

PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESS OF TEACHERS
WHO RECEIVED SPECIAL EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

To Mike, so very special,
you changed the way I look at the world.

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My family and friends remind me of times when I would join them in backpacking trips. I detoured off for a while on a path as difficult as reaching a mountain's summit. Hard work and success became synonyms, yet it is my belief that God led me through.

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ABSTRACT

PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESS OF TEACHERS WHO RECEIVED SPECIAL EDUCATION

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This qualitative study analyzed how teachers with learning disabilities defined success, what influenced their attainment of success, and how their disability affected their success. A phenomenological approach was utilized for data analysis. Findings were documented in relation to the literature relevant to success of individuals with learning disabilities.

The participants for the study were 4 teachers with learning disabilities who received services in special education sometime during their kindergarten through grade 12 experiences. Their ages ranged from 30 to 33 years. All were female and Caucasian.

Phenomenological methods focused on the lived experiences of participants and their perceptions of success. The findings were the participants' keys to success. These keys focused on setting goals, understanding

self, achieving success through particular strategies, and teaching for success.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the field of learning disabilities (LD) has developed, so has the understanding that a learning disability is not simply a school-based problem but is lifelong (Blalock, 1981; Bruck, 1992; Gerber, 1997, 1998; Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1990, 1992; Reder, 1995; Vogel, 1985). Researchers and professionals have struggled to understand the complex nature of the disability. This struggle has not come without malignment and debate (Lyon & Moats, 1993; Smith, Dowdy, Polloway, & Blalock, 1997). The complexity of learning disabilities is partly a result of the influence of a variety of professional groups: neurologists, psychologists, pediatricians, family physicians, speech and language pathologists, educators, nutritionists, and others (Smith et al., 1997).

A glimpse of the historical roots of the field of learning disabilities illustrates how the field has evolved and gives direction for research. Hammill (1990) organized the history of the field into three periods: foundation

phase, early and modern phase. Much of the work during the 1800s foundation period focused on observation of adults with sustained brain injury. Neurologists and scientists such as Pierre Paul Broca (1878), Carl Wernicke (1908), and Sir Henry Head (1926) conducted research that contributed to an understanding of the link between brain structure and functions such as speech and language.

In addition, scientists studied the relationship between neurological problems and written language, particularly reading. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, word blindness, later referred to as dyslexia, was studied by scientists such as James Hinshelwood (1907, 1917) and Samuel Orton (1925). For example, Orton, a neurologist at the University of Iowa, developed a theory concerning students who reversed letters while reading. Orton (1937) hypothesized that symbols were twisted in the left hemisphere of the brain due to a lack of cerebral dominance.

During World War I, Kurt Goldstein (1939) observed the behaviors of soldiers whose injuries resulted in brain damage: difficulty with visual-perception distracted by external stimuli and repeating actions. During the 1920s to 1940s, the focus of head injury research changed to the clinical study of learning problems in children who had

average intelligence, yet did not succeed in school. For example, Goldstein's work was expanded upon by Strauss and Lehtinen (1947). They described a condition they called Strauss Syndrome. Children classified as having Strauss Syndrome supposedly suffered from some type of brain damage or brain dysfunction, even though there was no documented head injury.

Fernald (1943) and Gillingham and Stillman (1940) conducted research on children who were not learning to read and write. Their effort resulted in training programs dominated by the use of multisensory, diagnostic, and phonic remediation procedures (Smith, 1994). Fernald, a psychologist, established a clinic at the University of California in Los Angeles where she developed a remedial approach to teaching reading and spelling. Gillingham, a colleague of Orton, advanced his theory by developing phonics-based remedial techniques (Gillingham & Stillman, 1966).

Hammill (1993) marks 1963 as the beginning of the learning disabilities movement. Kirk (1963), while speaking at a conference used the term learning disabilities to describe children who were affected by language and academic performance problems, either cerebral dysfunction or

emotional disturbance. Parents of children with learning problems sponsored the conference with the intent of forming a national organization. In 1964, parents formalized the creation of the Association for Children Learning Disabilities, which has now been renamed Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA). During this phase, remediation and education became the focus of research. Kephart (1960), Frostig and Horne (1964), Getman (1965), and Cruickshank (1967) developed techniques for the development and remediation of language and perceptual-motor skills. Such programs were extensions of the notion that there was a neurological basis for the learning problems of children who had average intelligence (Getman, 1977).

A shift in focus from psychological process deficits to behavioral emphasis in the 1970s meant educators had to adjust to different teaching methods. The notion of curing the disability by looking at weaknesses was changed to looking at successes (Bruck, 1985).

According to behaviorist principles, relationships between behavior and environmental events were observed to systematically and rigidly structure classroom learning and to modify behavior. Teachers used precise steps to build basic academic competencies by observing behaviors and

analyzing curricular tasks. This emphasis remained through the 1980s, but behaviorists (Bartel & Hammill, 1986; Borich, 1996; Harcones, 1992; Wiig, 1990) acknowledged the impact and effectiveness of information-processing teaching strategies. These strategies included using computers in instruction, helping students generalize information from setting to setting, and presenting to students a wide range of circumstances for acquiring knowledge and skills (Smith, 1994). During the 1990s, more attention was given to adolescents with learning disabilities and their transition into the adult world. Concern grew regarding students' readiness for challenges they would face in adulthood (Smith et al., 1997).

