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Examining the Perspectives of Students with Learning Disabilities through their Lived Experiences

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EXAMINING THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
THROUGH THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of college students with learning disabilities through their lived experiences. Specifically, as they related to their high school learning experiences, their transition to higher education, and their continued academic and social support in higher education. The researcher gathered qualitative data to gain insight into the world of students with learning disabilities. The study consisted of a survey, focus group, and in-depth interviews. The data were reviewed in order to achieve a holistic picture of what the students' perceptions illustrate and to understand thematic commonalities from their lived experiences. The researcher hoped to shape possible effective instructional strategies and supports for students with learning disabilities in secondary and post-secondary educational experiences.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Virginia Freeman Weil.

The day I interviewed for the National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative, as a potential doctorate student at UCF, I had just landed in Washington D.C. on my way to the hospital, where my mother had been admitted, due to a mild stroke. Upon arriving, I learned that she had pancreatic cancer. Six months later, on October 22, 2011 she passed away during my second semester.

As the second generation of four generations of teachers, she never let me waiver in continuing with my studies, but more importantly she is the reason, that when faced with adversity in my life, I have never given up or stopped believing in myself, because she always believed I was capable of great things. But the greatest legacy I have as her daughter, is to instill in others to never stop the quest for learning new things, to think outside the box, to not suffer fools lightly and to never stop the dancing rhythmic beat that guides your heart and soul.

This is my mom's accomplishment, as much as it is mine, for without her belief in me, I would not be in this moment today,

always dancing.

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And to my very sweet and understanding family. You have watched me pursue this dream with patience, love, support and lots of quiet work time. We have reached this moment together. To my sister: Thank you for your unconditional love. You're a life line in times of great duress and great joy. To my Dad: Your first born has her doctorate. You have done well. Time to relax.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Students with learning disabilities are the largest group of students eligible for special education in the United States and are included in the category of high incident disabilities (NCES, 2013). Even though they are characterized as having average to above average intelligence, students with learning disabilities struggle significantly through secondary schooling. Furthermore, they are hesitant to disclose their disability after graduating from high school as they transition into post-secondary education to four year colleges and Universities (Weintrub, 2012). However, through a trio of federal laws enacted over the past thirty years, The Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act(IDEA), and the No Child Left Behind Act(NCLB), the lens of education for students with disabilities has been significantly altered (Cavendish, 2013). For students with learning disabilities, the need remains to create a holistic understanding of why some students are more successful than others. The purpose of this chapter is to first discuss the purpose of the study and its significance as it relates to a historical perspective on learning disabilities; next, review current relevant legislation; then discuss the problem and proposed solutions.

The historical process of serving students with learning disabilities has not always been met with significant positive outcomes. Even though students with learning disabilities have the benefit of special education services in K-12, through the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), it was not until the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) that students with disabilities were held to the same academic standards as students in general education settings. Accountability for all students became required through annual high stakes testing and the same expectation for success for all students, regardless of ability (NCLB, 2002).

According to National Statistical data (NCES, 2015) more than 6,000 general education students, including students with learning disabilities, drop out of high school due to a variety of reasons. For students with learning disabilities, these reasons can be attributed to their academic learning difficulties, but also to social emotional constructs (Crotty, 2003). Students with learning disabilities face greater risks for dropping out of school, having an early pregnancy, and substance abuse than students who do not have a learning disability (Bender, Rosenkrans & Crane, 1999). Serving these students in a mainstream educational setting however, has supported better outcomes by facing less academic risk, as well as a clearer path to post-secondary education (NCES, 2015). In fact, 80% of students with learning disabilities who were served in general education settings were more likely to graduate and continue into post-secondary education (Rojewski, 2002). However, the struggle to remain in mainstream education, and graduate with a high school standard diploma, could affect the success in transitioning to a college or university if educational and social supports do not continue in post-secondary settings.

According to recently released educational statistics, (NCES, 2015), the graduation rate of students with disabilities is increasing yet there is still a significant gap between the graduation rate of typical students and their peers with disabilities, 80% to 61% respectively. Increasing the graduation rate for students with disabilities to over 90% nationwide is one of the five key areas of emphasis for the Department of Education (NCES, 2015). Even though significant gaps between post high-school outcomes of students with and without disabilities persist, the implementation of NCLB's inclusive accountability model has been effective at developing a deeper understanding of the complexities in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities. Given that students with disabilities account for 13% of the nation's

students, it is imperative to understand the lived experiences and perspectives regarding secondary schooling, social constructs, graduation, and transition into higher education institutions (Creswell, 2007). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors from the National Longitudinal Study on Transition (Wagner, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2007), clarified the need for strategies and transition practices for students with disabilities from high school into post-secondary settings. To date, there is limited research reflecting the lived experiences and perspectives of college students with self-disclosed learning disabilities as to their secondary learning experiences. Effective student-focused planning, interagency collaboration, and family involvement are identified by the extant research as essential criteria for successful transitioning of students with disabilities (Kohler & Field, 2003). By examining the lived experiences of students with learning disabilities, meaning can be uncovered through their stories, with the goal of increasing graduation rates and improving transitional opportunities into higher learning institutions (Wagner et al, 2007). By examining the lived experiences and perspectives of students with learning disabilities, insight into the transition process for students with disabilities in higher education may emerge.

Students with learning disabilities often struggle not only with a disability that affects their learning, but also with social and emotional difficulties. Students with learning disabilities have difficulty with the processing and social emotional domains. These struggles affect their academic pursuits, employment, and independent living (Test, Fowler, White, Richter &Walker, 2009). Significant risk factors, including social emotional constructs, for students with learning disabilities exist, thereby making success in higher education more difficult to attain (Svetaz, Ireland & Blum, 2000). Due to the varied nature of learning disabilities and the variety of service delivery programs from state to state, it is difficult to identify specific programs and

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services that account for successful higher education matriculation for students with learning disabilities. However, by describing the lived experiences and perceptions of students with learning disabilities in college, one may be able to draw conclusions as to what factors contributed to a successful transition. Information gathered directly from the student's perspectives may contribute to assessments of inclusive practices for students with learning disabilities (Grant, Ramcharan, Flynn & Richardson, 2010). The examination of the students' lived experiences in this study will add qualitative data to the previously established quantitative data.

Statement of the Problem

Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner (2006) discussed the importance and purpose of special education as the successful transition from high school to post-secondary experiences. A review of graduation rates for students with learning disabilities, who have successfully transitioned from primarily inclusive settings to more accessible general post-secondary environments, would be valuable but cannot be done in isolation of other information (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein & Chapman,2000). To evaluate the impact of inclusive settings on the transition of students with learning disabilities, Kaufman et al. (2000) and Wagner et al. (2007) suggested studying the graduation rates of these students as well as the reasons some have chosen career plans that include post-secondary education. It also should be inclusive of the successful transition from their secondary learning institution into a higher educational setting or career/vocational track. However, according to previous research, students with learning disabilities, as well as students without, are less likely to graduate from high school with a standard diploma, but are also less likely to pursue higher education (Wagner et al., 2007).

Students with learning disabilities face many challenges in the pursuit of a standard diploma from high school. For students with learning disabilities, these statistics are complicated through their own experiences and perceptions as stakeholders (Skiba, Simons, Ritter, Rausch, Cuadrado & Chung, 2008; Svettaz et al., 2000). In addition to academic struggle, students with learning disabilities often face social emotional problems such as depression, substance abuse, and early pregnancy (Bender, Rosencrans & Crane, 1999). Educators engage in effective and evidence-based interventions and explicit instruction to meet the needs of these students by teaching advocacy skills, emotional resilience, and motivational strategies (Chartock, 2010). Academic interventions include, but are not limited to, differentiated instruction (Torgesen, 1997) Universal Design for Learning (Rose, 2001), and direct explicit instruction (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001) to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities and to ensure equal access to general curriculum. While these strategies and theoretical principles have provided qualitative data that supports student success, little qualitative information concerning preparation for transition to post-secondary experiences has been gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Additional insights from the lived experience of students with learning disabilities would enable researchers to examine the data through the student's perspectives. Understanding which strategies and interventions prepared them for the transition to college (Ekes & Ochoa, 2005). As Dewey (1938) discusses in his work, the method of reflective thinking is critical to informing future research for positive educational outcomes, lifelong learning, and the practice of special education.

Significance of Study: Advantages and Disadvantages

The significance of this study was built around the need for the educational profession to examine and report the qualitative perspectives of students with learning disabilities who have successfully transitioned into post-secondary educational experiences. To ascertain what is working will be a great addition to the best practice we currently follow with high school students with learning disabilities (Eisman & Ferretti, 2010). The perspectives of the students themselves, as valued stakeholders, adds a critical view point that could influence the future of educational policy and practice.

Since the beginning of the institution of education as early as Dewey in the 1930's and many following years of advocacy and significant amount of educational research, the condition referred to as learning disabilities was not recognized (Huber et al., 2007); the condition was not recognized until Congress passed Public Law 94-142 in 1975. Since PL 94-142, known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), students with learning disabilities were to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers in inclusive classrooms.

Since the passage of NCLB (2002), a greater emphasis has been given to accountability for all students. NCLB was the first law on the heels of previous disability legislation, particularly IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of (1973), to not segregate students with disabilities from the general population in terms of accountability. However, the push from standards to accountability through NCLB has not been met with universal acceptance in educational, political, or public commentary. Besides being instrumental in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the same accountability as general education students, its focus on high stakes testing and rigid protocols have not been met without controversy. The demands on students with learning disabilities to perform with significant outcomes have been met with uneven results (Cavendish, 2013) as well as harsh criticism. Ravitch (2011), stated that what

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NCLB did was not raise the quality of curriculum and standards but dwell on testing which undermines the very intent of the educational system. For students with learning disabilities, there has been a constant battle for appropriate interventions that provide opportunities to graduate with a standard diploma (Alverson, Naranjo, Yamamoto & Unruh, 2010). Through amendments that support transition requirements for students with disabilities that were added to IDEA in 2004, the compliance for transition services is in place. However, it has yet to be determined if the outcomes for students with learning disabilities are significantly successful (Halpern, 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of college students with learning disabilities through their lived experiences as they relate to their high school learning experiences, their transition to higher education, and their continued academic and social support in higher education. The researcher gathered qualitative data to gain insight in the world of students with learning disabilities. The study consisted of a survey, focus group, and in-depth interviews. The data was reviewed to achieve a holistic picture of what the students' perceptions illustrate as well as understand if there are categorical thematic commonalities from their lived experiences.

Research Questions

1. Through their personal lived experiences, what do college students, with identified and self-disclosed learning disabilities, perceive to be the personal and school level characteristics that enabled them to graduate from high school with a standard diploma?

2. Through their lived experiences, what are the beliefs of these students of their secondary educational experience as preparation to higher education or career readiness?

3. What are the commonalities or themes of the student's lived experience as it relates to their secondary and post-secondary education?

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to research the perspectives of college students with self-disclosed learning disabilities who attended one of two accredited colleges specifically designed for students with learning disabilities through their lived experiences. The data was obtained through an initial survey of qualified students determined by an application process, a smaller focus group, and finally in-depth interviews with 3-5 participants (Glasner & Strauss, 1967).

Strauss & Corbin, (1990) report that through the phenomenological method of research, the data were divided into a categorical thematic structure that was structured as follows: Epoche or Bracketing; Significant Statements; Meaning units; Textural descriptions and Structural descriptions. One of the most classic components of phenomenological research is the terminology of bracketing or epoche, in which the researcher removes his background or beliefs from the process of data collection (Creswell, 2005). This allows for a more valid collection of the participants' lived experience. The analysis structure in determining significant statements is called horizontalization (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). From this process themes or clusters of meaning will be determined through a coding process, which will conclude into a composite description of the essence of the phenomena itself (Ary et al., 2006).

This phenomenological qualitative approach examined students' reflective responses based on their lived experiences to a variety of questions and probes that will identify the essence of their experiences during high school and the current experiences in college as students with learning disabilities (Moustakas, 1994). The research sought to find similar commonalities and

themes based on open-ended and specific probes that enabled the participants to recount their high school lived experiences leading up to their high school graduation through their post-secondary education (Creswell, 2005).

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

<u>Learning Disabilities</u>: Learning Disabilities is a broad definition to describe a set of neurological disorders that make it difficult, over a life time, to acquire a variety of academic skills as well as affecting language processing and certain verbal and non-verbal skills which can affect social and emotional academic and non-academic domains. Specific types of learning disabilities are categorized as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and executive functioning. Although there are effective strategies and interventions that can assist the student with learning disabilities, it is a lifelong condition in which there is no known cure (Harwell, 2001).

<u>Phenomenological theory</u>: is a qualitative research method of questioning with a prolonged engagement with a set of participants who share a commonality based on the same phenomena to be studied (Creswell, 2005).

<u>Individual Education Program (IEP)</u>: is a written document created on an annual basis for the student who qualifies for special education services under The Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). An IEP describes the educational present level of performance, the effects of the disability on the educational environment, accommodations to the learning environment, testing, assistive technology, related services, transition and accountability for measured progress (IDEA, 2004).

<u>Free Appropriate Public Education</u>: IDEA guarantees that each child with a disability, eligible for Special education will be entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE; IDEA, 2004).

Appropriate Evaluation: IDEA requires that each child suspected of having a disability receive an appropriate evaluation (IDEA, 2004) to address all aspects of disability.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): IDEA guarantees that a child with a disability will receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate. This principle reflects IDEA's strong preference for educating students with disabilities in general education classes with the access to general education curriculum. Placement in the general education classroom is the first placement option the IEP team must consider (IDEA, 2004).

Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making: This principle reinforces the belief that the education of children with disabilities is made more effective by strengthening the role of parents in the special education process. IDEA requires that parents (and students, as appropriate) participate in each step of the special education process. Students must be invited to participate in IEP meetings where transition services are to be discussed (IDEA, 2004).

Procedural Safeguards: Procedural safeguards are a set of activities whose purpose is to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected (IDEA, 2004).

Bracketing or Epoche: is the suspension of the researcher's personal beliefs or opinions so that the researcher is removed from data collection process in order not to unduly influence the data collection and analysis. The researcher's background can however be introduced at a later time (Ary et al, 2006).

Transition: is referred to in this study as the movement from high school to higher education. A transition plan is part of the IEP as a result of the amendments of IDEA in 2004. Transition services were more clearly defined to focus on improving the academic and

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functioning achievement of students with disabilities from school to post-secondary activities (IDEA, 2004).

    <u>Universal Design for Learning: is</u> a set of guidelines and best practice that enables students to utilize a variety of skills, methods and technology to learn, and assess using a variety of tools for input and output of knowledge. It is based on the Architectural Design principle of Universal Design which designates equal access to structures and buildings and presents the same principle when looking at curriculum as a barrier for students (Rose, 2001)**.**

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

    To obtain an accurate accounting of the lived experiences of students with learning disabilities, students in their current academic setting needed to self-disclose their learning disabilities. The research was conducted on the students' current college campus. However, by conducting the questioning on college site, the responses were limited to the students' lived experience in response to their current educational location. Due to the nature of their disability, the possibility of omissions in oral reflective responding was present due to issues concerning short and long term memory recall. The research encompassed several sessions of data collection to disallow for any possible cognitive fatigue based on the Creswell (2007) guidelines for qualitative research.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

    This research contributed to the body of literature by examining the perceptions of lived experiences of college students with learning disabilities who graduated from high school with a standard diploma and were enrolled in post-secondary college. Students with learning disabilities, as well as students without disabilities, have a variety of options upon graduating

from high school. Students may enroll in the military, vocational or trade school, community college, or other colleges and universities. This study analyzed what college students with learning disabilities perceive as supports that contribute to the discussion of various pathways to a diploma (Gewertz, 2007). The intent of this research study was to contribute to previous studies by revealing the perceptions of students with learning disabilities as it relates to their secondary educational experience and specifically what has led them throughout their education to complete high school with a standard diploma; their transition from high school to a higher educational institution; as well as having represented their perceptions of their disability as it related to their past and present learning.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

Learning Disabilities are often referred to as the hidden disability due to the varied and complex intricacies affecting learning, processing and effective output of knowledge in oral and written forms (Harwell, 2001). The deficits of the disability are not obvious to the eye, but pose significant challenges for the student during his or her educational career as well as interfere throughout his or her entire life. Learning disabilities, in fact, are a group of neurological conditions in which there is no known cure. There can also be accompanying verbal and nonverbal learning disorders that affect the overall functioning of the individual with learning disabilities, complicated as well with possible social and emotional deficits.

In this literature review, a review and critique of the research and scholarship on strategies for effective instruction and educational practice of students with learning disabilities will be discussed. Although previous studies (Cavendish, 2013; Dziekan, 2003; Faber,2006; Garner,2008), on the successful transition planning for students with learning disabilities have been examined, as well as The National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner et al, 2007), these studies have not included reflective perspectives of college students with learning disabilities on their secondary education. Nor have they specifically targeted self-disclosed students with learning disabilities in a prescribed higher educational setting. As such, this literature review provides additional insight into successful secondary programming for students with learning disabilities, components of transition planning and continued support in higher education.

This chapter's purpose will review literature that is relevant to this study as well as exploring previously reported educational concepts for students with learning disabilities in

school environments. A survey of literature should attempt to highlight certain aspects of lived experiences and perspectives of students in the examination of the educational discipline in order to assist in defining the possible future implications as presented through this phenomenological research design (Charmaz, 2006). The analytic focus on the aspects of social qualities (Bender et al., 1999), resilience (Alvord& Grados, 2005), and technology (Rose, Hasselbring, Stahl & Zabala, 2005) in relationship to students who have learning disabilities provides additional insights to the complexities of the student with learning disabilities.

This phenomenological qualitative study also will review policy and practice in regards to learning disabled students and their relationship to their education. In addition, although numerous quantitative studies in the graduation rates with disabilities exist, little analytic attention has been paid the perspectives of the students themselves through an examination of their lived experiences of their secondary educational experience and the transition to a higher educational in relationship to the effects of recent policy and legislative practice (Garner, 2008). The questions remain: Are students prepared to enter higher educational institutions or career/vocational tracks upon graduation? and What are the support and services that they received during their secondary educational experience? ; And how do they feel based on their own experiences would benefit them as they transition from high school to the pursuit of a college degree? Through a clearer understanding of what supports them through their education, through their own beliefs and perceptions, one can obtain a holistic "snap shot" as it relates to educational practice (Moustakas, 1994).

The topics following will highlight specific legislation; changes in the direction of special education; instructional strategies academic, social, emotional and behavioral aspects related to learning disabilities (Turnbull, 1995) and technology (Rose & Strangman, 2007). This wide

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spectrum of topics will assist in presenting a platform for understanding prior to the presentation

of the research data. This phenomenological qualitative method as described by Glaser &

Strauss, (1967) further compliments previous research in assisting to understand student

perspectives on their high school experience. The literature review is not presented as

preconceived reasons or justifications for the data revelations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a

result, the literature will attempt to reflect neutrality in order to help guide possible theoretical

views.

<u>What is a Learning Disability?</u>

According to the federal register a specific Learning disability is defined as:

'Specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic
psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken
or written, which may manifest itself as an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak,
read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. This term includes such
conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction,
dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. This term does not include children who
have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor
handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental,
cultural or economic disadvantage. (U.S., Office of Education, Federal Register;
IDEA, 2004)

However, the term Learning Disabilities (Swanson, Harris & Graham, 2013) actually

covers a broad definition that describes a set of neurological disorders as, referred to but not

limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and executive functioning. These disorders by

themselves or in combination can make it difficult to acquire new information as well as affect

the rate of processing language, receptively and expressively, as well as understanding social

cues as seen in a non-verbal learning disorder. They affect the individual's ability with listening,

speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or processing, and math calculation. It is a lifelong

disability in which there is no cure and can be mild to severe in relationship the impact on

function (Harwell, 2001). As a neurological lifelong condition, Learning disabilities are also

identified as having a genetic component, and may appear in generations of families as is indicated in genetic research and complications associated prenatal, post-natal, and birth trauma (Harwell, 2001). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is frequently seen as a co-morbid condition as are conduct disorders and other neurological conditions such as Tourette syndrome although these are not considered in the educational definition of a specific learning disability (Heward, 2000).

The individual with a learning disability, appears normal in appearance, with average to above average intelligence. As a result, historically the person with learning disabilities is often mistaken by parents and educators as an underachiever or lazy (Harwell, 2001). The research and legislation in the past 40 years has dramatically uncovered the need for significant interventions for the student with learning disabilities, yet there is much more to accomplish in relationship significant impacts on achievement and successful outcomes for these individuals as well as the future of effective educational practice.

<u>Legislation Overview</u>

Learning disabilities represent almost half of the identified disabilities in special education in schools today and are primarily served in inclusive classrooms (NCES, 2015). Recent reports from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) still identify this population as contributing to the high dropout rates of students with disabilities. Through the National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner et al., 2007) several characteristics and experiences have been identified in predicting a higher probability of graduating from high school for students with disabilities and enrolling in a 2 yr. or 4 yr. college: female, higher cognitive skills and a better educated head of household. However, over 50% of students with Learning Disabilities pursued the goal to attend a two- or four-year college however, the college

completion rate for young adults with LD is 41%, compared to 52 %in the general population

(Wagner et al, 2007). The reason is twofold. First a student with a learning disability must

identify himself or herself as having a disability and secondly he or she must receive significant

accommodations to enable them to successfully graduate (Weintrub, 2012). A further

examination based on student's perceptions could also contribute to a better understanding of the

characteristics students with learning disabilities may need to be successful.

