng.= Pre-Engineering
 Psych. = Psychology
 Pol. Sci.=Political Science
 N. Avail.= Not Available

Accommodations:

- 1 – extended time
- 2 – minimal distraction
- 3 – note taking
- 4 – texts on tape or CD
- 5 - reader or taped exam
- 6 – use of computer for exams
- 7 - assistance with Scantron forms
- 8 – reader/AT
- 9 – use of calculator for exams
- 10 – electronic speller or dictionary

Additional disability information:

1. NVLD, Mobility, tremor in hands. Deficits in fluid reasoning, attention, and processing speed. VIQ= 100, PIQ= 100, FSIQ= 93
2. LD-Written expression, ADHD. Deficits in visual motor integration, memory; long-term, short term, and working memory, attention, and language processing. VIQ= 88, PIQ= 100, FSIQ= 93
3. LD- Reading. Deficits in short-term memory, and visual-spatial thinking. VIQ= N. Avail., PIQ= N. Avail., FSIQ= N. Avail.

4. LD- Math, ADHD (combined type), Psych. Deficits in visual processing and processing speed. Mixed anxiety and depressive disorder. Student entered school with 16 CLEP units. Evaluator of Slossin test did not note VIQ or PIQ. VIQ= N. Avail., PIQ= N. Avail, FSIQ= 123
5. LD- Math, writing. Deficits in visual processing, sequencing, and receptive language. VIQ= N. Avail., PIQ= N. Avail., FSIQ= 102
6. LD- Writing. Deficits in visual sequencing, organization, and short-term memory. VIQ= 113, PIQ= 99, FSIQ= 107
7. LD- Math, ADHD. Deficits in academic fluency and math computation. When interviewed he was a Pre- Eng. student and at the end of the semester he changed to Und. in order to not be DQ'd. VIQ= N. Avail., PIQ= N. Avail., FSIQ= N. Avail.
8. LD- Math, ADHD, Psych. Dis.- depression. Deficits in attention, concentration, working memory, and math computation and applications. VIQ= 111, PIQ= 96, FSIQ=104
9. Gifted LD- Reading, mixed expressive language disorder, and writing. Deficits in language processing, phonological awareness. Student had Herbs Palsy as a young child and had temporary paralysis of right arm. Verbal ability and working memory are extremely discrepant from superior visual-spatial skills. VIQ= 110, PIQ= 130, FSIQ= 120
10. LD- Written language, ADHD. Deficits in processing speed, auditory processing, and attention. VIQ= 137, PIQ= 113, FSIQ= 128

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