In order to understand the laws that have influenced the services for students with

learning disabilities, it is also imperative to examine the intent of the laws themselves from an

early historical perspective. To reach the core of this topic one must also review the framework

of education itself as seen by the theorists of the origin of educational history in the United States

(Dewey, 1938). This is critical as we examine the narrative outcomes of the data in this study to

better understand if why we are educating is translating into actual lived experiences.

The two main laws influencing the student with learning disabilities in secondary

education are The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and The No Child Left

Behind Act (2002). The later applies to the statistical inclusion of all students as a whole,

whether they have a disability, or not as it is known simply as the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act or ESEA (NCLB, 2002). However, the dramatic emphasis, since NCLB was

enacted, has been focused on accountability of all students through a controversial method of

high stakes testing as a limited and isolated scope of student achievement. Although a significant

piece of legislation, due to being the first legislation to include accountability for students with

disabilities, the act's effectiveness for students with high incident disabilities (learning

disabilities) is an inconclusive justification as reported in limited high school graduation rates.

The academic appropriateness of a one size fits all high stake testing model is also mired with

unintended consequences. This can be attributed to effect the social and emotional motivation for students with learning disabilities as also seen through the limited graduation rates and successful enrollment in post-secondary universities and colleges (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

However, NCLB was the first legislative act that included all students with disabilities into the accountability equation (Yell et al., 2006). No longer could students with disabilities be segregated statistically from demonstrating the same progress as their peers. Prior to its enactment, students with disabilities, including those with specific learning disabilities, had been segregated from the general population not only physically, but also statistically. Even though IDEA granted equal access to the general curriculum, there was not a measure of accountability that addressed all students in the way that NCLB did. For students with learning disabilities inclusion into the accountability model would enable them to access the standard curriculum with accommodations in general education settings and thus have access to graduating with a standard diploma. Currently most students with learning disabilities are being served in inclusive classrooms, with special education services using a wide scale of interpretation of accommodations and curriculum modifications (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Through the inclusion in core content, students with disabilities have higher rates of graduating with a High school diploma. This inclusivity has addressed a great deal of disproportionality (Artiles, Kozlesky, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010) and has brought about changes in the perceptions and purpose of special education (Eiseman & Ferretti, 2010; Hehir, 2005).

<div align="center">Educational History and Policies</div>

To understand where we are now it is important to examine from where we came. During the progressive movement in education in the United States circa 1830's to 1930's, the goals of education were based on two principles as outlined by John Dewey (1916), a major theorist of

that time: *Respect for Diversity and Development of Critically and Socially Engaged Citizens.* It was also felt that knowledge was created through action and the interaction and a self-reflection process (Dewey, 1938). While the training of skilled workers at that time ensued, so did the teaching of academic subjects that embraced creative thinking and artistic imagination. So education was not only designed for meaningful employment, it was also designed to embrace higher-level thinking. More recently research was conducted using the theoretical model of integration of learning which bases the perception of learning through the connection, application, and synthesis of learning (Huber et al., 2007).

In today's schools, however, there is more emphasis on core academics and standardized testing on reading, writing and mathematics (Heward, 2000). This is particularly reflected through NCLB as well as legislative initiatives such as the Response to Intervention process as a response to the increasingly disproportionate identification of students with learning disabilities. These relatively recent changes have also tried to alleviate disproportionality and create a more equitable educational system for students with high incident disabilities, however they continue to expose glaring discrepancies for students with disabilities, minorities and English language learners (Kozol, 2005). Through the legacy and the advocacy that followed Brown vs. The Board of Education (1954), it is important to recognize the origins and the equity of special education (Skiba et al., 2008) that are embedded in a civil right to educational access that address the origins of an educational attempt to address educational diversity in America's schools.

For all students with disabilities, one of the most critical legislative acts of a similar nature as Brown v The Board of Education (1954) which stated that separate is not equal, was Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act), that patterned itself based on the civil rights legislation that followed the rights to an education without

discrimination (Yell & Christle, 2010). This Act allowed students with learning disabilities, as well as other students with disabilities, the protection of accommodations based in an anti-discrimination policy that can serve them from birth to death. This law is critical legislative component to the study of students with learning disabilities due to the nature that it follows them through the transition into post-secondary educational choices (Yell et al., 2010; Zirkel, 2007). The Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) has further defined six principles (Table 1) for the implementation of the rights of an education for students with disabilities for students. These principles form the building blocks for students with learning disabilities in their access to the general curriculum as well as all students with disabilities as well as identify the frame work for understanding the perceptions and expectations of students in their high school lived experiences.

Table 1:

IDEA Principles

Principles of IDEA
1. Free Appropriate Public Education-IDEA guarantees that each child with a disability, eligible for Special education will be entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE)
2. Appropriate Evaluation — IDEA requires that each child suspected of having a disability receive an appropriate evaluation
3. Individualized Education Program (IEP) — In order to ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate and individualized education, IDEA requires that, after drawing upon current evaluation information, the IEP team develop a written document, the IEP, designed to meet the unique educational needs of each student with disabilities.
4. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) — IDEA guarantees that a child with a disability will receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate. This principle reflects IDEA's strong preference for educating students with disabilities in general education classes with the access to general education curriculum. Placement in the general education classroom is the first placement option the IEP team must consider.
5. Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making — This principle reinforces the belief that the education of children with disabilities is made more effective by strengthening the role of parents in the special education process. IDEA requires that parents (and students, as appropriate) participate in each step of the special education process. Students must be invited to participate in IEP meetings where transition services are to be discussed.
6. Procedural Safeguards — Procedural safeguards are a set of activities whose purpose is to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected.

(IDEA, 2004)

In summary, when PL 94-142, otherwise known as the Education for the Handicapped Act, was expanded into what is now known as The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with learning disabilities were defined as categorically as having a Significant Learning Disability. However, students with learning disabilities are less likely to not only graduate from high school with a standard diploma but also pursue higher education (Wagner et al., 2007) and according to the 2011 statistics (NCES, 2013) only 59 % of all graduated students pursue a bachelor's degree at a four year higher education institution. The immediate college

rates for enrolling in a higher educational institution post-graduation was lower by 30 % for students from low-income families as well (NCES, 2013). After NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the Department of Education examined more stringently the graduation rates not only of students with disabilities but of all students now that all students were accounted for. Through this examination it became clear that there was an over identification of students with learning disabilities.

In an attempt to disaggregate these findings of NCES (2013), a process called Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multiple Tiers System Support (MTSS) was rolled out nationally (IDEA, 2004). RTI and MTSS initiated in special education but it was presented as a system of supports for all children (Yell & Christle, 2010) and as a response to the previous "wait to fail" model that waited until there was a significant achievement gap between performance and I.Q. For the student with learning disabilities this was a devastating and arduous process in which by the time any interventions were administered the discrepancy gap had become too great to overcome (Fletcher, 2012).

Response to Intervention is a three tiered system to look at schools and classrooms of all children. The goal is to provide interventions to students immediately upon struggling by providing school wide interventions across responsibilities of teachers and staff of the school in order to prevent further gaps in achievement and possible referrals to Special Education. RTI was created in part to address the growing over identification in special education of students with diversities (Yell & Walker, 2010). While this specific policy has begun to show a decline in the identification of students with learning disabilities, it still has significant variance in service delivery and strategic methods as well as continuing post-secondary accommodations and strategic methods found in post-secondary institutions (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). This policy can

make for a wide variance in the educational process for students with learning disabilities as well as affect their transition process into a higher education or vocational track.

Previous research studies, that examine students with learning disabilities, highlight thematic constructs of academic interventions, social emotional behavior, technology, (Hehir, 2005) and transition. Teacher accountability (Slavin, 2007) turned into the focus as a critical component for affecting student outcomes. Teachers and teaching methods were skewed as the reason for discrepancy issues in tests scores and especially scrutinized with the inclusion of subgroups into accountability (Artiles et al., 2010).

Evidence Based Practices

There are many challenges, academic and social, for students with disabilities in the pursuit of obtaining a standard diploma from a secondary school. Students with disabilities who are served in regular mainstream classrooms, even with special educational services, often have the challenge to meet high academic expectations and exit exams (Gardynik, 2008). Educators are examining interventions and explicit structures of instruction to meet the needs of all students as well as advocacy, emotional support, and motivational strategies for these students. Previous research studies have indicated effective strategies, academic skills, and interventions. Through inclusive practices of students with disabilities, the general educator must use a variety of interventions and strategies. Metacognitive Strategies (Paris & Winograd, 1990); self-regulating learning and academic achievement (McCombs, 1989); and Cooperative learning strategies (Slavin, 1988) are a few research based strategies that have shown effective outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Reading comprehension strategies that promote explicit direct instructional strategies and comprehension programs are specifically designed for the student with learning disabilities (Gersten et al., 2001). Strategies that focus on memory attention and

perception also address the complications in the learning process for the student with learning disabilities (Torgesen, 1997). Cognitive-Motivational strategies can address the achievement expectations that affect these students issue with self-concept (Chapman, 1988) as well as increase motivational processes that reflect mastery toward academic goals and objectives (Ames & Archer, 1988). It is imperative that students with learning disabilities develop academic self-regulation (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998) in order to become independent learners that possess the academic skills and self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991) needed for learning secondary and post-secondary settings. Continued teaching of learning strategies continues on throughout the secondary education with the learner engaging in active practice as a participant in their own metacognition acquisition of learning strategies across domains (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). Such strategies could include, but not be limited to educational approaches such as: differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and direct explicit instruction to meet the unique needs of all students with disabilities and to ensure equal access to the general curriculum. While these theoretical approaches can be utilized in a specific classroom by an individual teacher or a co-teaching model, they could be more effective and create a more strategic impact if they were systemically designed as a school wide or district initiatives.

The student with a learning disability is almost an invisible individual in a general education classroom. How the classroom is designed to meet their needs is critical to their success or failure (Hehir & Katzman, 2012). This classroom instructional design indicates that perhaps a more creative and artistic educational experience could be more suitable and more appropriate accommodation that could benefit all students, including the student of the learning disability. Reflectively building blocks attribute back to the origins of education and are important to the discussion of the needs of students with learning disabilities and the transition

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from their high school learning experience into post-secondary choices (Grant et al., 2010). However, professionals in special education continued to seek new directions through effective strategies and systemic applications of the design of education that addressed those with and without disabilities.

One of the more current revolutionary movements is called Universal Design for Learning (Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2006). This direction has perhaps more influence on the success of the student with learning disabilities, yet is relatively new in its effective implementation in today's schools and districts, although it has become more frequently seen in educational policy documents to address a legal and educational approach to diversity. Universal design for learning, in theoretical and practical design, creates an educational environment for a wide variety of learners that simultaneously allows educational access to the curriculum for all learners. (Hehir & Katzman, 2012)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is based on a design principle from an architectural design that perceives a building structure that would allow access to any who would use it. This constructionist structural viewpoint was then used to examine the structure of educational access to curriculum in the same way. This construct allowed for a more reflective practice to examine and provide multiple means for representation, action and expression and engagement of students (Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2006). Using a system that embeds access through a melding of practice, technology and innovation (Fullan, 2013), students with learning disabilities could have greater access to all materials in a way that has never been seen before. The curriculum or a traditional approach to teaching is no longer the active barrier for students with learning disabilities. UDL is rapidly becoming integrated within the language in public policy, as well as in classroom design in today's public schools Center for Applied Technology (Rose,

2001) It will take strong leadership from policy and practice as well as classroom instruction to be creative and innovative for all students' access to the curriculum. For the student with learning disabilities, UDL creates an environment that evens the field for learning. It however cannot be misconstrued as a one size fits all model but needs to approach the design of instruction through the use of technology that supports the specificity of the learner (Rose & Strangman, 2007). Using an approach of UDL could allow students to engage in their schools that could address dropout rates, detention issues and expulsion of students who are at the most risk for unsuccessful educational outcomes.

Through additional research using UDL principles with students in higher education it is necessary to create welcoming environments; communicate clear expectations; provide constructive feedback; explore the use of learning supports and design service methods that consider diverse learners (Higbee & Goff, 2008). Assistive technology was once the catch all to level the playing field for students with disabilities yet requires its own evaluations and qualifications under the auspices of the Individual Education Program process. Yet the UDL approach, while accessing technology to reduce the barrier of the curriculum, applies the use of design as an initial concept; not following later as an afterthought which assistive technology has become (Rose et al., 2005).

One of the most innovative applications for UDL is the use in assessment domain. Since NCLB has become so heavily reliant on assessment, UDL becomes a design in which limited barriers exist for students with learning disabilities' ability to express knowledge. Through using UDL in assessment, this barrier can be removed and/or reduced to benefit not only students with learning disabilities but all students as well. Through the methodology and understanding of as evidence based practice, the successful outcomes for students with learning disabilities can be

critically examined as to the effect on the successful transition of students from high school to college. UDL could emerge as an example for innovative educational infrastructural change that could affect students with learning disabilities and given it's relatively newness in educational practice it would be interesting through student's lived experiences to examine its effectiveness on student outcomes. UDL is highlighted here in detail due to its possible influence in the decisions of these students with learning disabilities to continue their educational careers in a specific school designed specifically to meet their learning needs.

<center>Social and Emotional Constructs</center>

For students with learning disabilities, their lives also are complicated by the social and emotional aspect of their lived experience in their secondary educational experience. Students with learning disabilities often face social emotional problems such as depression, substance abuse, and early pregnancy (Svetaz, Ireland & Blum, 2000). There is a critical need to activity teach metacognitive strategies and social skill instruction (Forness & Kavale, 1996) in an ongoing delivery due to the neurocognitive perspective of students with learning differences (Rose & Strangman, 2007). These strategies can assist the student with learning disabilities with issues in self-determination (Faber, 2006), motivation (Ames & Archer, 1988), and self-regulation (McCombs, 1989). Cavendish (2013) has identified student self-esteem and student resilience as integral factors in successful outcomes for students with learning disabilities. It will be of critical interest to see how much, given changes in the educational inclusive approaches of students with learning disabilities, the social constructs of their disability effects their perspectives during their high school and post-secondary educations.

Transition

Students with learning disabilities display significant resilience despite the challenges that their disability may present. The transition of a student with a learning disability as written into the law requires the student be active in his or her Individual Education Program by the age of 14 to specifically address the student with a learning disability. The transition plan is a multi-person, multi resourced document and process in which the student has an active part as well as a clearly written plan that can ease the student into the next phase. This plan can include recreation, jobs, vocational training, higher education discovered through personal inventories and a multi-disciplinary team approach with active involvement from the student. For the student with learning disabilities there can be a need for as much support outside the school due to additional deficits in social skills and /or executive functioning (Rose & Strangman, 2007). Through effective transition plans that are created and executed with fidelity, the student with a learning disability can receive the support that they need to successfully transition from high school into post-secondary learning.

The National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner et al.,2007), a ten year study of 13-16 year old students with disabilities, identified key characteristics and predictors that have become identifiable guidelines for the educational transition of student s with disabilities in their pursuit from high school to post-secondary planning. Systemic and educational preparation planning beyond the transition document of the Individual Education Plan target the steps needed for successful transitional outcomes (Dukes, Shaw & Madaus, 2007). Transition planning, assessment, family involvement, student involvement as well as transition based curriculum and interagency collaboration are all integral components (Morningstar, Turnball & Turnball, 1995). Emphasis on transition as a systemically instructed functional step, beyond compliance to the law, can affect outcomes to post-secondary education and career post-secondary employment

(Wagner et al., 2007). Evidence based practice, career planning, self-determination and family involvement (Kohler & Field, 2003) are all identifiable critical components of successful transitional outcomes and through the data of this phenomenological study can be examined through the students lived experiences as they have matriculated from high school into post-secondary education. Through this phenomenological qualitative study it is assumed that through the lived experiences of these college students with learning disabilities, as they reflect on their high school experiences, we can better understand and explain the educational and social practice than can benefit future research studies and inform further discussions that lead to more successful outcomes for these students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of this qualitative research study. In this chapter the phenomenological research design is discussed. Also included in Chapter 3 is a more detailed description of the participants, the access to the sampling location, procedures, and the validity and reliability of this design. Data collection and analysis methods also are introduced. In this section of methodology a Checklist for Qualitative research design procedures, as defined by Creswell (2007), was used to guide the process.

This chapter will discuss the qualitative phenomenological research design that was utilized in this study including a methodology Checklist for Qualitative research design procedures as defined by Creswell (2007). This chapter will include a detailed description of the participants, the access to the sampling location, data collection procedures in addition to the validity and reliability of this design and analysis methods.

Research Design: Qualitative; Phenomenology

Qualitative research is a research method that is used when describing a concept or social phenomena. The phenomenological qualitative research process allowed the researcher to analyze the lived experiences of the participants in order to determine meaning (Creswell, 2007). In this qualitative phenomenological study the researcher attempted to determine meaning from the lived experiences of the participants. Strauss & Corbin (1990) state that phenomenological research approach attempt to provide a holistic accounting of a human experience to further knowledge in the understanding of a specific phenomenon. The intent of this study is to specifically expand the knowledge of best practices of serving students with learning disabilities

through their reflections of their lived experiences that lead them to be post-secondary school students.

     According to Creswell (2007), the phenomenological design is chosen when there are characteristics present that suggest a phenomena to be studied and there is a need to explore in more depth the concept/problem in order to develop a more comprehensive description of the phenomena to be examined. Qualitative research includes a researcher-designed framework that allows for a creative and literary style in order for the researcher to reflect on the data after collection. The researcher can relate the data to a social construct that will make a personal social commentary on the educational professional practice of students with learning disabilities (Crotty, 2003). The ultimate goal of this qualitative research study is holistic in nature and represents a broader pictorial understanding of the problem, phenomenon or concept rather than a statistical representation as seen in qualitative data (Ary et al., 2006).

     Phenomenology is the study of a shared phenomenon or experience through the first person narratives of the participants. The researcher removes himself or herself from the process through epoche or bracketing as to allow the data to be grounded in the lived experiences of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This qualitative research method is designed to capture the essence of the human experience in order to explain or develop understanding of the depicted social phenomena. Through a guided set of procedures, the researcher sets aside his or her own views to develop a list of specific statements that can categorize the data into groupings in order to reflect comprehensive descriptions based on the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

This qualitative phenomenological study is guided through the following questions:

<div align="center">31</div>

1. Through their personal lived experiences, what do college students, with identified and self -disclosed learning disabilities, perceive to be the personal and school level characteristics that enabled them to graduate from high school with a standard diploma?

2. Through their lived experiences, what are the beliefs of these students of their secondary educational experience as preparation to higher education or career readiness?

3. What are the commonalities or themes of the student's lived experience as it relates to their secondary and post-secondary education?

Participants and Site Selection Purpose

The participants for the research study were students identified with learning disabilities having a standard high school diploma who were currently enrolled in a higher educational institution seeking a four year college degree. The site selection was limited to students enrolled at one of two US accredited colleges designed specifically for students with learning disabilities and ADHD. The College used in this study was the only four year accredited college of its kind in the United States. It was founded originally by a group of parents 24 years ago and is the first institution of higher education to be accredited to award a BA and AA degree exclusively for students with learning disabilities and ADHD. Student Educational Support services include a Center for Student Success, a Writing center, a Math lab, supplemental instruction, and special accommodations. In addition, there were also services in counseling and life coaching. The average class size was 12 students per class. The average graduation rate was 77% and student retention rate was 84% for a Bachelor's degree. In Fall 2014, the 223 enrolled students represented 35 states in the United States of America and 10 foreign countries. More specific demographics (gender, ethnicity) were obtained and will be reported in Chapter Four.

Institutional Review Board and Selection Procedures

In this study, two Institutional Review Board (IRB) Permissions were sought. One IRB was from the University of Central Florida and the other from the Specialized College. Informed consent was secured from the participants themselves to participate in this study as defined through the Criteria for selection.

This qualitative study was conducted through three phases of data collection: a survey; a focus group; and in depth-interviews. After the IRB was obtained from the accredited college for students with learning disabilities, as well as The University of Central Florida, I began the process of participant selection. An introductory email was distributed through the college's list serve through a single contact in the administrative offices at the college. To further the selection criteria process, a set of questions were designed to identify the students for this particular study. The email explained the research project to all students, identified the researcher and presented the qualifying questions in Table 2. The questions were to ensure that each participant was above the age of legal adulthood, had attended a secondary school in the United States and were a student in good standing at the school. Informed consent to participate was demonstrated and addressed by the student's agreement to continue on and participate in the survey by clicking the link embedded in the introductory email (Creswell, 2007).

Table 2

Pre-qualifying Questions for Potential Respondents

Question
1.   Are you eighteen years or older?
2.   Are you currently enrolled at Beacon College in an AA or BA degree track?
3.   Did you attend secondary school in the United States?
4.   Did you graduate from a United States public or private school with a standard High school diploma (No GED) with an IEP?
5.   Are you a student in good standing (not on probation for academic or other reasons)?

If the student answered answer yes to the above questions, then they proceeded to the survey phase of the study by clinking the embedded link in the introductory email. In this phase the participant would be agreeing to informed consent by continuing with the survey, which would include but not be limited to:

- Participants will participate freely;

- Answer questions truthfully

The students were given two weeks to participate in the survey. Several emails to encourage participation were distributed through the same procedures through the link to the list serve through a school administrator.

Survey Procedures

The survey questions in this phenomenological research study were selected from the work of Cavendish (2013) which isolated specific questions targeting graduation success for students with learning disabilities. Permission was obtained to use these questions in this quantitative study as students in college reflect on their lived experiences in high school. The students will gauge their responses using Likert scale of 1-5. The questions are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3:

Electronic Survey Questions

Survey Questions
1. Members of my IEP team asked me about my goals for graduation.
2. My school asked me which type of diploma I want to receive.
3. Members of my IEP team discussed with me what skills I would need to master in order to succeed in school.
4. Members of my IEP team talked with me about skills I need to make decisions on my own about my own education.
5. Members of my IEP team talked with me about my transition plan.
6. My teachers understand my behavior.
7. My general education classes are the right level for me.
8. My school gives me all the help and services documented on my IEP.
9. My school gives me all the help and services documented in my transition plan.
10. My school shows me a copy of my testing results for all tests I have taken.
11. Special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my IEP.
12. My teachers offer alternative homework assignments to meet my needs.
13. My school consistently carries out all the recommendations documented on my IEP.
14. My school evaluates whether my program continues to meet my needs every year.
15. The testing, progress, and grade reports that my school gives me are written in terms that I understand.
16. The special education services I receive are effective.
17. Regular education teachers make any adjustments for me that were agreed on at my IEP meeting.
18. My school gives me information about different types of classes, for example, regular classes and classes just for ESE students.
19. My school gives me information about my legal rights to different educational services.
20. My school gives me a copy of my IEP.
21. My school encourages me to be actively involved in my IEP meeting.
22. Members of my IEP team discussed with me whether I could receive any testing accommodations, like extra time

Note. Adapted from Cavendish (2013)

<u>Focus Group and Interview Procedures</u>

From the survey participants, seven students agreed to participate in the focus group phase of the study.   In order to obtain a broad array of perspectives on the topic of learning disabilities, it was necessary to conduct a variety of narrative sessions in the format of a focus group, and in depth interviews. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was maintained by assigning a numerical identity to the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The treatment of the participants reflected a harmonious interview process to allow them to respond freely and without fear or intimidation.

Interview protocol included the following concerns:

- The anonymity of the students was maintained through the numerical assignment. All recorded data were attributed to that numerical assignment as opposed to a personal name (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

- For the purposes of the final dissertation, the names of the college was omitted to protect the anonymity of the students and careful omissions of any personal data will be considered to further to also protect their anonymity such as names, ages, teacher's names or specific classes.

- No other data was suppressed, falsified, or invented as to insure that the data was true and a valid representation of the participant's perspectives (Creswell, 2007)

- Multiple methods of data collection (Creswell, 2007) was be obtained (demographic data, observations, memoing, self-reflective journal of researcher, and a series in depth interviews).

- Questioning was be open ended or a reflective response to a statement.

- Questions for focus groups and interviews was created or obtained from a variety of sources to include but not limited to: Tell me your story, How does your disability affect your learning? What accommodations did you use in school? What accommodations do you use now? Tell me about your experience in high school, Tell me about your experience in college, Where do you see yourself after college?

Using the survey questions as the framework, the questions in Table 4 were used to assist in expanding the focus group and the in-depth interviews.

Table 4:

In-depth Interview Sample Probes

Probes

Questions about your high school experience.
1. How would you describe your high school?
2. What would your teachers say is your greatest strength and weakness both as an individual and as a student?
3. What would you say was your role within your high school community?
4. How would others describe your role in your high school community?
5. What courses did you enjoy the most?
6. What courses were the most challenging/difficult for you?
7. Do you like your teachers?
8. Describe your favorite teacher.

Questions about your interests and activities.
1. What personal traits would you like to see yourself build in the next four years?
2. What articles and/or books have you read in the last year that have special meaning for you and why?
3. Do you have any hobbies or special interests?
4. In your life, what experiences have been most important to you?
5. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
6. Describe a challenge you've had and how you overcame it.
7. How did you spend last summer?
8. What do you do in your spare time?
9. What do you do with any money that you earn?
10. Have you ever been a volunteer?
11. What questions do you have for the interviewer?

Questions about attending this college.
1. Why do you want to attend this college/university?
2. Why should we (the college) accept you for admission?
3. What is your career goal and how would a degree from this college help you achieve that goal?
4. What qualities make you a good choice to attend this college?
5. What other colleges are you considering?
6. What interests you the most about this school?

Note. Retrieved from http://www.high-school.devry.edu/students/get-ready/college-interview questions.jsp,

Data Collection and Analysis

After securing the IRB permission from both colleges, the data was collected through a set survey, focus group and in depth interview. Informed Consent were obtained through the survey process. Upon completing the survey, 7 students were assigned a number value to assist with the coding process for the purposes of the focus group and interviews. The students selected for the focus group had an opportunity to share their perspectives based on his or her individual journey to college; his or her transition as a high school graduate from a secondary learning institution; and his or her continued decision to enroll as an identifies learning disabled student in a four year higher education institution.

The focus group and interview process were recorded and transcribed verbatim. After the focus group three students agreed to participate in the interview process. The interview questioning was built around the results of the focus group questioning. To make sure the intent of their responses were captured, memoing also occurred in tandem with the interviews so that the observational data coincided with the narrative responses and provided additional ideas, thoughts, and possible emerging categories. The data were reflective of the voices of the participant themselves. The researcher developed a list of possible significant statements as viewed through the first person accounting of the student's experiences or what the participants experienced which is called textural descriptions (Creswell, 2007). From this the researcher described *how* the experience occurred. A self-reflective journal was kept by the researcher to assist with thoughts, ideas, and reflections however this remained as a separate entry as to not affect the collection process but assisted in the construct of the commonalities and themes as noted in a phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) describes this stage as structural description. Finally, using both descriptive methods, the researcher then

described the essence of the phenomena itself. This step in the process was the culminating composite of phenomenological research.

<div align="center">Reliability and Validity</div>

The coding process in phenomenology examines commonalities based on the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell 2007). The transcription was reported in the first person which contributes to the reliability as a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994), The concepts that form are a direct reflection of the data, which in turn form a basis for generating a common understanding and insights into the subject matter for interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The words and actions of the participants were absorbed into the data as well as the aspects of self as presented by the researchers background (Lincoln, 1998). It is important that the researcher remained as neutral as possible during the interview process as well as in the interpretation of the results. Responses to the actual interviews of the participants while ongoing should remain limited as to not influence or encourage reactionary responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This process can be assisted for the researcher through memoing which will guide the researcher through the valid accounting of the students' intent (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Although interpretation of data is an art that lacks formalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), a system of coding identifying commonalities was engaged in order to provide validity to the data. It also assisted to discover categories that appeared unusual as well as covered topics that were expected through the background knowledge of the researcher.

Special attention to the researcher's views was removed from the data collection process to ensure validity of the study. Through the background knowledge of the researcher the coding process was monitored for authenticity in the process to allow the research and theoretical conclusions to be grounded in the data itself. Much of the process in this type of research

analysis and collection is a learning by doing and feeling your way through the collection

process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Through the use of varied methods of data collection in this

study all efforts were made to ensure the representation of data and data analysis were valid and

attribute to the social validity of the study and a true and accurate representation of the lived

experiences of the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). It is important to recognize that in a

qualitative study the researcher must remain creative and flexible to allow the data to be truthful

(Corbin & Strauss, 2014). A check list (Table 5) was adapted to ensure this process for the

benefit of the researcher and ultimately the process itself.

Table 5:

Checklist of Qualitative Research Design Procedures

Qualitative Research Design Procedures
1. Basic characteristics of a qualitative study
2. Researcher's role in the study
3. Data and justified use
4. The interviews are unstructured and open ended questions that are few in number and intend to elicit responses that reflect students' views and opinion.
5. Interviews
6. Use of audio to add and code
7. Collection of official data reports to understand the diversity of the population in greater detail.
8. Procedures for recording the information: Using a smart pen/life scribe.
9. Observational protocol descriptive notes of participants, a description of the settings
10. Data analysis steps identified
11. Coding
12. Codes developed to form a description of a theme-done after the data
13. How will the data be transcribed into tables?
14. Outcome of the study
15. Multiple strategies cited for validating

Creswell, (2007)

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This phenomenological qualitative research study examined the perspectives of college students with learning disabilities on their high school experiences and in their continued experiences in their pursuit of higher education. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight into the lived experiences this specific population under study (Moustakas, 1994). The population sampled in this study was college students with self-disclosed learning disabilities who had transitioned from high school to college. The perspectives of the students who participated in this study were determined through the results of a survey, results of a focus group and results of face to face interviews. The three sets of data are presented below with accompanying field notes. The three research questions are presented with corresponding data samples from each of the three data sources. Tables were created to organize and highlight the data as well as to provide a better understanding of selected student demographics and researcher observations (field notes) related to the data findings and research questions. For the purposes of this chapter, the researcher has included field notes and procedures. In addition the researcher has presented the data to show the correlation of each data sample as it relates to the research question. This is to demonstrate the specific relevance of the data to the research question and to also demonstrate where the data sample may overlap to answer more than one research question. Chapter Four will conclude with an analytical synopsis from the three data sources.

Following this introduction, Chapter Four will present the data in a staggered three-tiered format: (a) the results of the survey, (b) the results of the focus group questions, and (c) the results of the three individual in-depth interviews, as well as demographics of participants and

contemporaneous field notes. Survey data and complete focus group and interview transcripts are found in Appendices D, E and F, respectively, for further reference and clarification.

Qualitative Research Process

Upon approval of this research study by the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board, and the school where the sample was taken, the researcher gathered the survey questions using Cavendish's (2013) 22-item survey on students with learning disabilities perspectives on the effectiveness of their school experience. The survey software Qualtrics® was utilized to create the survey questions format for this study. A link to the survey was embedded in an introductory email that included the description of the research study, researcher, the criteria for selection, informed consent and the survey link. Table 6 has been created to present the demographic data from this study.

Table 6:

Demographic Information for Survey, Focus Group, and Interview Participants

Activity	Age range	Female	Male	Ethnicity	Grade in School - Senior	Grade in School - Junior
Survey	18-25	36%	64%	Caucasian	X	X
Focus Group	18-25	29%	71%	Caucasian	42%	58%
Interviews	21-22	66%	33%	Caucasian	66%	33%

Research Subject Selection

The researcher provided the introductory email to a member of the Administrative staff at the sample site who had previously agreed to disseminate the informed consent email to the student body at the target university on March 31. In the first email sent by the administrator the students were encouraged to participate in the research study, however at no time was it indicated that it was required.

The survey remained open for 2 weeks. Reminder emails were sent to the student body at the target university on April 7 and April 15 respectively. And was officially closed on April 27. At the close of the electronic survey window, twenty-seven students had begun the survey, while only eleven had completed it entirely. One student partially completed the survey omitting some answers but their partial completion was included in the final number of completed surveys thus bringing the final total to 12 students. The data is displayed below in the following sections.

Qualitative Research Study Questions and Outcomes

This qualitative phenomenological study is guided through the following questions:

1. Through their personal lived experiences, what do college students, with identified and self -disclosed learning disabilities, perceive to be the personal and school level characteristics that enabled them to graduate from high school with a standard diploma?

2. Through their lived experiences, what are the beliefs of these students of their secondary educational experience as preparation to higher education or career readiness?

3. What are the commonalities or themes of the student's lived experience as it relates to their secondary and post-secondary education?

Survey Questions and Responses

Below are the questions and responses from the survey portion of this study. Additional quantitative data is available in Appendix D. For the purposes of this survey, analysis will include the mean value in reference to the survey items. The findings will be supported using qualitative data collected during the focus group and in-depth interviews to determine commonalities or themes.

Table 7

Likert Scale for Answering Survey Questions

Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	No Opinion (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)

Table 8

Electronic Survey Responses

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	Mean
1. Members of my IEP team asked me about my goals for graduation.	0	0	2	6	4	12	4.17
2. My school asked me which type of diploma I want to receive.	1	1	2	2	6	12	3.92
3. Members of my IEP team discussed with me what skills I would need to master in order to succeed in school.	0	1	1	6	4	12	4.08
4. Members of my IEP team talked with me about skills I need to make decisions on my own about my education.	0	1	1	6	4	12	4.08
5. Members of my IEP team talked with me about my transition plan.	0	0	3	2	7	12	4.33
6. My teachers understood my behavior.	0	0	1	7	4	12	4.25
7. My general education classes were the right level for me.	0	3	2	2	5	12	3.75
8. My school gave me all the help and services documented on my IEP.	0	2	1	4	5	12	4
9. My school gave me all the help and services documented in my TRANSITION plan.	0	2	0	5	5	12	4.08
10. My school showed me a copy of my testing results for all tests I took.	0	3	1	4	4	12	3.75
11. Special education teachers made accommodations and modifications as indicated on my IEP.	2	0	1	4	4	11	3.73
12. My teachers offered alternative homework assignments to meet my needs.	0	2	2	3	4	11	3.82
13. My school consistently carried out all the recommendations documented on my IEP.	1	0	2	4	4	11	3.91
14. My school evaluated whether my program continues to meet my needs every year.	0	2	1	3	5	11	4
15. The testing, progress, and grade reports that my school gave me were written in terms that I understood.	0	0	1	6	4	11	4.27
16. The special education services I received were effective.	0	1	0	6	3	10	4.1
17. Regular education teachers made any adjustments for me that were agreed on at my IEP meeting.	0	0	3	4	3	10	4
18. My school gave me information about different types of classes (For example: regular classes and classes just for ESE students).	0	1	2	4	3	10	3.9

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	Mean
19. My school gave me information about my legal rights to different educational services.	0	2	2	4	2	10	3.6
20. My school gave me a copy of my IEP.	0	1	1	3	5	10	4.2
21. My school encouraged me to be actively involved in my IEP meeting.	0	0	1	5	4	10	4.3
22. Members of my IEP team discussed with me whether I could receive any testing accommodations (For example: extra time).	0	0	1	5	4	10	4.3

Focus Group Procedures and Field Notes

Table 9 has been created to provide the reader with the demographic information for the focus group of this study.

Table 9

Demographics of Focus Group

Gender (M/F)	Grade in School	Ethnicity
5/2	3 Seniors,4 Juniors	Caucasian

From the 12 survey participants, seven agreed to continue in the focus group; all were invited to participate. There was no need for random sampling as the sample size was limited to those who responded. At the end of the focus group, three participants were invited to complete an in-depth, one-on-one interview.

The researcher looked for a variety of experiences around the general themes that had been generated through the focus group questions. These students were chosen specifically as their answers in the focus group reflected a thoughtful and reflective response that highlighted a positive and critical analysis of their lived experience in high school and their present educational setting. Of the seven participants of the focus group three participants agreed to participate in the interview process. The interview process continued with those chosen students. At each stage of the subject selection process, informed consent was distributed to the students and reviewed by them during the first meeting.

To relieve any anxiety in the focus group, a face to face meeting was scheduled for a weekday on the campus of the selected college. The focus group setting was a private room, around a table, in the campus library. All participants arrived to the focus group on time and appeared eager to participate. By meeting the participants on the college campus, there were fewer barriers to participation and sources of anxiety related to being in an unfamiliar place.

The students were familiar with one another and demonstrated comradery through familiar and warm greetings to one another. After describing who the researcher was and the purpose of the research the informed consent document was distributed and a short period of time provided for the students to read through the document. After receiving informed consent from each participant and permission to begin, the focus group process was explained to the group as such: (a) 11 question would be asked of the group, (b) there was no limit to response length, and (c) there were no right or wrong answers so they should respond truthfully and to the best of their abilities. The questions were posed and each participant was afforded time to answer each question to their satisfaction. The session was audio recorded. The audio was transcribed by the researcher and combined with the researcher's field notes to observe and note any nuances in behavior that could affect or contribute to item responses. Conducting the focus group prior to the in-depth interviews helped the researcher refine the interview questions to clarify meaning and maximize understanding of the data provided during the focus group and to augment the researcher's approach to the interaction with participants to encourage them to freely answer the interview questions.

After the conclusion of focus group questions, participants were allowed to ask any questions related to the study that were still unclear. Several questions were asked as to the origin of the study and why the researcher selected the particular subject to study. The researcher

explained her involvement with students with learning disabilities as a parent and as an educator in which the students appeared to find very interesting. They also gave the impression to the researcher that they understood how important their voice was by validating the importance of the study.

Interview Procedures and Field Notes

Table 10 has been created to provide the reader with the demographic information of the individual participants in the interview.

Table 10

Demographics of Interview Group

Gender (M/F)	Grade in School	Ethnicity
1/2	2 Seniors,1 Junior	Caucasian

After reviewing the focus group responses, three participants were selected for the interview portion; two females and one male. All three were Caucasian and two were graduating seniors; the third was junior. The questions selected for the in-depth interviews were chosen to assist the researcher in answering the research questions guiding the study. The questions were designed to solicit responses that were more personal in nature; specifically, how their learning disability affected their life, their academics, and their social interactions. In-depth interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 1 hour. During the in-depth interviews, participants exhibited behaviors indicating increased anxiety, such as increased fidgeting and decreased eye contact. Many times their eyes drifted upward as they recalled an event or were organizing their thought. Several times one individual's phone vibrated with glances to who was calling or texting. Another student kept looking at their watch. As opposed to the focus group the interview students appeared less comfortable with having to singularly answer questions without the

comraderies of their classmates. Their responses to in-depth interview questions had fewer words and contained less diversity of themes than the focus group. Similar to the focus group setting, each participant completed their in-depth interview in a private room on the college campus during the school week. A series of seven questions were asked and after, the researcher allowed participants to ask any clarifying questions related to the study or interview questions. Participant questions were closely related to those asked following the completion of the focus group but were fewer in number during the interviews than during the focus group. The other two had no additional questions. Upon conclusion each participant received a small token of appreciation and seemed eager to leave but friendly in their departure.

<div align="center">Focus Group and Interview Questions</div>

After a review of the results of the survey questions, a series of focus group questions were selected based on the responses of the survey questions. Although the survey questions provided minimal narrative samples, they did allow the researcher to specifically choose the focus group question based on areas in the survey that needed further explanation through targeted questions. The questions were designed to enhance understand of the perspectives of college students with learning disabilities on self-identity, goals and aspirations, and successes and failures through their high school experiences and their transition to post-secondary education. Additional questions were asked as to the types of services or learning environments present at the target college that impacted their matriculation decisions and the transition preparation received for post-secondary education as well as life after school. An independent rater also reviewed the questions in reference to the survey questions and responses to confirm the researcher's selection of the focus group questions.

The purpose of the focus group was to assess a more narrative sample of the student's lived experiences in high school as well as into their needs as college students. Once the questions were drafted, the researcher contacted the focus group participants by the email from the survey to arrange for a face to face meeting in which the students were audio recorded. All seven agreed upon a time and location (school campus) and the researcher met the group at the pre-arranged location and time. The focus group began by presenting the selected questions. These questions were presented to be broad enough for the students to be able to encompass their own experience and perspective, but also specific enough to be able to answer the question. The entire focus group lasted one hour and 15 minutes.

Once the focus group concluded, the researcher asked if any participants would be willing to continue with the interview portion of the research study. Three students agreed to continue. The focus group audio recordings were transcribed and prepared in a word document with accompanying questions The questions used in the focus group are presented in Table 11 and the transcripts of responses in Appendix E.

Table 11:

Focus Group Questions

Questions
1. How would you describe yourself?
2. How would you describe your high school?
3. What would your teachers say was your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?
4. What courses did you enjoy the most?
5. What courses were the most challenging?
6. Describe your favorite teacher(s) in High School and why?
7. What do you think is the most contributing factor to you getting out of HS?
8. How important is family in your success?
9. If you had the chance to go back to HS and tell your school to do it better or things that they could add to help other students coming along what would that be?
10. Why did you choose this school?
11. What's next?

After the conclusion of the focus group three students were selected to continue with the interview portion of the research study. Below are the open-ended questions that were drafted based on a review of the focus group questions? These questions attempted to secure a more thorough narrative understanding of the perspectives of these 'student's lived experience as it related to their learning disability. A full transcript of the interview questions can be found in appendix G.

Table 12

In-depth Interview Questions

Questions
1. How hard was it to get through High School
2. Which was more difficult, if you had to decide which affected you the most in your success or struggle for success, academic or social?
3. Did your teachers respond to the social struggles?
4. Do you find your experience at this college responds to your learning style?
5. Describe a challenge in High School and how you overcame it.
6. How does your Learning disability affect your life?
7. Leaving High School? What do you think you were ready for?

This study was conducted in three sections: (a) electronic survey, (b) focus group and (c) in-depth interview. The questions were selected from various sources and related back to the three original research questions where most appropriate (Table 13).

Table 13:

Research Questions and their Corresponding Data Sources.

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
Survey Questions #	Survey Questions #	Survey Questions #
1,3,4,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17	1,2,5,6,8,9,14,16,18	1,5,6,7,8,9,14,15,19,20,21
Focus Group Questions #	Focus Group Questions #	Focus Group Questions #
1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,	2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,11
Interview Questions#	Interview Questions#	Interview Questions #
1,5,	3,7	2,4,6

Research Question 1 and Related Responses

Through their personal lived experiences, what do college students, with identified and self -

disclosed learning disabilities, perceive to be the personal and school level characteristics that

enabled them to graduate from high school with a standard diploma?

Survey Responses

A thorough examination of the student responses and question analysis as it relates to

research question number 1 the following discussion will conclude with commonalities that were

found by examining the responses, the mean and the identified questions as they relate to the

specific research question. Commonalities will be presented after presentation of each data

source however the survey questions predominantly refer to the student's perceived school level

characteristics and not an exact statistical figure.

For research question 1 there were fourteen questions from the survey that best answered

this research question. The survey questions for this research question predominantly referenced

the student's understanding of their IEP, their teacher's communication of those IEP services and

the appropriateness of testing. These questions were looking at the perspectives of the students in relationship to their understanding of effective services that enabled them to graduate from high school. Although the mean averages are reported in the table and will be highlighted here, the researcher felt that the number of responses in tandem to the mean averages according to the likert scale was the better combined indicator description of student's perspectives. Of the fourteen questions, the five questions that showed the lowest mean average were:

Question # 11 (mean 3.73) Special education teachers made accommodations and modifications as indicated on my IEP

Question # 10(mean 3.75) My school showed me a copy of my testing results for all the tests I took.

Question # 7(mean 3.75) My general education classes were the right level for me

Question # 12(mean 3.82) My teachers offered alternative homework assignments to meet my needs

Question # 13(mean 3.91) My school consistently carried out all the recommendations documented on my IEP.

From reviewing at the mean averages, the questions indicate a discrepancy in the student perspectives with regard to their IEP services as seen in regard to accommodations and modifications, their understanding of testing results, the appropriateness of the level to which they were instructed, the opportunity for additional or alternative work to demonstrate knowledge and again the appropriate application of services as delineated on their IEP. It also should be noted that question 11 of all the survey question had the only 2 responses that indicated (Strongly disagree) which highlights the question of providing a variety of opportunities for engagement and representation of knowledge for the student. Questions # 10

and 7 showed the most number (3's) in the category of (Disagree) which highlighted the correct level of instruction and the copy of testing results being fully explained as also additional higher numbers for disapproval respectively.

Of the survey questions that the student's perceived to be positive were:
Question # 15 (mean 4.27) The testing, progress and grade reports that my school gave me were written in terms I understood. This item showed 6 students agreeing with this statement which slightly contradicts question # 10 which asked being shown testing results. This discrepancy indicated an area to explore accommodations and testing on the focus group questions highlighting the description of services and their ability to understand the needs for accommodations.

Other questions of the survey that specifically address research question 1 was question #1 (mean 4.17) Members of my IEP team asked about my goals for graduation. Six students reported agree while 4 strongly agreed.

A grouping of questions were reported with a mean average of 4.08. These were:
Question # 3 Members of my IEP team discussed with me what skills I need to master in order to succeed in school
Question # 4 Members of my IEP team discussed with me what skills I need to make decisions on my own about my education.

One of the more interesting responses was question #6 (mean 4.25) Teachers understood my behavior identifying 7 students agreeing and 4 students strongly agreeing. This question, in tandem with the lower reported mean averages, helped to identify focus group narrative questions in describing perception of themselves as students from what they thought their teachers would say.

Commonalities for the Survey for Research Question 1:

(Positive Commonalities reflect positive statements regarding what worked in their educational experiences; Critical Commonalities reflect where they felt there was a lack or an absence of support.)

- Positive Commonalities: Student's felt a supported member of the IEP team by identifying goals for success in school and graduation; Students felt emotionally supported by teachers understanding their behavior; students felt they understood their progress in relation to grades, testing and progress reports

- Critical Commonalities: Not appropriately leveled curriculum, lack of comprehension in fully understanding testing results, Not enough varied opportunities for representation of knowledge

Focus Group

The questions identified for the focus group questions came directly from the positive and critical commonalities as discovered through the examination of the survey questions. The analysis in the design of the questions helped to give a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the students as well as the perspectives and self-reflection that they had in viewing their high school experience and success in exiting high school with a standard diploma. After the transcription of the focus group audio recordings, the transcripts were analyzed by hand to identify key words or phrases that would depict the essence of the data. Bracketing of commonalities was also utilized to assist and to further define and confirm the analysis. The questions below, identified for analysis, in the focus group questions helped to give a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the students as well as the perspectives and self-reflection that they had in viewing their high school experience and success in exiting high

school with a standard diploma. The focus group questions and responses below best respond to answering research question one.

Most students had a very positive self-reflection of themselves. They referred to themselves in the order of frequency as "helpful"; "willing to help", "likes to volunteer". Attributes as "strong", "bright", "responsible", "determined" and "self-aware" presented as self-descriptors along with a command of presence that indicated a self-assured group. "Responsible" and "a good sense of humor" followed. The most predominant attribute however was helpful. Two examples follow that depict the self-assured personal statements. These not only reflect who these students feel they are now but were a direct response to the probe "I want you to describe your high school experience" which was an intro to the focus group question discussion.

Question # 1 How would you describe yourself?

S1: "I'm a very helpful person, very energetic. I'm willing to do anything for anybody. Like if you…I'm willing to take my shirt off for anyone…Help anyone in need, um, 'cause I love to volunteer."

S3: I would say that I am strong, self-strong, and more self-aware as well to who I am and bright, very bright. (Smiles).

In the focus group questions that asked students to describe their high school, students varied their responses to describe setting, experience, services and social environment. A few compared it to their present educational setting and for many it appeared difficult to reflectively separate the two without commenting on their high school experience without also explaining how it could be better. Examples below best describe their high school setting.

Question # 2 How would you describe your high school?

S2: My high school was pretty small, so pretty similar, pretty small, similar to this college. But it wasn't for students with learning disabilities but it was similar because they had learning specialists, so very small classes so they gave me a lot of modifications to help me, as much as they could-like especially 100% of the time, and stuff like that so in that way it was very helpful.

This student as he described the setting wove in his experience, services and an emotional component of bullying and tattle telling and specific services to address social skills and perceptions.

S5: My high school experience was tough because I used to tattletale on kids before I began high school but they had a class on social skills and that helped me a lot because I would take kidding as bullying and I would take things way too, too seriously.

Another student responded when asked the question of describe the high school setting using emotional attributes which as opposed to an actual place, he described how it felt. This particular response was noted as a memo as preparation for possibly using this student as a potential interview candidate as well as digging deeper into an further understanding of the emotional component for students with learning disabilities in the interview questions. : Question 2; How would you describe your high school?

S7: Caring, charismatic, helping each other, helping the students. Actually cared, even at lunch there was always a teacher that you could go to for help.

The third focus group question was generated by the survey discussion regarding perception of the students of themselves as they perceive their teachers see them. While previously they indicated that their teachers understood their behavior they also indicated that their opportunities to represent their knowledge was not fully expressed. In describing their perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses the students' main commonalities for

strengths were a strong work ethic, punctual, eager to learn, and organized. Their self-reflective commonalities for weaknesses had less variety as they described comprehension as the major deficit which presented as well as self-doubt, lack or organization and lack of patience as the second. Both social skills are listed as strengths and weaknesses but it is importance to remember that these are the student's perceptions of themselves as they reflect on what their teachers see as strengths and weaknesses.

Question # 3 What would your teachers say was your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?

S1: They would say my greatest strength is always turning my work in on time, always wanting, and meeting a deadline. My greatest weakness are you sure I did that right, like, um would be always not sure of myself, doubting (concurrence-yea-doubting) myself.

S6: I think in school my weakness was patience, not enough patience, a lack of, with people and with school work. My strength was probable my extreme talent for leadership

S 7: Tries really hard,, accomplishes a lot, pays attention, eager to learn;(weakness)maybe trying to get along with everybody, maybe fully understanding what the teacher is saying; comprehending.

Question # 4: What courses did you enjoy the most? , and question number 5: What courses were the most challenging? helped to further the perspectives of the students into where the students' high school careers were successful or challenging. The questions directly relate to research question number 1 as most of these course descriptions fulfill core components in reaching a high school diploma.

In question 5, the courses that generally shown as favorites in HS were Science(3), Art(2) ,English(2), Sports(2),Drama(1) Sign Language(1) and Math(1). The courses that were the

most challenging were English Literature (2), Math (2) specifically Algebra and Geometry, American Government/History and Sciences Specifically Environmental science and Biology.

Question number six's responses provided greater insight into identifying some of the contributing factors, both academic and socially, that enabled the students to graduate with a standard diploma. The students specifically identified the type of teacher which allowed the researcher to analyze similar or different attributes or teaching styles among the students perception of their favorite teacher for comparison. In terms of teaching style the students perceived teachers who not only helped them but pushed them to be successful. Their attributes stemmed from loving and maternal, mentoring to funny and goofy.

Question # 6: Describe your favorite teacher(s) in high school and why?

S1: "I actually had two, can I say two? She was my English teacher. She was the hardest teacher. Especially for spelling. If you're spelling was wrong, she would let you know but I thank her for that to this day because now my handwriting, my spelling is a lot better because of her strictness. The second one was so funny. He was very into Shakespeare and if I needed help he would help me, with recommendations for schools and jobs and stuff like that. He's one of my favorite teachers." This perception expresses the theme of transition preparation. S7 continues to describe the maternal theme, the mentoring theme and also the accommodation of proximal seating and repeating directions and checks for comprehension.

S7: I have several. One I had for a long time since middle school, she helped me a lot-like another mom, seen me through a lot; another, my leadership teacher-really helped me to be a leader and understanding what that is. My reading teacher. If I didn't understand I had a desk right next to hers so if I didn't understand she was right there to re-explain it."

In question number seven, when defining what the student's perceived definition for the most contributing factor with their success in their HS graduation, they listed their accommodations as the leading contributing factor, their family as the second and their teachers as the third. However when pressed for just one, the majority attributed all three as being integrally intertwined in contributing as part of a whole.

Question 7: What do you think is the most contributing factor to you getting out of high school: teachers, a great IEP, accommodations?

S1 describes her teachers: " It would have to be my teachers 'cause um they really wanted me to succeed and they tried very hard for me to succeed and got on me-you're going to do this and we're going to help you no matter what the struggle and helped me get out of HS.

S3 summed up all three factors by saying "All of it is important because I would have my teachers that would accommodate my work in HS; my parents were always there to help me understand how well I was doing with that particular teacher and that teacher would also be there to let me know how I was doing."

Question eight furthers the discussion to identify contributing factors and even though some of the students reported it earlier, this question targeted how important in their reflection of their lived high school experience is family? The student's credited in some cases their families, and in particular their mothers, for their graduating from high School and their continued success in higher education. However they answered as it related to their high school graduation.

Question 8: How important is family in your success?

S4: My parents have been there for me and they stood by me and they still are even though I am here (college). If it wasn't for my family (chuckles nervously) I wouldn't come, have come, this far."

S6: "My family was very supportive through my journey through out High school. I was closer to my mom more than anyone because my Dad worked a lot and my sister was like older and out of HS by the time I was in HS so it made it harder.

Students were asked if they could go back to High school (Question 9) and change something or tell someone what they could do better what that would be. This question in combination with the other descriptive responses contributes highly in identifying the commonalities for research question number one than any other. However, all of the focus group questions support and lead up to this one. It is noted that the students seemed to have the most fun with this question than any other. There mood became lighter and they smiled more.

The three themes that emerged from question number nine were teaching and teaching styles, services or additional services and transition. These three ideas were broken into sub categories as follows: Teaching was described as teaching differently, more hands on, and more activities. Additional services were described as more technology, peer tutoring, a writing center, and learning specialists.

Transition was not merely described as needing a better plan but describing it as an event that needs to not only start earlier than usual(earlier than junior year) and also being more specific and hands on in visiting and actually physically looking at specific options post-graduation. In allowing the students to reflectively remember their high school experience from where they are now they were able to more clearly define what they need and specifically articulate it.

Question # 9 If you had the chance to go back to high school and tell your school to do it better or things that they could add to help other students coming along what would that be?

S2: "I think that for my High school they should have the teachers teach differently like have more activities more hands on. I don't know what they do now. I know they moved to a new building and they have a lot more resources so I don't know if it's gotten better but I do-they do have a learning specialist and that is great but maybe more learning specialists like they have here. That would be more helpful and have the teachers do more activities and have them present the information in different ways. And also if they had a peer tutoring program like they do here that would be really helpful as well."

S5: "I would tell my High school to put up a learning center, to help them with their writing skills like they have here. More technology."

S6: S6: I would go back to my High school and say that they need to start a transition program where students are allowed to look at colleges or talk about what they want to do after High school in their sophomore year because when I was in High school we started looking in my Junior year and then when it became my senior year we had to rush to make our decision about where to go next so I would start a transition program much earlier.

Key Commonalities: Teaching styles; Accommodations; Family support; Teacher support and mentorship; Effective Services; Technology; Transition perseverance.

<u>In-Depth Interviews</u>

Through the interview process the researcher was able to delve a bit deeper into the complexities of living day to day with a learning disability. The purpose of the interview questions in regard to research question number one was to understand how the students perceived their journey in high school as they progressed toward a high school diploma. Through the answers to these questions the researcher was able to find similarities and a deeper understanding with academic and social challenges, yet it became clearer that the social factor

weighed heavier in the interview portion than what had been shared in the focus group. The mood became more somber in the interview question. Questions and probes specifically targeted whether the academic or social struggle took a higher toll. In each interview it became clear that based on the responses that the social struggle was equally, if not more difficult, than the academic struggle. This question particularly addressed the question as to what were characteristics on a personal level that student perceived as contributing to their successful graduation from high school. This probe explored the ability to identify a challenge and how the student overcame it.

Interview question # 1 served more as an introductory question to the interview process and this was obvious by the limitation of the responses. The question asked directly how difficult it was to get through high school. The students responded in a short sentence. The follow up to the focus question (Question 5) helped to further answer the first question. Below are examples of Question # 1.

Question # 1: How hard was it to get through high school?

S1: It wasn't hard for me at all academically-wise, socially wise, it was.

S2: It was hard for me academically and socially

S7: Classes were ok, had a lot of friends, had fun-maybe the hardest thing were the tests.

Interview Question # 5 Describe a challenge in high school and how you overcame it.

S1: "Doing homework I've always done the homework but I always manage to stress myself out and say I can't do this and I'll just give up on it but then once I talk to my teachers they say You can do this so that's my biggest challenge that I doubt myself continuously that I have faced in HS and college and even going forward."

S2: : "I'd say in Hs maybe the biggest challenge is understanding the information, fitting in with the other kids like I felt, like I was way more shy when I was in high school and I felt like no one liked me and I tried so hard to fit in. I went out with a couple of students outside of school but it was rare if they invited me so I felt pretty left out so I didn't have many friends in High school. In College, I guess the biggest challenge has been to be more assertive. Not that I let people walk all over me but I would have trouble saying no and telling people how I really feel um but I've overcome those challenges. And so has she" (refers to other interviewee-who proceeded her, also disclosed as her best friend).

S3: S7: "Losing my grandma. My family was all over the place and I didn't sleep in my bed due to I felt the need to or I didn't see the need to sleep in a bed. Academically- Getting through geometry. I just don't get it. Comprehending."

Table 14:

Key Commonalities and Themes of Successful Characteristics for securing or meeting HS Graduation

Student-level	School-level
Helpful,	Needs appropriate skill instruction;
Likes to volunteer	Needs effective services
Needs family support	Need goals clearly set for graduation
Benefits from Mentorship	Type of diploma
Needs social emotional support in school	Needs appropriate accommodations
	Different teaching styles/Differentiated
Needs social Emotional Support @ home	Instruction
	Needs Access to Technology

Research Question 2 and Related Responses

Through their lived experiences, what do these students believe to be the beliefs of these students of their secondary educational experience as preparation to higher education or career readiness?

Survey Responses

Through a thorough examination of the student responses and question analysis as it relates to research question number two the following discussion will conclude with commonalities that were found by examining the responses, the mean and the identified questions as they relate to the specific research question. Commonalities will be presented after presentation of each data source however the survey questions predominantly refer to the student's perceived beliefs on their secondary and post-secondary education and not an exact statistical figure.

Some responses were specific to research question two. The lowest attributes for the survey, as it relates to research question two, was reflected in the two questions below, question eighteen and question two:

Question # 18 (mean 3.9) My school gave me information about different types of classes (For example: regular classes and classes just for ESE students)

Question # 2(mean 3.92) My school asked me which type of diploma I want to receive.

In relationship to research question two, these students identify the lack of opportunity to access the general curriculum as possibly affecting their preparation to post-secondary planning. They continued to agree in affirmative responses as seen in question # 14: (mean 4.0) My school evaluated whether my program continues to meet my needs every year. On average, the student's responses continued to specifically address the function of the IEP as positively meeting their specific needs through question # 8: (mean 4.0). My school gave me all the help and services

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documented on my IEP as well as question # 16: (mean 4.1): The special education services I received were effective.

Question # 1 and question # 6 were addressed in the responses to research question 1 specifically but they add as a backdrop to research question 2 by affirming that (Q1) the student's goals for graduation had been addressed as well as (Q 6) the teachers understood the behaviors of their specific students. The most imperative question from the survey in regard to research question 2 is question number # 5(mean 4.33) Members of my IEP team talked with me about my transition plan. This disclosure leads to the continuing development of the focus group questions by encouraging the open-ended discussion as it related to their transition plans from HS and as well continuing on past post-secondary education. Through their beliefs it appears that the students have a solid understanding of the transition planning and a strong sense of their High school preparation into post-secondary planning.

Positive Key commonalities: Function and compliance of the IEP, transition, transition plan, accommodations

Negative Key Commonalities: Access to the curriculum; diversity of academic programming

Focus Group Responses

Through the responses above to the survey questions, the below responses in the design of the focus group question are best reflected as they address specific commonalities. Self-determination, self-resilience and self-motivation are interwoven in the responses for the focus group through the questions below as they describe themselves as assisting in their transition to post-secondary as well as honestly reflecting self-depreciating qualities:

Q 1: How would you describe yourself?

S6: I am very determined and? At school.

S7. Determined, eager to learn, sometimes I piss people off but not meaning to but annoying people. One of my best friends we used to curse at each other as friends all the time but other people found it annoying.

Q2: How would you describe your high school?

S4: I had difficulty with the public High school system because I experienced school and then I was Home schooled/ I go at my own pace. I don't deal with stress well.

S6: I looked at my High school setting as a business. Hs is more like a business setting so for me I dressed very nice. I went to school with numerous kids from ADD to ADHD to normal kids just struggling to get through HS.

In question number three the students display the belief and recognition that there "weakness" is not a weakness but a mere accommodation or fact of learning as represented here.

Q3: What would your teachers say was your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?

S2: My strength would be organization, but my weakness would be-well I don't know if it is a weakness, Like I had a lot of trouble understanding , like not always understanding or knowing what things meant and trying to understand it- comprehension I think is the word. So the weakness not reading things repeatedly or that I had to simplifying things a lot to be able to understand it. It's not really a weakness. It's what I have to do. So maybe a weakness would be not reading the information repeated, or that I had to simplify-just what I needed.

S4: I think I was sort of I had a hard a time getting things done. It was very challenging over the years. I think I have grown out of it well I certainly have improved.in different areas.

Question 5 offers descriptions on accommodations and learning strategies meant to assist, however, given their learning disabilities, the students express the content and representation of knowledge as difficult.

Q5: What courses were the most challenging and why?

S4: Probably American Government. Learning about American History. Challenging and the most interesting. Lots of memorization

S6: S6: I think in High school the most challenging course was senior lit because we had to write a lot of essay papers and at the time I struggled with comprehending and putting words into my own words ah... On paper.

Question 6 reflects the reflective perspective of their secondary schooling and how in reflection their personal beliefs have changed over time with their new experiences in post-secondary education. Note the maturity in reflection of the transition process.

Q6: Describe your favorite teacher and why?

S2: In High school I realize now that a lot of my teachers were old fashioned but I didn't know that when I was there but here were some teachers that were very good as I said before my art teacher. She was really fun, crafty and creative and goofy and had good ideas to help us figure out what to make and draw, gave us suggestions, showed us what to do so it made class fun. It's hard to remember all of it but for the most part she was more hands on and didn't just lecture but came beside me and said let me show you, um. If I had another favorite teacher it would be my history teacher- she was kinda like a mom. She was strict but she was very there for you and open and listened if you needed something.

S4: One of my teachers that was my favorite, he actually passed away before I even came to this school. He was one of those teachers that knew me pretty well. He would stick around, by my side all through when I was in High school. When he passed away, I went to his funeral and (Student becomes reflective in thought and becomes slightly emotional) He was just my favorite. He was one of those teachers that you that he knew every student. He was one of those guys that

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was, he was caring and loving. He knew me and he knew all these other kids like me in my High school and we all had a connection with this guy.

Question seven emphasizes the importance of appropriate continuous accommodations as well as beliefs on fairness, the reality of the future as it relates to transitional opportunities and possible pitfalls.

Q7: What do you think it the most contributing factor to you getting out of high school: teachers, IEP, strong accommodations?

S2: Um, I think it was mostly the accommodations had 100% extra time, um. I didn't have many others. They couldn't give me a word bank because I wouldn't get the same amount of points the others did and I wouldn't get enough points to pass because the test wouldn't be equal to other student's tests and um 100% extra time really did help and having a learning specialist that I saw weekly like they do here. She helped a lot like she taught one of my history classes and she would simplify information and she help understand it so much better so that really helped a lot.

S7: Teachers yea, accommodations, IEP, family-all three. If I didn't have family support I wouldn't have gotten through HS and gone to this school/college. I probably would have flunked out or really struggled just to get by and probably drop out. I got and get lots of accommodations-large print, extra time, note takers etcetera.

Question eight addresses the emphasis as the student's beliefs on the importance of family on their transitional preparation to post-secondary and their journey up until this moment in the educational careers both emotionally and financially.

Q8: How important is family on your success?

S1: Oh my family is very important to me especially my mother. She really wants me to be successful in my life, so (Pause), she found me the best schools for me. I'll be graduating on Saturday. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be graduating.

S2: My family is important of course financially. My grandpa has paid for my tuition. Which of course is really helpful and my parents not only financially but emotionally as well have been supportive and if I needed something are willing to talk and they are like a third party in y'know they are proud of you and supportive of you in everything you are doing. It makes you feel really good. It makes me feel really good.

Question nine reflects a looking backwards reflection to what the student's would tell people now about their journey and how they believe it could be helpful to another student based on their own experiences.

Q9: If you had the chance to go back to high school and tell your school to do it better or things that they could add to help other students coming along what would that be?

S3: That would be like, I went back recently and the admissions lady there and she asked me about this school and I said about it. And she said oh ok, maybe we should talk about it more(like to other students) so if this guy went there then it should be ok-so I think the transition a way to really sit down and tell kids there is a college out there for kids like us. It's not just transition from high school to college but what you want to do after your done with school and it what is the right path to take.

S4: I would think that I would suggest to have people come to Central Florida that this is a school that you should come see and consider and they talk to different teachers, learning specialist and students and have them understand the setting of what this school does and things they can do to help students be successful.

Question ten asks the students to reflect then on their current educational setting if asked why they not only chose the setting but more so why it has been either important or influential in their continued success as a student and why.

Q10: Why would you chose a specific school to address skills related to your Learning Disability?

S5: This school was supporting things and I have difficulties and it interfered with what I was learning and that made it very difficult for me to read things and still struggled for several years and certainly have come a long way. I came here directly here because it does deal with differences and I have seen. They have learning specialists that can help you and that is why really the one reason why I came here.

S6: I chose, I came straight here from HS. I chose this school due to the accommodations and the very detailed oriented support system from school counseling to the learning specialists which helped transition me from HS to college.

The last question, question eleven, in the focus group set, refers to the student's beliefs on transition; on their own transition from where they are now and where they think they are headed. These can relate back upon more discussion as to if they were prepared for such a transitional opportunity or not in their beliefs upon leaving high school and preparing for post-secondary education.

Q11: What is next? (For you?)

Based on your experiences what is your next transition?

S3: I plan on helping kids with learning differences in my near future and live with some good friends from college and succeed. Yea a teacher, a sports counselor and vets too-like amputees. Helping them play sports. I like to play sports like kayaking or rock climbing. For Vets I think

good thing to support vets because of amputees-when they have just got back from war and their legs are broken or they have prose this legs or they have problems with like PTSD or mentally getting back.

S7: I want to get into a career that can lead me into having a family. Or maybe continuing college, maybe going further (In what field?) Maybe Special education or some kinda program that works or trains dogs to be service dogs to learn simple commands and be fun companions to people at the same time.

Through the responses of the focus group questions, the interview questions, as they relate to research question 2, were designed to investigate a deeper understanding of the beliefs of the students of their secondary educational experience as it related to the preparation for post-secondary opportunities. Through the design of the interview questions, a deeper uncovering of the social and emotional toll unfolded as seen in the below examples.

In-Depth Interview Responses

Question two displays the perceived accounting of social struggles in the lives of the three interviewed students with learning disabilities.

Q2: Which was more difficult, if you had to decide which affected you the most in either your success or struggle for success, academic or social?

S1: My Social struggle. Affected me in what way? Getting into college or like in general? Well, they both affected me but I think more social because it was more about things what I would take with me in life in the time. Academics yes of course. It wouldn't be harder academically- it was just the time. It wasn't that that would make it harder for me in the future. I just need it. But it was the social stuff. I was bullied a lot. And so,-about my weight. It wasn't

really for my disability, really but other things. People said I was annoying so I was bullied a lot for that. They said I was annoying.

S1: My mom was very helpful. We had heard about this school and planned carefully after visiting to come here. I knew it would be the same as I had experienced in HS. With the support I mean. The learning specialist is really important and all the help. I know I needed it and it was what I needed to learn and do well. So it was very carefully planned to come here because we knew this would be perfect for me. Now I have a job and a career. One thing helped the other HS, college. It has prepared me know for life. I'm pretty confident about it. My HS got me ready to come here.

S2: Yea for me I think in high school I needed more accommodations because of how demanding the work was but here they way they teach is a lot different like before a lot of my teachers would just lecture and you would have to memorize and memorize all these lectures and textbooks and notes and all these terms, but here they do it different like even if they lecture the tests seem easier and like the assignments they give you because they give you pre information and guidelines that help you prepare for tests. Not like in HS. I think here they are more accommodating because they plan their lessons around how the students learn and what they have and so they plan for that, so like they say I want to do that assignment, but I can't so they say I'm going to structure it this way and plan for the different disabilities to learn from it. Not like they make it simpler, just so everyone can understand it.

 S 7: I am, um not sure, yet. As I said before HS was really hard, academically and socially. I know that I really needed to come here. I couldn't have done it at a bigger school. I wouldn't –I mean without the learning specialist, I wouldn't have been successful. It is great that there is a school like this. I am a much stronger person now. I don't know what I am going to do yet. But I

am sure I can find something if not a career then I can get a good job. Like I said maybe

education. I really like helping kids.

Table 15:

Commonalities or Themes Believed to Assist Students with Learning

Disabilities Prepare for College or Career

Characteristics or Themes
Needs Learning Specialists
Needs Family Support
Financial Support Critical
Determination/Needs Self Advocacy
Needs Accommodations
Diploma options clearly defined
Transition plan written and carried out/Concrete Curriculum
Based Instruction
Appropriate educational Environments
Access to Technology

Research Question 3 and Related Responses

What are the commonalities or themes of the student's lived experience as it relates to their

secondary and post-secondary education?

Table 16:

Commonalities or Themes in Secondary/Post-Secondary

Secondary	Post-Secondary
Needs advocacy skills for successful learning	Needs advocacy skills for successful learning
Importance of Family	Importance of Family
Needs Accommodations and Differentiated Instruction	Differentiated Instruction/Universal Design for Learning
Needs Social Emotional Support	Needs Social Emotional Support/Counseling
Needs Learning Specialists	Needs Learning Specialists/ Academic Advisors
Needs Transition planning	Needs Transition Planning

Commonalities that were identified through a thorough examination of the survey questions in research question 1 and research question 2 respectively.

The only survey responses that have not been accounted for elsewhere in the survey are question #19, #20, #21 and #22.

Question #19 (mean 3.6) My school gave me information about my legal rights to different educational services was the lowest score of all the 22 questions regarding the survey as well as having the most diverse spread of participants upon the Likert scale.

Question #20(mean 4.2) My school gave me a copy of my IEP references a compliance issue that is difficult to understand in light of question #19 other than the mere handing of the IEP to the student.

Question# 21(mean 4.3) and question #22 (mean 4.3) My school encouraged me to be actively involved in my IEP meeting and Members of my IEP team discussed with me whether I could receive my testing accommodations also refer to compliance under IDEA and while identify the measure of the law do not necessarily reflect the qualitative perspective of the law which assisted in identifying the focus group questions below as they related to research question 3.

Focus Group Responses

For the most part students refer to themselves positively except for the glimpse into self-reflection when they account for themselves as possibly annoying to others. Although this was referenced as well in research question 2 it displays a continuity of self-reflection that is a commonality throughout the display of data.

Q 1: How would you describe yourself?

S4: I probably would say that I am a responsible person and that I am very friendly. I get along with others and would be there for them.

Determined, eager to learn, sometimes I piss people off but not meaning to but annoying people. One of my best friends we used to curse at each other as friends all the time but other people found it annoying.

They see themselves as similar yet distinct in the process of getting through high school as they also see all students with the same goal.

Q2:How would you describe your high school?

S5: I looked at my HS setting as a business. Hs is more like a business setting so for me I dressed very nice. I went to school with numerous kids from ADD to ADHD to normal kids just struggling to get through HS.

They also see their maturity and strengths as pushing themselves forward similarly as a commonality.

Q3: What would your teachers say was your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?

S3: My strength was to be really social and I succeeded pretty well. I was pretty social with a lot of kids at my HS. My weakness was patience and I didn't have enough patience but I progressed on this too as a student at school and it was very interesting.

S4: I think I was sort of I had a hard a time getting things done. It was very challenging over the years. I think I have grown out of it well I certainly have improved.in different areas.

S5: I have problems in with comprehension and math but school had taught me more to believe in myself.

Students were also able to reflect on their learning style as it reflected on classes they did well in. They understand and are reflective on things they know they do well through creative and sports themes.

Q4: What courses did you enjoy most?

S3: I was more a sports person. I was accepted to play on a JV and Varsity soccer team before I left HS. People on that team were very supportive. There were people on that team that also had learning differences as well and they would say oh yea this person can play but we need to just put him in a different spot or like there would be different ways to cope with different persons.

S4: I enjoyed sign language in HS because I am a visual learner and sign language is visual and it helped me but when I learned more about it I realized it is a whole different language and it's not for me because I have language based problems in my disability that's why I couldn't do it. The comprehension

S5: I played cross country. I loved cross country. It helped me be social and get out of my shyness so.

They also similarly acknowledged the struggle of not only themselves, but of their teachers in their attempts to meet their needs, with humor.

Q6: Describe your favorite teacher and why?

S5: They helped me fairly well. It was a full time job for them, (Student is amused with this statement).

All of them account heavily with the importance of family, family advocacy and emotional and financial support.

Q8: How important is family in your success?

S1: Oh my family is very important to me especially my mother. She really wants me to be successful in my life, so (Pause), she found me the best schools for me. I'll be graduating on Saturday. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be graduating.

S2: My family is important of course financially. My grandpa has paid for my tuition. Which of course is really helpful and my parents not only financially but emotionally as well have been

supportive and if I needed something are willing to talk and they are like a third party in y'know they are proud of you and supportive of you in everything you are doing. It makes you feel really good. It makes me feel really good.

S7: My parents drove me to school every day; my sister drove me. They helped a lot.

All of the students mentioned technology as an added benefit-specifically mentioning programs while also re-emphasizing transition planning as not just on paper but a physical process as well. They also interwove the expense of transitioning on to college as an added burden to a complex decision making process.

Q9: If you had the chance to go back to high school and tell your school to do it better or things that they could add to help other students coming along what would that be?

S1: I just thought of something. One thing that would be really helpful to improve on there is like um the computer information systems like word cue and Kurzweil where you can talk to the computer 'cause a lot of people at my school struggled with spelling and getting their words out. More technology.

S5: I would tell my HS to put up a learning center, to help them with their writing skills like they have here. More technology.

S3: That would be like, I went back recently and the admissions lady there and she asked me about this school and I said about it. And she said oh ok, maybe we should talk about it more(like to other students) so if this guy went there then it should be ok-so I think the transition a way to really sit down and tell kids there is a college out there for kids like us. It's not just transition from HS to college but what you want to do after your done with school and it what is the right path to take.

S4: I would think that I would suggest to have people come to Central Florida that this is a school that you should come see and consider and they talk to different teachers, learning specialist and students and have them understand the setting of what this school does and things they can do to help students be successful.

S5: I would tell my HS to put up a learning center, to help them with their writing skills like they have here. More technology.

S6: I would go back to my HS and say that they need to start a transition program where students are allowed to look at colleges or talk about what they want to do after HS in their sophomore year because when I was in HS we started looking in my Junior year and then when it became my senior year we had to rush to make our decision about where to go next so I would start a transition program much earlier.

S3: It's not just transition from HS to college but what you want to do after you're done with school and it what is the right path to take.

S4: I think it is that people don't always chose that that for many reasons for the main fear that they won't make it and the pain, that if they went to college that they won't last as long. They would go for one year and they would leave. They would never continue their education so they are really at a disadvantage and for their families who cannot afford tuition. Colleges here in the U.S. are very expensive

S3: Yea they are very expensive. My brother doesn't have a disability and is at a University and he might be a friend with disabilities and he really likes seeing people with disabilities (like he see me) at schools-for example.

S7: Maybe transition program. Having a program that you have a full time college teacher for seniors and juniors and it would count as a college and both HS credit, kinda like an AP class but

so If you were all done with Math let's say or if done with science or if they needed an elective. Transition with that that kinda program saying yes this is still HS but the teacher will teach you or have a seminar to look at different colleges around and see what different programs look like and see what things look like outside of the HS classroom because sometimes you want to see what it feels like.

In describing plans for the future there are similarities in profession as well as skills for those professions. For such a small sample they are broad in scope yet several have common themes of service oriented professions. They range from the hospitality industry from hourly services in parks, public assistance, and service dog training to more career oriented in the field of education.

Q 10: What's next?

S1: I just got into Ameri Core. I applied at the end of January and I got in the end of February and I leave for Iowa. That's a big step for me. I never thought I would get a job rights out of college. I'm going to work for FEMA-disaster relief.

S2: Right now I am just working as a sales associate at a Massage place so that's what I'm doing right now. I don't really know what my career is. I was looking into working with children but I just want to try some different things and see what I really want like say Yes I could see myself doing this or no I really don't like this so I want to try different things and see where it takes me.

S3: I see myself working at a theme park like my pal here (indicates another student).

S6: Well Not yet, but I'm going to.

S3: I want to work in merchandise, games, food service, admissions, front gate –that kinda stuff.

S6: I see myself in five years either creative manager or designer at a theme park or human resource manager. I would design-I guess maybe rides, backgrounds or sound.

S5: Probably when I finish school I will go back home and probably work or find work somewhere. I am not sure specifically just see what is out there.

S3: I plan on helping kids with learning differences in my near future and live with some good friends from college and succeed. Yea a teacher, a sports counselor and vets too-like amputees. Helping them play sports. I like to play sports like kayaking or rock climbing. For Vets I think good thing to support vets because of amputees-when they have just got back from war and their legs are broken or they have prose this legs or they have problems with like PTSD or mentally getting back.

S7: I want to get into a career that can lead me into having a family. Or maybe continuing college, maybe going further (In what field?) Maybe Special education or some kinda program that works or trains dogs to be service dogs to learn simple commands and be fun companions to people at the same time.

In-Depth Interview Responses:

One of the more glaring commonalities as shown in the below example are the instances of social pressure, acceptance and bullying.

Q2: Which was more difficult, if you had to decide which was more influential which affected you the most in your success or struggle for success, academic or social?

S2: I was bullied in middle school a lot but in high school it was like the kids in my class-five girls in my class. They thought I was stupid. They made fun of me but they said it in a way or displayed it in a way that I didn't understand what they were talking about at the time I didn't know they were making fun of me. And I tried **so** hard to fit in but they thought I was stupid. They said mean things that were that I didn't understand – they said underlying things that I didn't understand. They were taking AP courses and I needed a lot more help. It wasn't that I

wasn't smart or couldn't do it was because a lot of time the conversations I wouldn't be able couldn't pick up on or follow the conversation, what they were talking about or be able to follow- so that made them think I was stupid. A lot of kids said mean things to me.

Social struggles again are more descriptively defined as a school and social based problem and challenge in response to interview question 2 as well as the specific schools response to the instances of bullying and peer pressure.

S2: Yes, yeah they did, the principal responded, he was pretty nice and all, There were a couple of instances where he talked to those students and said that they had to write me a letter and apologize and they did , but there were a lot of times the teachers didn't or couldn't do anything was there. I mean you can't be there all the time they did help at some points, yeah.

S3: There is no way I would have graduated HS without all the help I got. It was pretty tough too. I have been bullied my whole life. I was terrified about leaving my family and coming here. I didn't know if I could make it on my own. But here they have a counselor, um, a learning specialist, um an advisor. They make you see them every week sometime a couple of times. I might transfer –see if I can do it somewhere else. It's pretty expensive. But I want to finish with a BA. I want to work. I want to have kids. I think I like helping kids like me-let them know they're not alone. They can do it y'know. My family helped me a lot. There was no way after high school that I could have gone to a big school plus my SAT's were really bad. Here they didn't want them. I don't do great on tests. But if I didn't come here I don't know. Think there should be an extra year somehow to prepare like Transition better.

The comparison to the perceptions of the student's high school instructional experience and their current college instruction is illustrated here. Not only are they reflective on the actual services they had but also to what they think they needed.

Q4: Tell me about the way your teachers instruct you here as opposed to high school?

S1: At my high school I had some of the same exact help so coming here was really not surprising that they teachers were going to help me one on one if I needed one on one help from my teachers I could go up to them and they would help me one on one and so coming here wasn't that different for me because I really didn't have to be accommodated because it was what I expected because that's what my whole school's purpose and experience was before. So coming here was more of the same and what I expected.

S2: Yea for me I think in high school I needed more accommodations because of how demanding the work was but here they way they teach is a lot different like before a lot of my teachers would just lecture and you would have to memorize and memorize all these lectures and textbooks and notes and all these terms, but here they do it different like even if they lecture the tests seem easier and like the assignments they give you because they give you pre information and guidelines that help you prepare for tests. Not like in high school. I think here they are more accommodating because they plan their lessons around how the students learn and what they have and so they plan for that, so like they say I want to do that assignment, but I can't so they say I'm going to structure it this way and plan for the different disabilities to learn from it. Not like they make it simpler, just so everyone can understand it.

S7: Yea. They give you a visual, listening or look at it and usually help you in the way that you learn

S7: Similar. I didn't have a learning specialist so that was different .Having a learning specialist helped a lot because ½ the time we worked on little stuff but it helped me stay on top of my work.

Social perception, social acceptance with accounts of bullying behavior, anxiety, and depression are all similar accounts and themes in high school and college. These are commonalities in not only school but in life as well. This question was the culmination of all the questions proceeding it by recognizing it is not a school struggle but a life struggle as well.

Q6: How do learning disabilities (LD) affect your life?

S1: I always thought I was really different-with my ADHD-that I wasn't normal. I always got hyper over stuff that did not need to get hyper over, I thought people would always look at me and say why are you so happy about this or that-what's there to be so happy about so I…always though I was a bit different because I got more excited about things or more dramatic over things that I really shouldn't have been that dramatic.

S2: I guess my biggest, um.., my learning disability has affected me 'cause sometimes I'll forget things and um make mistakes and I'll tell someone something and I don't realize that I told them something wrong and or I try to figure something out and I maybe didn't realize something but other than that it –I hate to say that-doesn't really affect me that much, um, like um, I've achieved so many things this year, so I have found ways to deal with it-I do have to do things, extra things, because of it but I don't mind doing those things.

S7: Sometimes you don't want to identify your disability in school. You are not sure about what your friends are going to say-if they care and maybe they will help you. I don't know. Some days you want to just go to your room. You get depressed. You see kids do stuff on the TV or at school. They get bullied or have no friends and sometime you think about that, how bad that feels. You don't do anything about it but it still feels bad. I think about how my life would be remembered or forgotten. Some days having a learning disability you joke about it, make fun of it. But I think it depends on what kinda of schooling you have. I think the public schools don't

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really care. You get put in a unit which deciphers you from everybody else other students so you don't really get the experience you just stay in a room with six other kids and people or other teachers look at you and say oh great-we're going to have a problem.

You can't stand constantly getting taken out of your classroom all the time so you kinda drift or become a loner, you feel like an outcast. People say things and hurt you. Sometimes it's really hard. I have lots of family and teachers to help- a good support system. In school if you are in a school where everyone has one-its easier because everyone knows that everyone has difficulty learning but then everybody also. Then at college it's still hard-even at a school where everybody has a learning disability – you still have drama, bullying but you have more support. There are times when you just don't understand a lot of stuff but you have friends and family. Sometimes I sleep a lot. Having a learning disability makes you tired. But you find ways to cope.

Inter Rater Review

Inter Rater Reliability is recognized as a varied and discussed process in qualitative research. (Creswell, 2005) Several methods were utilized in this study. To determine the inter rater reliability, the researcher used triangulation in this study. Additionally, an independent rater was used to examine the data tables, transcripts responses, and summations. All data sources were available to the independent rater for review in a well-organized presentation of tables and transcripts.

Summary Tables

Compilation of findings for Research Question 1

Table 17:

Key Commonalities and Themes of Successful Characteristics for securing or meeting High

school Graduation

Student-level	School-level
Helpful,	Needs appropriate skill instruction;
Likes to volunteer	Needs effective services
Needs family support	Needs goals clearly set for graduation
Benefits from Mentorship	Type of diploma
Needs social emotional support in school	Needs appropriate accommodations
	Different teaching styles/Differentiated Instruction
Needs social Emotional Support @ home	Needs Access to Technology

Compilation of findings for Research Question 2

Table 18:

Commonalities or Themes Believed to Assist Students with Learning

Disabilities Prepare for College or Career

Characteristics or Themes
Needs Learning Specialists
Needs Family Support
Financial Support Critical
Determination/Needs Self Advocacy
Needs Accommodations
Diploma options clearly defined
Transition plan written and carried out/Concrete Curriculum
Based Instruction
Appropriate educational Environments
Access to Technology

Compilation of findings for Research Question 3

Table 19:

Commonalities or Themes in Secondary/Post-Secondary

Secondary	Post-Secondary
Needs Advocacy skills for successful learning	Needs Advocacy skills for successful learning
Importance of Family	Importance of Family
Needs Accommodations and Modifications	Differentiated Instruction/Universal Design for Learning
Needs Social Emotional Support	Needs Social Emotional Support/Counseling
Needs Learning Specialists	Learning Specialists/ Academic Advisors
Needs Transition planning	Needs Transition Planning

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of college students with

learning disabilities through their lived experiences as they relate to their high school learning

experiences, their transition to higher education, and their continued academic and social support

in higher education. The researcher gathered qualitative data to gain insight in the world of

students with learning disabilities. The study consisted of a survey, focus group, and in-depth

interviews. In order to triangulate the data this research study was formatted into three data

sources: a survey, a focus group, and interviews of a subset of focus group participants. Through

the survey questions focus group questions were created to support and further define the

themes. From the focus group questions interview questions were developed to further examine

the perspectives of students with learning disabilities on their lived experiences. A coding

process was used to identify topics that assisted the researcher's analysis of the data in relation to

the original research questions. The data was reviewed to achieve a holistic picture of what the

students' perceptions illustrate as well as understand if there are categorical thematic commonalities from their lived experiences. The researcher examined the data to guide possible effective methods for instructional strategies and support for students with learning disabilities through their secondary and post-secondary educational experience. Using these data sources, as well as contemporaneous field notes, the researcher was able to present an essence description (Moustakas, 1994) and identified commonalities of the study participants. Using their perspectives of their lived experiences in High school and post-secondary education several themes emerged.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the perspectives of lived experiences of high school graduates with learning disabilities who obtained a standard education diploma and transitioned into a post-secondary educational experience. In this chapter, an overview of the research and an interpretation of the data will be reported. Current literature as well as thematically related relevant research studies will be presented. The review of the statement of the problem, purpose of the study and a review of the methodology are all reviewed in this chapter as a synopsis of the study in its entirety. A summary and interpretation of the research findings will follow with implications for educational policy and practice and recommendations for further research.

Statement of Problem

Yell et al., (2006) states the importance of the purpose of special education as the successful transition from high school to post-secondary experiences. After reviewing graduation rates for students with learning disabilities, it was determined that they still lag behind their non-disabled peers (Wagner et al., 2007) in transitioning from high school to post-secondary educational settings. In order to determine how successful the transition of students with learning disabilities who are served in high school through a primarily inclusive setting, Kaufman and colleagues(2000) suggest studying the graduation rates of these students as well as the reasons some have chosen post-secondary education as their career plan. Such a study should also be inclusive of the successful transition from their secondary learning institution into a higher educational setting or career/vocational track. However, according previous research, students

with learning disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school with a standard diploma, but are also less likely to pursue higher education (Wagner et al., 2007).

Many challenges face students with learning disabilities in their pursuit to graduate from high school with a standard diploma. Through past and present literature, students with learning disabilities face the complicated task to not only graduate with a standard diploma, but also struggle to maintain a positive self-determination toward academic achievement (Cavendish, 2013). For students with learning disabilities, maintaining a positive self-determination is complicated by their own experiences and perceptions as valued stakeholders (Skiba et al., 2008; Svettaz et al., 2000). In addition to academic struggle, students with learning disabilities often face social emotional problems such as depression, substance abuse, and early pregnancy (Bender et al., 1999). In order to assist students with learning disabilities striving for a standard education diploma, educators must engage ineffective teaching and learning techniques. When educators engage in effective and evidence based interventions and explicit instruction (Chartock, 2010) positive outcomes for students have been found. In light of the Chartock finding, to meet the needs of these student, instruction in advocacy skills, emotional resilience, and motivational may prove advantageous. Such strategies should also include, but not be limited to, differentiated instruction (Torgesen, 1997) Universal Design for Learning (Rose, 2001), and direct explicit instruction (Gersten et al., 2001) to meet the unique needs of all students with disabilities and to ensure equal access to the general curriculum. But the effective strategies may fall short when applied merely as a band-aid instead of a more systemic educational approach that allows for the development of diverse learners within secondary and post-secondary educational systems. The insights on lived experiences of students with learning disabilities will provided additional qualitative data that supports the use of such strategies and

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systemic change that reaches beyond traditional approaches to special education and to a more inclusive design for all (Hehir, 2005).

Additionally, the insights on the lived experience of students with learning disabilities will enable researchers to examine the data on their preparation for transition to post-secondary experiences through the student's perspectives. This data will help to examine how and where they felt the strategies and interventions prepared them for the transition from high school to further their educational experience in college (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). As Dewey (1938) discusses in his work, the method of reflective thinking is as equally critical to informing future research for positive educational outcomes and lifelong learning as well as the practice of special education. This is particularly critical to this research study as it supports the value of qualitative research to influence and mitigate the future and purpose of education, as well as highlight the input of students with learning disabilities as they reflect on their lived experiences. Such data can continue to serve as a guide post to policy and educational practice.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of college students with learning disabilities through their lived experiences as they relate to their high school learning experiences, their transition to higher education, and their continued academic and social support in higher education. The researcher gathered qualitative data to gain insight in the world of students with learning disabilities. The study consisted of a survey, focus group, and in-depth interviews. The data will be reviewed to achieve a holistic picture of what the students' perceptions illustrate as well as understand if there are categorical thematic commonalities from their lived experiences. The researcher examined the data to guide possible effective methods

for instructional strategies and support for students with learning disabilities through their secondary and post-secondary educational experience.

Review of Methodology

In this phenomenological qualitative study the researcher prepared three tiers of data, each building on the one prior, in order to examine the perspectives of the students themselves on their lived experiences. This qualitative research method is designed to capture the essence of the human experience in order to explain or develop understanding of the depicted social phenomena. Through a guided set of procedures, this qualitative research study was designed in three stages: a survey, a focus group and an interview process in order to determine if there were any commonalities within the lived experiences of students with learning disabilities. The survey questions were designed as a template from quantitatively proven attributes through the work of Cavendish's (2013) 22- item survey looking at student perceptions of school efforts in high school and then used the questions to identify the perspectives of the college students with learning disabilities reflective perceptions on their secondary school experiences and their successful transition into post-secondary higher education. Building upon the survey responses this researcher designed focus group questions and similarly interview questions that dug deeper into the lived experiences of these students. Each tier of data built upon the one proceeding. Through their lived experiences in this phenomenological study the researcher found responses that implied broader themes that could provide insight into future implications for educational policy and practice as well as recommendations for further research.

Summary and Interpretation of Research Findings

Research Questions

1. Through their personal lived experiences, what do college students, with identified and self -

   disclosed learning disabilities, perceive to be the personal and school level characteristics

   that enabled them to graduate from high school with a standard diploma?

2. Through their lived experiences, what are the beliefs of these students of their secondary

   educational experience as preparation to higher education or career readiness?

3. What are the commonalities or themes of the student's lived experience as it relates to their

   secondary and post-secondary education?

Research Question 1

Through their personal lived experiences, what do college students, with identified and self -

disclosed learning disabilities, perceive to be the personal and school level characteristics that

enabled them to graduate from high school with a standard diploma?

Table 20:

Key Commonalities and Themes of Successful Characteristics for securing or meeting HS

Graduation

Student-level	School-level
Helpful,	Needs appropriate skill instruction;
Likes to volunteer	Needs effective services
Needs Family support	Needs goals clearly set for graduation
Benefits from Mentorship	Type of diploma
Needs social emotional support in school	Needs appropriate accommodations
	Different teaching styles/Differentiated Instruction
Needs social emotional support at home	
	Needs access to Technology

Through the combined research findings from the survey, focus and interviews most of

the students indicated that the three systems of support enabled them to graduate from high

school with a standard diploma: strong family support and advocacy; nurturing and supportive

teachers; accommodations to the curriculum. These students had matriculated through high

school after NCLB (2002) was enacted. This fact is important because under this Act students

with learning disabilities were included in accountability measures that not only gave them

access to the general curriculum but also aligned their Individual Education Plans with academic

goals that enabled them to pursue a high school diploma. According to Rojewski (2002) those

students who had spent 80% or more in a general curriculum classes were more likely to

graduate with a High School diploma and continue on to post-secondary than students who had been removed to self-contained settings.

Cavendish (2013) identifies four critical components to support students with learning disabilities in their successful attainment of a high school diploma and academic progress, (a) procedural involvement, (b) academic and behavioral supports, (c) accommodations and differentiated instruction, and (d) self-determination. These categories were evident in the narrative responses, particularly in the focus group and interviews. Engagement in their high school program also is noted as a predictor in academic success and attainment of a high school diploma through all processes of the student's academic career from an early age. With this engagement the student is more likely to understand what they need to remain successful and how they are an integral part of their education as a critical stakeholders (Cavendish, 2013). They liked it when they were engaged in educational decisions from utilizing their accommodations to curriculum project planning and goal setting.

Procedural Involvement

Through the survey, focus group and interview responses, the student's felt that their goals for graduation in relation to their IEP's had generally been met from a compliance standpoint. Although they did not indicate such, within the reporting from the survey, narratively their ratings indicated that they had received their IEP, the accommodations were delivered as written, they received testing accommodations and the IEP discussed and prepared goals that led to the development of a transition plan. The procedural process is critical to policy and practice of special education in which a majority of time and effort is made on the process and compliance of the IEP. In this study it has uncovered a gap from IEP compliance to a student's understanding of the IEP as it effects their education and transition to post-secondary education.

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A system of checks and balances should not just look at compliance of the IEP as designated by law but the student's ownership and comprehension of its educational implications. The involvement of the student appeared to be intact. These are all essential components of a functionally sound IEP as well as the development of the goals. It is apparent that the compliance of the IEP was met. Yet never once did any student refer to their IEP by name, nor did they identify any specific goal, nor did they refer to any indication that they might not be able to graduate. So it is unclear, that even though the working document is procedurally compliant, the understanding of its implications was not.

Academic and Behavioral Supports/Differentiated Instruction and Accommodations

Where the students found areas for criticism, however, was not in the application of the IEP, but the lack of appropriately leveled curriculum. In addition, they appeared to have limited understanding in the comprehension of testing implications. This limited understanding is concerning on several levels, as it does not reflect a complete student understanding of the IEP in regards to testing implications, as well as exposing a limited teacher understanding of how to not only implement an IEP but how to prepare the classroom curriculum in a manner that provides access to meet the needs of the individual student. The disability cannot serve as the reason that the student does not feel that the material is not on the correct level, nor that the testing is not a direct reflection of the knowledge ability. This fact does not support several principles of IDEA (Table 1) particularly a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). While a great deal of effort by school personal is spent on IEP compliance, the data appears to have uncovered a lack of the IEP to reflect the necessary classroom components for effective instruction and the classroom instructors do not appear to use the IEP as an instructional tool to assist in positive student outcomes.

Upon further examination through the focus group and interview questions, it is clear that a variety of supports were evident through the perspectives of the students. Not only effective IEP's and accommodations, but some of them reported very attentive teaching styles and academic supports while others referred to the instruction or the individual teachers as "old fashioned". By the student's description "old fashioned" indicated a lack of modification of the curriculum to provide access to the learner. This student recounted that her teachers simply equated any adjustments as not being fair. Rick Lavoie (1996), in his work from The FAT City Workshop, succinctly states that the definition of fairness is askew, especially when it reflects the fairness of accessible curriculum for the student with learning disabilities. He states that fairness is not that every student gets the same thing, but that fairness means every student gets what they need. Through the focus group and interview discussion there were several instances where the students equated a misinterpretation of accommodations, modifications and "fairness" as their perspective of their educational experience.

The students also identified when their needs were being met through a specific teacher(s) that they remembered as supporting, accommodating and addressing their learning difference in a positive, nurturing yet challenging manner that allowed them the opportunities for multiple methods for presentation, engagement, and representation (Rose et al., 2006). Academic and behavioral Supports, while listed as a separate component from differentiated instruction and accommodations really should be all one in the same. For the student with learning disabilities they all fall under the categorical definitions of supported or not supported within the general education setting. Although the term Universal Design for Learning did not ever appear in the verbiage of the narrative texts, the components of this approach did appear on more than one occasion as a description that alluded to UDL. Technology, and the access to it ,as a matter of

course was highlighted as a component that the student's felt would have benefited them immensely in their preparation for graduation and post-secondary education. Certainly their experience in their current post-secondary educational setting has many components that reflect UDL (Rose et al., 2006). In contrast the students were very aware as to when their needs were not being met. It was when their needs were not met, that they experienced great confusion and the semblance of non-verbal learning disabilities, that made it difficult for them to understand how to not only self-advocate but to also have the ability to interpret the social construct needed to be successful in an inclusive classroom (Salend et al,1999; Rourke, 1989).

While the student's also mentioned accommodations, many recalled extra time on coursework as the only contributing factor to their success. This finding was disturbing as if extra time can "cure" the neurological ramifications of a learning disability. Yet in many IEP's on a high school level as well as Offices of Disabilities in post-secondary education, "extra time" is a common accommodation intended to alleviate challenges faced by students with learning disabilities where other strategies might be more effective. While "extra time" may benefit some, it does not effect the differentiation of presentation, engagement and representation that students with disabilities could benefit from (Hehir, 2005; Rose et al, 2006). This would create a shared burden of responsibility of instruction on both the student and the teacher in providing not just "extra time" but true access to the curriculum.

Family Involvement and Self Determination

It was clear that all students credited their families as not only supporting them as they matriculated through their education, but also as providing and guiding them in making educational decisions. Family support was credited as not only being a sole contributing factor in student success but also listed as a financial component. Family involvement has been identified

as a key component in the success of students with learning disabilities (Mooney & Cole, 2014; Svetaz et al, 2000; Morningstar et al, 1995) through the educational journey toward a high school diploma as well as preparing for transition planning. With the cost of post-secondary education becoming more and more prohibitive for students, it is disturbing that to continue a post-secondary education would come at such a higher financial burden for a student with learning disabilities. Such was reported for several of these students in thanking their families for being able to continue their educational journey with the costly necessary educational support. The complexities of transitioning to post-secondary and career opportunities can be compounded with not only social components but monetary components as well (Newman, Wagner, Cameto & Knokey, 2009). While a free, appropriate education (FAPE) is supported in High school, the financial burden of providing the intensity of instructional accommodations for the student with learning disabilities cannot present as an access barrier for higher education. This could be viewed as a violation, for state colleges and universities, of the student's civil rights which are protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act which protects students through their higher education career.

Regardless of their academic struggle, the students appeared and narratively described themselves as determined, helpful and even retrospectively annoying. However, on the social level, especially in the interview portion, the students described difficulty with their peers and non-verbal social cues that left them with the impression that they could not only be annoying to their peers, they could be teased or bullied by their peers. They recounted these instances in a matter of fact manner, giving the impression that these had been constant occurrences that were an expected part of their school experience. The final interview question asked "How difficult was it to have a learning disability?" Their responses reflected the darkest indication of

loneliness, exhaustion and depression that on some instances equated deep despair. This confirms and adds to the awareness of the toll and struggle that students with learning disabilities face throughout their educational and life journeys (Bender, et al, 1999). The social emotional component could also be examined in future research to determine if it has an effect on the discrepancy between the dropout and graduation rates of students with and without disabilities (NCES, 2015).

Research Question 2

Through their lived experiences, what are the beliefs of these students of their secondary educational experience as preparation to higher education or career readiness?

Table 21:

Commonalities or Themes Believed to Assist Students with Learning

Disabilities Prepare for College or Career

Characteristics or Themes
Needs Learning Specialists
Needs Family Support
Financial Support Critical
Determination/Needs self-advocacy
Needs Accommodations
Diploma options clearly defined
Transition plan written and carried out/Concrete Curriculum based instruction
Appropriate educational Environments
Access to technology

Self-determination, self-resilience and self-motivation are interwoven in the responses for the focus group through the questions below as they describe themselves as assisting in their transition to post-secondary as well as honestly reflecting self-depreciating qualities.

The most glaringly frequent item in this area that had not been mentioned specifically before was not surprisingly, preparation for transition to post-secondary experiences. Most felt that this was a component that either had worked or not and they offered varied suggestions as to how to make the transition planning from high school to post-secondary a better and more efficient process. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2(NLTS2) there were similar indicators that paralleled with the student's suggestions (Wagner et al, 2007). Characteristics from this study have been critical in predicting a higher probability in not only graduation from High school but also continuing on to enroll in either 2 year or 4 year post-secondary programming. Transition planning, transition assessment family involvement, student involvement transition focused curriculum and instruction and interagency collaboration are all components of this study and have been supported through previous research studies as well (Morningstar et al, 1995). Kohler & Field (2003) also indicates the need for family involvement and research that specifically targets the student's needs as well as interagency involvement through a federal, state and local transition services and continued research.

The students emphasized that they had believed part of the issue with transition planning was that it should have occurred much earlier and specifically to be instructed in career tech opportunities that could be linked to high school employment outcomes (Wagner et al, 2007). The student's also felt similar to research studies on enrollment (Berktold & Horn, 1999) that given that more students with learning disabilities enrolled in 2 year colleges that they would benefit from more concrete opportunities to visit possible schools as part of their school transition planning. They felt that while they had found the opportunity to be supported in a post-secondary that supported their learning that not a majority of students knew institutions such as theirs existed. They felt that there needed to be a better emphasis to prepare them for advocating

for specific services at wherever school to which they transitioned. These perspective highlights again an absence and a need of instructional self-advocacy for these students. This would not only assist them in the basic understanding of their legal rights to educational services, as featured in the survey questions, but also further build upon their self-determination by creating active stakeholders as they determine their educational opportunities. Several students frequently highlighted a learning specialist as a specific individual that could assist in this direction. Certainly they credit this position with their success through post-secondary education. While the transition studies were imperative to the understanding of the components and critical markers for effective transition, it is through qualitative perspectives that we find that the follow through is not necessarily working for a vast majority of students in their transition post high school (Newman et al, 2009).

Research Question 3

What are the commonalities or themes of the student's lived experience as it relates to their secondary and post-secondary education?

Table 22:

Commonalities or Themes in Secondary/Post-Secondary

Secondary	Post-Secondary
Needs Advocacy skills for successful learning	Needs advocacy skills for successful learning
Importance of Family	Importance of Family
Needs Accommodations and Modifications	Differentiated Instruction/Universal Design for Learning
Needs Social Emotional Support	Needs Social Emotional Support/Counseling
Needs Learning Specialists	Needs Learning Specialists/ Academic Advisors
Needs Transition planning	Needs Transition Planning

One of the most interesting findings was that as long as the student's needs were met they did not seem interested in the IEP process or the plan as long as they felt engaged and their accommodations were met. In fact the word IEP never came up in their narrative as discussed earlier although they did address it multiple ways in detail in response to the survey questions. As educators and legislators we create great weight to the compliance of the IEP as prescribed through law (IDEA, 2004), but the student's perspectives rallied more around how they felt about their educational experiences and whether or not they were learning, than about the compliance of their program. As discussed earlier in the responses to research question 1 this implies an ineffective use of the IEP as a working document in which the student's involvement as a stakeholder has a full comprehension not only of its implications, but how to effectively use the IEP to adjust and assist with educational benefit and access to the general curriculum. The IEP must reflect classroom practice and visa versa.

Their perspectives on their current post-secondary experience were hugely positive and provided them with great reflection on how their high school experience, and transition could have been better. As stated earlier, they all attribute, specifically, learning specialists as a critical component to their success. Not in the sense of a resource teacher, but as an individual who addressed individually their specific needs as it related to their current academic courses. In their post-secondary experiences they also attributed the access to appropriate assistive technology (Marino, Marino & Shaw, 2006) was one of the suggestions for improvement. However, it was presented not as a specific service that they had qualified for, but as a resource that they had the ability to access. Technology represented more of a UDL environment (Hehir, 2005) in providing presentation, engagement and representational examples for their current learning needs. Their engagement and self-determination was an evident commonality because they knew they were

going to be taught, accommodated and supported and most important that they were going to learn in the way they needed and they were going to be successful. The only inhibiting factor that they attributed to their current educational setting was the cost of higher education particularly for their specific college. To have a small learning environment, such as a specifically designed college for students with learning disabilities, may exclude a vast majority of students with learning disabilities from various socio economic backgrounds. The other disturbing feature, even though transition from high school to post-secondary was discussed frequently, was their preparation to enter the work force or know exactly where or what they are going to do-as one student said "yea then well what this degree means?" Going back to the original purpose of education to create a viable work force, I think it is imperative that we do not try to professionalize students with learning disabilities just to merely say we have enabled them to perform at a higher education level but that we are able to say we have enabled them to seek and secure meaningful employment and careers. To prepare them for such a life transition takes careful planning and preparation (Dukes & Shaw, 1998).

Relationship of the Current Study to Previous Research

Cavendish (2013) categorized four components from her research study conducted on High school students and there are similar comparison noted here. In her study, the four components were listed as: (a) self-determination, (b) academic and behavioral support, (c) accommodations and differentiated instruction, and (d) procedural involvement. In the current study, the students specifically identified all four in explicit detail. These were noted in Cavendish's study (2013) yet her students were in high school reflecting on their current environment. In this current study they were reflecting on their lived experience in high school as well as the determination to continue with their education in higher learning. Their experiences

encompass the execution of a specific and not generalized transition plan as noted in the interview transcripts. These students presented as strong and determined individuals that had experienced some of the best of the legislative practice in action such as IDEA, Section 504, and NCLB. Without knowing it they had also experienced post-secondary applications of UDL and most certainly high school interventions through evidence-based practice such as RTI and MTSS. They understood when things worked and when they did not. When they did not they felt badly and it then affected them socially and emotionally. Therefore, as we address all components of a student through the IEP goal domains, so should we bracket our educational wisdom.

In this current study the common themes could be characterized into broader categories of curriculum instruction and learning environments, social emotional, communication and independent functioning-similar to the domains that are listed on an Individual Education plan. Curriculum Instruction and Learning environment, could embody Universal Design for Learning; Social Emotional, could address self-esteem, self-determination and advocacy; Communication, could include student and family involvement, and Independent functioning could address transition planning with post-secondary, career, and vocational planning. The correlations of current literature and identified educational effective practice could further effect the desired graduation and transitional outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Under these brackets, the components based on the National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner et al, 2007) as well as other specific targeted commonalities as presented through the research data and specific interventions that we have already identified, fit. We know what interventions have proven to be effective but instead of providing the necessary supports from the beginning we continue to try to remediate students with learning disabilities instead of educating them by using

proven educational foundations for instructive practice. We seem to consistently try to reinvent the wheel. Instead of looking for the panacea, we as educators need to combine effective practice, systemically designed classrooms, diverse schools with well trained and supported educators and teach what we know how to do best for all abilities and diversities.

Recommendations

The narrative text that students with learning disabilities academic and social deficits need to be equally addressed but one wonders that if the student's felt valued, challenged and allowed the opportunities for multiple methods of demonstration of information that some of their social issues could be addressed within the classroom setting. Given the social/emotional component of students with learning disabilities, it is unfortunate that most public schools have minimalized a good deal of significant counseling services throughout elementary and secondary and have created the burden of the social responsibility of teenagers onto the teacher's work plate. Due to cuts in counseling's availability for all students, there never appears to be a constant service for a balanced mental health program except as a response only to dire moments when a student is in a crises situation. Instruction in social skills as a counseling service would benefit these students greatly from elementary on before it creates a significant mental health issue. The college experience, from these student's perspectives, recognizes this and they have provided mental health counseling as well as academic advisement and learning assistance/counselors. In addition, while there are many programs to ensure students with significant cognitive disabilities have access to a college experience and independent living, the same services could benefit a wider audience, specifically students with learning disabilities. It is apparent from the narrative research data that these students with learning disabilities needs similar in not equal social and emotional support through their educational programming and

transition to and through post-secondary opportunities. This would be the charge upon higher education to equip more professionals and professors to not only prepare for but support students with learning disabilities in higher education (Dukes et al, 2007). This process for support would take additional planning and evidence based practice and accountability more than student self-disclosure, accommodations and modest technology beyond the offices of disability services on college campuses but support a more Universal design for learning that encompasses education and behavioral sciences as supportive services.

The table below has been created to summarize the recommendations from this study

Table 23

Summary of Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Recommendations
1. Investigate and create programs or curriculum instruction for instructional curriculum for transition planning starting in middle school and continue into and through high school.
2. Examine use of professionals to replace intensity and function of "learning specialists" for student remediation and peer tutoring and mentorship support programs
3. Identify professional development for the modeled use of Universal Design for learning.
4. Identify appropriate interventions and accommodations throughout instruction and assessment
5. Change from compliance of Individual Education Plan document to a working document that creates ownership and appropriate reflection of classroom practice.
6. Identify and redistribute existing counseling services in elementary and secondary to appropriately address social and emotional component of students with learning disabilities
7. Implement instructional curriculum to teach self-advocacy to assist with transition planning from elementary, middle and high school
8. Identify knowledge base and current practice of using Universal Design for Learning as a model for presentation , engagement and representation in classroom practice
9. Identify accessible technology software and application in classroom settings for all students, especially for students with learning disabilities

Suggestions for Additional Research

Through an expanded version of this study, a broader sampling could add additional insight to this subject matter that could have a greater impact on educational policy and

procedures. The results of this study and a broader application could further influence teacher preparation and professional development. Through the use of epoche, which is a suspension of the researcher's own bias towards the subject matter for the period of the study, I have suspended my own experience as a parent of an adult with significant learning disabilities. I understand the amount of time, effort and expertise required on the part of families, educators, administrators and higher education. Studies like the National Longitudinal Study on Transition (Wagner et al., 2007) have immense impact in their ability to reflect and analyze multi components on the success and failures of systemic programming for students with learning disabilities as well as identify the perspectives of all stakeholders. In the lived experience of this researcher, I believe, for students with learning disabilities, services need a comprehensive and exhaustive support system that enables students not only access to the curriculum, but allows for opportunities in instruction that offer variance in presentation, engagement and representative opportunities(Rose & Strangman, 2007) in the classroom and assessment. Education must support the learner as a fundamental educational curriculum design from the beginning that student sets forth into the classroom. Through the principles of UDL as an educational model further research studies could discern if such an approach effects graduation rates as well as matriculation of students with learning disabilities into post-secondary education opportunities. It is also the charge on higher education facilities to also embrace such an educational design in order to allow for higher level cognitive learning for all types of learners.

With the stringency of legislation such as NCLB (2002) it is critical that we examine all avenues as to evidence based practices and social services as seen through the eyes of one of the most essential stakeholders, the student. It is through a phenomenological qualitative design that through the lived experiences of students with learning disabilities a greater understanding can

be explained to better serve these student in secondary education and make a dramatic impact on the rest of their lives. Building on past studies that examine best practices the perspectives of these students will validate and contribute to a vast array of research through their lived experiences.

Table 24

Summary of Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for Future Research
1. Examine and investigate understanding of Universal Design for Learning in theory, practice and application in elementary public and private school settings.
2. Examine and investigate understanding of Universal Design for Learning in theory, practice and application in secondary public and private school settings.
3. Examine and investigate understanding of Universal Design for Learning in theory, practice and application in post-secondary public and private school settings.
4. Examine and investigate programs and interventions for effective outcomes for high school graduation for students with learning disabilities.
5. Replicate research study using larger sample size in mixed methods methodology
6. Conduct research to expand understanding of larger study of post-secondary transition into post-secondary attendance of students with learning disabilities in higher education settings, vocational certifications and careers.

<u>Summary</u>

Mooney & Cole (2014) from *Learning Outside the Lines* said "Just as we design special curriculum for students who are gifted so should we also expect students with learning disabilities the ability to engage with the curriculum in order to demonstrate their learning potential." Through the lens of students and adults with learning disabilities of their lived experiences, I believe we can understand perspectives and create educational environments for learning that better address the diversity of our population

Is it the environment with students who struggle academically that must change? The removal of students with learning disabilities from the main stream classroom for remediation has not shown increase in academic improvement and yet students through field observations

seem most comfortable and supported when with other students with learning disabilities. That is not to say that human behavior does not segregated students amongst themselves to indicate that even students with learning disabilities can bully or tease each other. However, it is not until we create an even balance that links us back to the purpose of education to prepare individuals for meaningful and productive lives that we can address the needs of all learners within the mainstream classroom. We also must be sure that in a democratic society education is free and appropriate for all individuals and access is not denied based on the ability to reach further in a specific period of time or a specific way. Going back to the original purpose of education, we must assure that to create a viable work force that will allow students with learning disabilities to engage the varied options of seeking post-secondary options that support their learning, as well as support their ability to lead productive lives. Research studies that quantitatively access progress are imperative to measuring outcomes of successful lives of students with disabilities. But it is the qualitative exploration of the perspectives of individual's lived experiences that is the barometer check to determine if we are doing our job as educators for the success of all children and their families and will provide us the essence of the human experience that we cannot ignore.

APPENDIX A:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL–UCF

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

University of
Central Florida

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
          FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Hannah W. Ehrli

Date: February 20, 2015

Dear Researcher:

On 02/20/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Examining the Perspectives of Students with Learning Disabilities through their Lived Experiences
Investigator:	Hannah W Ehrli
IRB Number:	SBE-14-10828
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Joanne Muratori

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/20/2015 10:11:29 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL–BEACON COLLEGE

Beacon College

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DECISION FORM

Date: 3/25/15

Title of Research: *Examining the Perspectives of Students with Learning Disabilities through their Lived Experiences*

Principal Investigator (PI): Hannah Ehrli

Brief Description of method(s): Part 1: The students will participate in a linked electronic survey that will be distributed through their school emails and reported anonymously. **Part 2**: From the generated population of surveys, a group of 8 individuals will be randomly selected to participate in a focus group. The focus group will be facilitated by the principal investigator on school campus face to face in one afternoon. The participants should be available for several hours to enable a smooth transition into a conversation that will consist of approximately ten guiding questions. All sessions will be audiotaped to ensure research validity and to assist the researcher with field notes. **Part 3**: From the focus group, three individuals will be purposely selected for a one hour individual in-depth interview. All sessions will be audiotaped to ensure research validity and to assist the researcher with field notes.

Participants: Students from Beacon College as described above

Results of IRB Review:

Reviewer #1: Shelly A. Chandler, PhD, LMHC   APPROVED

Reviewer #2: Jamie Flemings, DBA   APPROVED

Reviewer #3: William Nesbitt, PhD   APPROVED

Reviewer #4: Richard Perrone, PhD   APPROVED

APPENDIX C:
PERMISSION TO UTILIZE SURVEY

Morrison-Cavendish, Wendy <wcavendish@miami.edu>

Fri 6/12/2015 3:02 PM
To:
hannahehrli;

Dear Hannah,
Thank you for the clarification. This email serves as an affirmation of permission to use the survey items in your qualitative research dissertation.

I would be very interested in reading your study results as I recently also used the questions as a guide for interviews with 65 NYC high school students with IEPs. Please forward me a copy if that works for you once you've completed your defense. Best of Luck!

Best,
Wendy

Wendy Cavendish, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Teaching & Learning
University of Miami
Miami, Fl. 33124
(305) 284-5192
wcavendish@miami.edu

APPENDIX D:
INFORMED CONSENT-ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Dear Students,

I need your voice. I am a doctorate student at The University of Central Florida and I am conducting research on the perspectives of students with learning disabilities.

1.	Are you eighteen years or older?
2.	Are you currently enrolled at Beacon College in an AA or BA degree track?
3.	Did you attend secondary school in the United States?
4.	Did you graduate from a United States public or private school with a standard High school diploma (No GED) with an IEP?
5.	Are you a student in good standing (not on probation for academic or other reasons)?

Then if you can answer yes to these questions you are invited to participate in a research study that examines the perspectives of college students with learning disabilities through their lived experiences as they relate to

- their high school learning experience,
- their transition to higher education and
- their continued academic and social support.

This is a voluntary participation. There is no penalty for non-participation in this study.

This survey is anonymous. Anonymous means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you gave came from you.

Please click the link to the survey below to answer a few question. By participating in the survey you are giving informed consent.

A small face to face focus group will be randomly selected from those that have completed the survey. Please indicate on the last question of the survey if you would like to participate in further research.

Thank you in advance for your support.

APPENDIX E:
SITE COLLEGE ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Statistical Data Results from Survey

Statistic	Members of my IEP team asked me about my goals for graduation.	My school asked me which type of diploma I want to receive.	Members of my IEP team discussed with me what skills I would need to master in order to succeed in school.	Members of my IEP team talked with me about skills I need to make decisions on my own about my education.	Members of my IEP team talked with me about my transition plan.
Min Value	3	1	2	2	3
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	4.17	3.92	4.08	4.08	4.33
Variance	0.52	1.9	0.81	0.81	0.79
Standard Deviation	0.72	1.38	0.9	0.9	0.89
Total Responses	12	12	12	12	12

Statistic	The special education services I received were effective.	Regular education teachers made any adjustments for me that were agreeded on at my IEP meeting.	My school gave me information about different types of classes (For example: regular classes and classes just for ESE students).	My school gave me information about my legal rights to different educational services.	My school gave me a copy of my IEP.
Min Value	2	3	2	2	2
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	4.1	4	3.9	3.6	4.2
Variance	0.77	0.67	0.99	1.16	1.07
Standard Deviation	0.88	0.82	0.99	1.07	1.03
Total Responses	10	10	10	10	10

Statistic	My school encouraged me to be actively involved in my IEP meeting.	Members of my IEP team discussed with me whether I could receive any testing accommodations (For example: extra time).			
Min Value	3	3			
Max Value	5	5			
Mean	4.3	4.3			
Variance	0.46	0.46			
Standard Deviation	0.67	0.67			
Total Responses	10	10			

Statistic	My teachers understood my behavior.	My general education classes were the right level for me.	My school gave me all the help and services documented on my IEP.	My school gave me all the help and services documented in my TRANSITION plan.	My school showed me a copy of my testing results for all tests I took.
Min Value	3	2	2	2	2
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	4.25	3.75	4	4.08	3.75
Variance	0.39	1.66	1.27	1.17	1.48
Standard Deviation	0.62	1.29	1.13	1.08	1.22
Total Responses	12	12	12	12	12

Statistic	Special education teachers made accommodations and modifications as indicated on my IEP.	My teachers offered alternative homework assignments to meet my needs.	My school consistently carried out all the recommendations documented on my IEP.	My school evaluated whether my program continues to meet my needs every year.	The testing, progress, and grade reports that my school gave me were written in terms that I understood.
Min Value	1	2	1	2	3
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.73	3.82	3.91	4	4.27
Variance	2.22	1.36	1.49	1.4	0.42
Standard Deviation	1.49	1.17	1.22	1.18	0.65
Total Responses	11	11	11	11	11

Site College Survey Questions (as presented to students)
Welcome and thank you for participating in this survey research. Please respond to the questions that follow to the best of your ability based upon your experience in high school.

Ensure you answer all questions and continue to the end of the survey. Click next to proceed.

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, using the scale provided, based upon your experience in high school.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	No Opinion (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Members of my IEP team asked me about my goals for graduation. (1)					
My school asked me which type of diploma I want to receive. (2)					
Members of my IEP team discussed with me what skills I would need to master in order to succeed in school. (3)					
Members of my IEP team talked with me about skills I need to make decisions on my own about my education. (4)					
Members of my IEP team talked with me about my transition plan. (5)					

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	No Opinion (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
My teachers understood my behavior. (1)					
My general education classes were the right level for me. (2)					
My school gave me all the help and services documented on my IEP. (3)					
My school gave me all the help and services documented in my transition plan. (4)					
My school showed me a copy of my testing results for all tests I took. (5)					

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	No Opinion (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Special education teachers made accommodations and modifications as indicated on my IEP. (1)					
My teachers offered alternative homework assignments to meet my needs. (2)					
My school consistently carried out all the recommendations documented on my IEP. (3)					
My school evaluated whether my program continues to meet my needs every year. (4)					
The testing, progress, and grade reports that my school gave me were written in terms that I understood. (5)					

(

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	No Opinion (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The special education services I received were effective. (1)					
Regular education teachers made any adjustments for me that were agreeded on at my IEP meeting. (2)					
My school gave me information about different types of classes (For example: regular classes and classes just for ESE students). (3)					
My school gave me information about my legal rights to different educational services. (4)					
My school gave me a copy of my IEP. (5)					

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	No Opinion (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
My school encouraged me to be actively involved in my IEP meeting. (1)					
Members of my IEP team discussed with me whether I could receive any testing accommodations (For example: extra time). (2)					

Please click next to proceed

If you would be interested and willing to participate in a face to face focus group at Beacon College soon after you complete this survey, please enter your email below and the researcher may contact you to participate in a focus group in the next few weeks.

Email (1)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Please click Next to submit your responses.

APPENDIX F:
FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS

Focus Group

<u>Focus #1 How would you describe yourself?</u>

S1: I'm a very helpful person, very energetic. I'm willing to do anything for anybody. Like if you… I'm willing to take my shirt off for anyone. …Help anyone in need um 'cause I love to volunteer.

S2: We both volunteered in elementary school and she didn't have to but she woke up early and volunteered her time at the elementary school. That was really great and so did I. Um …

I'm very helpful as well, very kind and organized and I'm a good listener and I'm always willing to help someone.

S3: I would say that I am strong, self-strong, and more self-aware as well to who I am and bright, very bright. (Smiles).

S4: I probably would say that I am a responsible person and that I am very friendly. I get along with others and would be there for them.

S5: People say I have a good sense of humor.

S6: I am very determined and ? At school.

S7. Determined, eager to learn, sometimesI piss people off but not meaning to but annoying people. One of my best friends we used to curse at each other as friends all the time but other people found it annoying.

Focus #2 How would you describe your high school?

S1: Mine was pretty um good. It was dedicated to with students with learning disabilities and autism and any other types of disabilities so that it wasn't hard for me to be able to do my work.

S2: My HS was pretty small so pretty similar, pretty small, similar to this college but it wasn't for students with learning disabilities but it was similar because they had learning specialists, so very similar and small classes so they gave me a lot modifications to help me, as much as they could they could- like especially 100% extra time, and stuff like that so in that way it was very helpful.

S3: My HS experience was interesting because I got to fit in with different people and different challenges and I learned how to cope with different people with physical and mental difficulties or kids with bad histories.

S4: I had difficulty with the public HS system because I experienced school and then I was Home schooled/ I go at my own pace. I don't deal with stress well.

S5: My His school experience was tough because I used to tattle tale on kids before I began HS but they had a class in HS on social skills and that helped me a lot because I would take kidding as bullying and I would take things way too, too, seriously.

S6: I looked at my HS setting as a business. Hs is more like a business setting so for me I dressed very nice. I went to school with numerous kids from ADD to ADHD to normal kids just struggling to get through HS.

S7: Caring, Charismatic, helping each other, helping the students, Actually cared, even at lunch there was always a teacher that you could go to for help.

Focus #3 What would your teachers say was your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?

S1: They would say my greatest strength is always turning my work in on time, always wanting meeting a deadline. My greatest weakness are you sure I did that right, like um would be always not sure of myself, doubting (concurrence-yea, doubting) myself

S2: My strength would be organization, but my weakness would be-well I don't know if it is a weakness, Like I had a lot of trouble understanding , like not always understanding or knowing what things meant and trying to understand it- comprehension I think is the word. So the weakness not reading things repeatedly or that I had to simplifying things a lot to be able to understand it. It's not really a weakness. It's what I have to do. So maybe a weakness would be not reading the information repeated, or that I had to simplify-just what I needed.

S3: My strength was to be really social and I succeeded pretty well. I was pretty social with a lot of kids at my HS. My weakness was patience and I didn't have enough patience but I progressed on this too as a student at school and it was very interesting.

S4: I think I was sort of I had a hard a time getting things done. It was very challenging over the years. I think I have grown out of it well I certainly have improved.in different areas.

S5: I have problems in with comprehension and math but school had taught me more to believe in myself.

S6: I think in school my weakness was patience, not enough patience, a lack of, with people and with school work. My greatest strength was probably my extreme talent for leadership.

S7: Tries really hard, accomplishes a lot, pays attention, eager to learn; maybe trying to get along with everybody, maybe fully understanding what the teacher is saying, comprehending.

Focus 4: What courses did you enjoy the most?

S1: I enjoyed art and English and science. I love doing hands on things so art was most definitely was my favorite subject.

S2: That's funny those are the two I enjoyed as well-art. My art teacher was, she was like very fun and goofy but she was tough. She got me to push myself and I was glad she did. At the time probably I didn't realize it, but I'm glad she did um. Art was really fun because I got to do pottery on the wheel and drawing. I really liked that and English was not as hard for me as the other subjects, because I'm good at reading and grammar and now I'm really good at editing. I wasn't at that point, but English came easier for me than better for me than history or math. Science too, like she said, hands on. It's a lot easier to learn in doing it, than just their lecturing.

S3: I was more a sports person. I was accepted to play on a JV and Varsity soccor team before I left HS. People on that team were very supportive. There wewre people on that team that also had learning differences as well and they would say oh yea this person can play but we need to just put him in a different spot or like there would be different ways to cope with different persons.

S4: I enjoyed sign landuage in HS because I amam a visual learner and sign language is visual and it helped me but when I learned more about it I realized it is a whole different language and it's not for me because I have langusge based problems in my disabilitythatts why I couldn't do it. The comprehension

S5:I played cross country. I loved cross country. It helped me be social and get out of my shyness so..

S7: Drama was really fun, sign language was really fun. Even Math and Science-even though they were hard they broke it down in steps. I liked chemistry.

Focus 5: What courses were the most challenging?

S3: Algebra. (Everybody acknowledges this with a deep sigh and concurs with oh yea.)

S4: Probably American Government .Learning about American History. Challenging and the most interesting. Lots of memorization.

S5: When I was in HS my senior classes were pretty hard. I took a lot of hard litereature courses so I could get into a college like this and ah, also it's kinda of supported me with the courses. I would have educatore try and help me through.

S6: I think in HS the most challenging course was senior lit because we had to write a lot of essay papers and at the time I struggled with comprehending and putting words into my own words ah... On paper.

S7: Environmental Science, Biology and geometry.

Focus 6: Describe your favorite teacher(s) in High School and why?

S1: I actually had 2, can I say 2? She was my English teacher. She was the hardest teacher. Especially for spelling. If you're spelling was wrong she would let you know but I thank her for that to this day because my now my handwriting is a lot better, my spelling is a lot better because of her strictness. The second one was so funny. He was very into Shakespeare and if I needed help he would help me, with recommendations for schools and jobs and stuff like that. He's one of my favorite teachers.

S2: In HS I realize now that a lot of my teachers were old fashioned but I didn't know that when I was there but here were some teachers that were very good as I said before my art teacher. She was really fun, crafty and creative and goofy and had good ideas to help us figure out what to make and draw, gave us suggestions, showed us what to do so it made class fun. It's hard to remember all of it but for the most part she was more hands on and didn't just lecture but came beside me and said let me show you, um. If I had another favorite teacher it would be my history teacher- she was kinda like a mom. She was strict but she was very there for you and open and listened if you needed something.

S3: He was tall. He was funny. He would make fun of you. In funny ways. Not laugh at you. But he kept it fun and he was a good teacher too. He made it definitely fun.

S4: One of my teachers that was my favorite, he actually passed away before I even came to this school. He was one of those teachers that knew me pretty well. He would stick around, by my side all through when I was in HS. When he passed away, I went to his funeral and(Student becomes reflective in thought and becomes slightly emotional) He was just my favorite. He was one of those teachers that you that he knew every student. He was one of those guys that was, he was caring and loving. He knew me me and he knew all these other kids like me in my HS and we all had a connection with this guy.

S5: They helped me fairly well. It was a full time job for them,(Student is amused with this statement).

S6: I think my favorite teacher,um,he was always funny, he would give us trivia questions before class began and he would act like a child most of the time. That was fun.

S 7: I have several. One I had for a long time since middle school, she helped me a lot- like another mom, seen me through a lot; another my leadership teacher-really helped me to be a leader and understanding what that is; my reading teacher. If I didn't understand I had a desk right next to hers so if I didn't understand she was right there to help re-explain it.

<u>Focus 7: What do you think is the most contributing factor to you getting out of HS?</u>

S1: It would have to be my teachers 'cause um they really wanted me to succeed and they tried very hard for me to succeed and got on me-you're going to do this and we're going to help you no matter what the struggle and helped me get out of HS.

S2: Um, I think it was mostly the accommodations had 100% extra time, um. I didn't have many others. They couldn't give me a word bank because I wouldn't get the same amount of points the others did and I wouldn't get enough points to pass because the test wouldn't be equal to other student's tests and um 100% extra time really did help and having a learning specialist that I saw weekly like they do here. She helped a lot like she taught one of my history classes and she would simplify information and she help understand it so much better so that really helped a lot.

S3: All of it is important because I would have teachers that would accommodate to my work in HS;my parents were always there to help me understand how well I was doing with that particular teacher and that teacher would also be there to let me know how I was doing.

S 4: I think what helped was both my parents helped me through.

S5: My accommodations were very helpful the most especially with accommodations on tests and finals.

S6: I think family, accommodations and social are all three important. My accommodations were very helpful to me because I got, Instead of thirty minutes I got like an hour on tests due to my accommodations.

S7: Teachers yea, accommodations, IEP, family-all three. If I didn't have family support I wouldn't have gotten through HS and gone to this school/college. I probably would have flunked out or really struggled just to get by and probably drop out. I got and get lots of accommodations-large print, extra time, note takers etcetera.

Focus 8: How important is family in your success?

S1: Oh my family is very important to me especially my mother. She really wants me to be successful in my life, so (Pause) , she found me the best schools for me. I'll be graduating on Saturday. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be graduating.

S2: My family is important of course financially. My grandpa has paid for my tuition. Which of course is really helpful and my parents not only financially but emotionally as well have been supportive and if I needed something are willing to talk and they are like a third party in y'know they are proud of you and supportive of you in everything you are doing. It makes you feel really good. It makes me feel really good.

S3: My brother he was a couple of grades behind me in HS but he would support me in HS. My sister, she wasn't really supportive of me-I don't know why, she had her on and off moments. She was older than me. My mom and dad were very supportive of me, always there for me, attended different parties for the school and events and me being an alumnae of the school-every time I go back to the school, I always talk to my folks about it getting involved. Very helpful.

S4: My parents have been there for me and they stood by me and they still are even though I'm here. If It wasn't for my family, (chuckles nervously) I wouldn't come, have come , this far.

S5: My family was supportive throughout my entire HS career. If you asked us how I was doing we would say I was doing great.

S6: My family was very supportive through my journey through out HS. I was closer to my mom more than anyone because my Dad worked a lot and my sister was like older and out of HS by the time I was in HS so it made it a lot harder

S7: My parents drove me to school every day; my sister drove me. They helped a lot.

Focus # 9: If you had the chance to go back to HS and tell your school to do it better or things that they could add to help other students coming along what would that be?

S1: Y' know. I don't know. It's been so long since I was in HS. I don't really know I had a really positive experience.

S2: I think that for my HS they should have the teachers teach differently like have more activities more hands on. I don't know what they do now. I know they moved to a new building and they have a lot more resources so I don't know if it's gotten better but I do-they do have a learning specialist and that is great but maybe more learning specialists like they have here. That would be more helpful and have the teachers do more activities and have them present the information in different ways. And also If they had a Peer tutoring program like they do here that would be really helpful as well.

S1: I just thought of something. One thing that would be really helpful to improve on there is like um the computer information systems like word cue and Kurzweil where you can talk to the

computer 'cause a lot of people at my school struggled with spelling and getting their words out. More technology.

S3: That would be like, I went back recently and the admissions lady there and she asked me about this school and I said about it. And she said oh ok, maybe we should talk about it more(like to other students) so if this guy went there then it should be ok-so I think the transition a way to really sit down and tell kids there is a college out there for kids like us. It's not just transition from HS to college but what you want to do after your done with school and it what is the right path to take.

S4: I would think that I would suggest to have people come to Central Florida that this is a school that you should come see and consider and they talk to different teachers, learning specialist and students and have them understand the setting of what this school does and things they can do to help students be successful.

S5: I would tell my HS to put up a learning center, to help them with their writing skills like they have here. More technology.

S6: I would go back to my HS and say that they need to start a transition program where students are allowed to look at colleges or talk about what they want to do after HS in their sophomore year because when I was in HS we started looking in my Junior year and then when it became my senior year we had to rush to make our decision about where to go next so I would start a transition program much earlier.

S 3: It's not just transition from HS to college but what you want to do after you're done with school and it what is the right path to take.

S 4: I think it is that people don't always chose that that for many reasons for the main fear that they won't make it and the pain, that if they went to college that they won't last as long. They would go for one year and they would leave. They would never continue their education so they are really at a disadvantage and for their families who cannot afford tuition. Colleges here in the US are very expensive

S3: Yea they are very expensive. My brother doesn't have a disability and is at a University and he might be a friend with disabilities and he really likes seeing people with disabilities (like he see me) at schools-for example.

S7: Maybe transition program. Having a program that you have a full time college teacher for seniors and juniors and it would count as a college and both HS credit, kinda like an AP class but so If you were all done with Math let's say or if done with science or if they needed an elective. Transition with that that kinda program saying yes this is still HS but the teacher will teach you or have a seminar to look at different colleges around and see what different programs look like and see what things look like outside of the HS classroom because sometimes you want to see what it feels like.

Focus # 10: Why did you choose this school:

S3: I heard about the academic programs here and that is why we chose this school. I spent five years at my old school.

S4: I loved that this school is so diverse and how many options you could have. I did go to a school before this as well for one year.

S5: This school was supporting things and I have difficulties and it interfered with what I was learning and that made it very difficult for me to read things and still struggled for several years

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and certainly have come a long way. I came here directly here because it does deal with differences and I have seen. They have learning specialists that can help you and that is why really the one reason why I came here.

S6: I chose, I came straight here from HS. I chose this school due to the accommodations and the very detailed oriented support system from the school counseling to the learning specialists which helped transition me from HS to college.

S7: It was the only school I applied to do to, if I went to other schools I would be stuck in remedial classes and not get the support that I need and would not have met the friends that I have today had I not gone to this school. I also had a girlfriend from this school.

Transitions yes that is very important; Some on you mentioned attending another school prior to coming here I was wondering if you could share a little bit about that experience:

S3: I went to a college before this –a four year college, why was it difficult for me well the staff id not support people with disabilities and ah- I mean there were a lot of people there who had learning differences and they just couldn't handle so people who had differences. The school it would also use two other schools and they would join forces with those other schools, do class with them. It was a big campus. People like give an opinion and when it came to my turn they would already have an opionion of my learning difference or my difference so then they would tell me Oh you should do this this way and they were just off. The students at my University who had learning disabilities they um they didn't want anyone to know they had a disability.

S4: My big issue at my old school was the classroom sizes. Too big and um I was required to- well as of here I feel more welcome.

<u>Focus 11: What is next?</u>

S1: I just got into Ameri Core. I applied at the end of January and I got in the end of February and I leave for Iowa. That's a big step for me. I never thought I would get a job rights out of college. I'm going to work for FEMA-disaster relief.

S2: Right now I am just working as a sales associate at a Massage place so that's what I'm doing right now. I don't really know what my career is. I was looking into working with children but I just want to try some different things and see what I really want like say Yes I could see myself doing this or no I really don't like this so I want to try different things and see where it takes me.

S3: I see myself working at a theme park like my pal here (indicates another student).

S6: Well Not yet, but I'm going to.

S3: I want to work in merchandise, games, food service, admissions, front gate –that kinda stuff.

S6: I see myself in five years either creative manager or designer at a theme park or human resource manager. I would design-I guess maybe rides, backgrounds or sound.

S5: Probably when I finish school I will go back home and probably work or find work ssomewhere. I am am not sure specifically just see what is out there.

S3: I plan on helping kids with learning differences in my near future and live with some good friends from college and succeed. Yea a teacher, a sports counselor and vets too-like amputees. Helping them play sports. I like to play sports like kayaking or rock climbing. For Vets I think good thing to support vets because of amputees-when they have just got back from war and their legs are broken or they have prose this legs or they have problems with like PTSD or mentally getting back.

S7: I want to get into a career that can lead me into having a family. Or maybe continuing

college , maybe going further(In what field?) Maybe Special education or some kinda program

that works or trains dogs to be service dogs to learn simple commands and be fun companions to

people at the same time.

APPENDIX G:
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

INTERVIEWS

Interview 1 : How hard was it to get through High school?

S1: It wasn't hard for me at all academically-wise, socially-wise it was.

Interview 1: Which was more difficult, If you had to decide which was more influential affected you the most in your success or struggle for success, academic or social?

S1: My Social struggle. Affected me in what way? Getting into college or like in general? Well, they both affected me but I think more social because it was more about things what I would take with me in life in the time. Academics yes of course. It wouldn't be harder academically- it was just the time. It wasn't that that would make it harder for me in the future. I just need it. But it was the social stuff. I was bullied a lot. And so,-about my weight. It wasn't really for my disability, really but other things. People said I was annoying so I was bullied a lot for that. They said I was annoying.

S1: Oh yes

Interview 1: Do you find that your experience at Beacon responds to you and your learning style?

S1: Yes most definitely. They want the best for you. That's why it's so important to have a learning specialist. 'Cause they want to help you succeed and they will help you anyway they can. They will accommodate any learning disability-even if they don't know about it probably they would research it for you so they could help you and understand you better.

Interview 1: Tell me about the way your teachers instruct you here as opposed to High school?

S1: At my High school I had some of the same exact help so coming here was really not surprising that they teachers were going to help me one on one if I needed one on one help from my teachers I could go up to them and they would help me one on one and so coming here wasn't that different for me because I really didn't have to be accommodated because it was what I expected because that's what my whole school's purpose and experience was before. So coming here was more of the same and what I expected.

Interview 1: Describe a challenge in High school and how you overcame it:

S1: High school: Doing homework I've always done the homework but I always manage to stress myself out and say I can't do this and I'll just give up on it but then once I talk to my teachers they say You can do this so that's my biggest challenge that I doubt myself continuously that I have faced in High school and college and even going forward.

Interview 1: How does your LD affected your life?

S1: I always thought I was really different-with my ADHD-that I wasn't normal. I always got hyper over stuff that did not need to get hyper over, I thought people would always look at me and say why are you so happy about this or that-what's there to be so happy about so I…always though I was a bit different because I got more excited about things or more dramatic over things that I really shouldn't have been that dramatic.

Interview 1: Leaving HS? What do you think you were ready for?

S 1: My mom was very helpful. We had heard about this school and planned carefully after visiting to come here. I knew it would be the same as I had experienced in High school. With the

support I mean. The learning specialist is really important and all the help. I know I needed it and it was what I needed to learn and do well. So it was very carefully planned to come here because we knew this would be perfect for me. Now I have a job and a career. One thing helped the other High school, college. It has prepared me know for life. I'm pretty confident about it. My High school got me ready to come here.

Interview 2: How hard was it to get through High school?

S2: It was hard for me academically and socially.

Interview 2: Which was more difficult, If you had to decide which was more influential affected you the most in your success or struggle for success, academic or social?

S 2: I was bullied in middle school a lot but in high school it was like the kids in my class-five girls in my class. They thought I was stupid. They made fun of me but they said it in a way or displayed it in a way that I didn't understand what they were talking about at the time I didn't know they were making fun of me. And I tried so hard to fit in but they thought I was stupid. They said mean things that were that I didn't understand – they said underlying things that I didn't understand. They were taking AP courses and I needed a lot more help. It wasn't that I wasn't smart or couldn't do it was because a lot of time the conversations I wouldn't be able couldn't pick up on or follow the conversation, what they were talking about or be able to follow- so that made them think I was stupid. A lot of kids said mean things to me.

Interview 2: Did your teachers respond effectively to the social struggles?

S2: Yes, yeah they did, the principal responded, he was pretty nice and all, There were a couple of instances where he talked to those students and said that they had to write me a letter and apologize and they did , but there were a lot of times the teachers didn't or couldn't do anything was there. I mean you can't be there all the time they did help at some points, yeah.

Interview 2 :Do you find that your experience at Beacon responds to you and your learning style?

S2: I think it was different because the academic work here was so much easier here than it was in HS so my disability didn't get in the way of my learning as it did in high school. I mean the teachers did help me, but I didn't really need as much help as I thought I would but they were there when I needed help if I needed it. It wasn't that they were there to help me with things I couldn't doubt like the learning specialists have helped me brainstorm ideas and sentence structure but nothing that I really couldn't do.

Interview 2: Tell me about the way your teachers instruct you here as opposed to HS?

S2: Yea for me I think in high school I needed more accommodations because of how demanding the work was but here they way they teach is a lot different like before a lot of my teachers would just lecture and you would have to memorize and memorize all these lectures and textbooks and notes and all these terms, but here they do it different like even if they lecture the tests seem easier and like the assignments they give you because they give you pre information and guidelines that help you prepare for tests. Not like in High school. I think here they are more accommodating because they plan their lessons around how the students learn and what they have and so they plan for that, so like they say I want to do that assignment, but I can't so they

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say I'm going to structure it this way and plan for the different disabilities to learn from it. Not like they make it simpler, just so everyone can understand it.

Interview 2: Describe a challenge in HS and how you overcame it:

S2: I'd say in Hs maybe the biggest challenge is understanding the information, fitting in with the other kids like I felt, like I was way more shy when I was in high school and I felt like no one liked me and I tried so hard to fit in. I went out with a couple of students outside of school but it was rare if they invited me so I felt pretty left out so I didn't have many friends in HS. In College, I guess the biggest challenge has been to be more assertive. Not that I let people walk all over me but I would have trouble saying no and telling people how I really feel um but I've overcome those challenges. And so has she.

Interview 2 :How has LD affected your life?

S:2 I guess my biggest, um.., my learning disability has affected me 'cause sometimes I'll forget things and um make mistakes and I'll tell someone something and I don't realize that I told them something wrong and or I try to figure something out and I maybe didn't realize something but other than that it –I hate to say that-doesn't really affect me that much, um, like um, I've achieved so many things this year, so I have found ways to deal with it-I do have to do things, extra things, because of it but I don't mind doing those things.

Interview 2: Leaving HS? What do you think you were ready for?

I am, um not sure , yet. As I said before HS was really hard, academically and socially. I know that I really needed to come here. I couldn't have done it at a bigger school. I wouldn't –I mean without the learning specialist, I wouldn't have been successful. It is great that there is a school like this. I am a much stronger person now. I don't know what I am going to do yet. But I am

sure I can find something if not a career then I can get a good job. Like I said maybe education. I really like helping kids.

Interview 3: How hard was it to get through High school?

S7: Classes were ok,had a lot of friends,had fun-maybe the hardest thing were the tests.

Interview 3: Which was more difficult, If you had to decide which was more influential affected you the most in your success or struggle for success, academic or social

S7: Before I came to this school, I was pretty social group of friends outside of school who knew I had weaknesses. In public school where in elementary so I continued to have friends who didn't have any disabilities and just saw me as a normal person and they just saw me as a friend and said oh yea this is just how this person works. So it was a life changing experience because I became friends with people, just not persons with learning differences but I became friends with people who didn't have learning differences and they would learn off of me and go Oh this is how this person works. They could understand more. That was pretty important. Socially? Definitely it was hard for me to get to anywhere because I didn't and don't drive. I knew a lot of kids since elementary and depending on the person wsometimes we would tease each other and it seemed sometimes hard depending on the person messing with each other or getting other people irritated but because I knew a lot of the people for so long they knew when it was too much.

Interview 3: Did your teachers respond effectively to the social struggles?

S7: I had one teacher who helped a lot-making me or helping me talk it out.

Interview 3: Do you find that your experience at Beacon responds to you and your learning style?

S7: Yea. They give you a visual, listening or look at it and usually help you in the way that you learn

S7: Similar. I didn't have a learning specialist so that was different .Having a learning specialist helped a lot because ½ the time we worked on little stuff but it helped me stay on top of my work.

Interview 3: Describe a challenge in HS and how you overcame it:

S7: Losing my grandma. My family was all over the place and I didn't sleep in my bed due to I felt the need to or I didn't see the need to sleep in a bed. Academically- Getting through geometry. I just don't get it. Comprehending.

Interview 3: How does your LD affected your life?

S7: Sometimes you don't want to identify your disability in school. You are not sure about what your friends are going to say-if they care and maybe they will help you. I don't know. Somedays you want to just go to your room. You get depressed. You see kids do stuff on the TV or at school. They get bullied or have no friends and sometime you think about that, how bad that feels. You don't do anything about it but it still feels bad. I think about how my life would be remembered or forgotten. Somedays having a learning disability you joke about it, make fun of it. But I think it depends on what kinda of schooling you have. I think the public schools don't really care. You get put in a unit which deciphers you from everybody else other students so you don't really get the experience you just stay in a room with six other kids and people or other teachers look at you and say oh great-we're going to have a problem.

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You can't stand constantly getting taken out of your classroom all the time so you kinda drift or become a loner, you feel like an outcast. People say things and hurt you. Sometimes it's really hard. I have lots of family and teachers to help- a good support system. In school if you are in a school where everyone has one-its easier because everyone knows that everyone has difficulty learning but then everybody also. Then at college it's still hard-even at a school where everybody has a learning disability – you still have drama, bullying but you have more support. There are times when you just don't understand a lot of stuff but you have friends and family. Sometimes I sleep a lot. Having a learning disability makes you tired. But you find ways to cope.

Interview 3: Leaving HS? What do you think you were ready for?

S3: There is no way I would have graduated HS without all the help I got. It was pretty tough too. I have been bullied my whole life. I was terrified about leaving my family and coming here. I didn't know if I could make it on my own. But here they have a counselor, um, a learning specialist, um an advisor. They make you see them every week sometime a couple of times. I might transfer –see if I can do it somewhere else. It's pretty expensive. But I want to finish with a BA. I want to work. I want to have kids. I think I like helping kids like me-let them know they're not alone. They can do it y'know. My family helped me a lot. There was no way after HS that I could have gone to a big school plus my SAT's were really bad. Here they didn't want them. I don't do great on tests. But if I didn't come here I don't know. Think there should be an extra year somehow to prepare like Transition better.

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