In addition, legislation significantly affected the service delivery system for children and adults with disabilities. "Public Law 89-10, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was the first massive legislative aid to education passed by Congress. Although focusing on disadvantaged children, the law included many provisions for students with disabilities" (Smith et al., 1997, p. 14). This law was amended by Congress in 1966 to authorize the formation of an advocacy committee, the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (NACHC) (1968). Smith

(1994) marks the formation of NACHC in 1966 as the beginning of advocacy efforts to pressure Congress to legislate learning disabilities as an exceptional category in special education.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act enacted in 1973 (Public Law 93-112) was not implemented until printed in the Federal Register in May of 1977. The purpose was to mandate nondiscrimination of programs and facilities receiving federal funds. Section 504 provides individuals with disabilities the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to participate in programs or activities that receive federal funds.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), significantly expanded the services for identified individuals with learning disabilities. This legislation provided these individuals free and appropriate education with nondiscriminatory testing and evaluation, placement procedures in the least restrictive setting, and due process of law.

PL 94-142 has been reauthorized with a new number approximately every 3 years (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998). In 1990, PL 94-142 was renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and in 1997, it was reauthorized as

Public Law 105-17. The aim of this legislation was to provide individuals with disabilities school support to become independent, productive, contributing members of their communities in adulthood (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998). This 1997 reauthorization of IDEA requires alternative assessment to be in place in schools by the year 2000 and that schools directly address outcome areas of life skills and functional living skills (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1991) was passed as PL 101-336 in 1990. The purpose was to extend civil rights to all individuals with disabilities, including individuals with learning disabilities. The aim was to end discrimination by providing equal access and services to individuals with disabilities in the mainstream of their communities. Areas in need of major improvements for access and service were transportation, public services, telecommunications, public accommodations, and employment. Unlike Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, all facilities were subject to ADA, including those not receiving federal funds (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998).

Current trends and issues in the field of learning disabilities focus on areas of identification, inclusion, transition, and adult services. Even though there is some

unofficial agreement that these areas have an influence on individuals with learning disabilities, controversy remains in each area (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

The practice of identification of individuals with learning disabilities has been plagued for years with controversy over issues of the definition and assessment (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1987). Such controversies have been partly a consequence of identifying learning disabilities by determining a discrepancy between the estimated potential for future achievement (e.g., standardized intelligence score) and the level that has been achieved (e.g., standardized achievement score). It has been suggested that the discrepancy criteria be replaced with alternative assessment methods such as observations, interviews, record reviews, and assessing authentic skills and experiences (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (PL 105-17, 1997) mandated that students attend school in the least restrictive environment. Thus, some believe that the logical special education service delivery model for the 21st century is inclusion (Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee, 1996). Attention has been directed at issues surrounding the opportunities and shortcomings of inclusive settings by

educators, advocacy groups, and parents of students with learning disabilities. These groups debate whether or not inclusion should be considered the least restrictive environment for individuals with learning disabilities. Factors related to inclusion such as competence, social functioning, and self-concept have been researched, yet controversy remains (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996).

Services for adolescents with learning disabilities transitioning from school to the adult world and adult services for those who are aging also have been gaining the attention of professionals (Condeluci, 1994; Skrtic & Sailor, 1996). In part, successful transitions for individuals with learning disabilities are determined by the degree of connection between individual needs and available services. Lack of services can effect the likelihood of future independent living. Although secondary school programs have addressed many life skills areas (e.g., computer literacy, home maintenance, money and time management, and job skills), few provide services to help with daily coping skills, getting and keeping a job, and finding a satisfying social life (Condeluci, 1994).

The 1997 amendments to IDEA focused attention on schools providing early intervention provisions;

"outcome-oriented and result-focused" (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998, p. 49). By the age of 14, state and local education agencies must provide transition plans for students. These plans should outline "effective services that lead to the students taking their place as productive citizens" in their communities (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998, p. 49).

Historically, the field of learning disabilities has its roots in the study of brain-injured adults who lost their ability to speak, read, or write. Information gleaned from this early research was applied to children who had difficulty learning to speak, read, write, or do mathematical calculations. During most of the 20th century, researchers have focused on children and school-based problems. There have been no absolute answers as to why some children have unexpected learning problems. Educators and others in the field have learned that learning disabilities are complex and remain throughout life. Because having a learning disability is a lifelong condition, it is necessary to study learning disabilities in the context of adult life.

Statement of Problem

Since learning disabilities are not only evident in childhood (Gerber & Brown, 1997), expansion of research

looking at issues surrounding adulthood is needed (Gerber & Reiff, 1991). As knowledge of individuals with learning disabilities expands, basic assumptions about their success are challenged (Kopp, Miller, & Mulkey, 1984).

As researchers are beginning to look at influences of learning disabilities on quality of life, there is a need to know more about the experiences of successful adults with learning disabilities, about the phenomenon of success, and the meaning individuals with learning disabilities ascribe to these experiences. Successful adults with learning disabilities should be primary informants from which to seek this insight (Patton & Polloway, 1992).

Traditionally, the majority of research has been devoted to children with learning disabilities by looking at their weaknesses from a deficit model. Gerber et al. (1990) examined the success, rather than failure or underachievement, in adults with learning disabilities. A model of vocational success was proposed based on findings of their research. They concluded that successful adults with learning disabilities:

1. take control of their lives and have a strong desire to excel,

2. recognize and accept positive and negative aspects of having a learning disability to "enhance their ability to perform well . . . accomplish tasks and generally survive" (e.g., strategies or "learned creativity") (Gerber et al., 1990, p. 11),

3. understand how to build on strengths and minimize weaknesses by an ability to interpret experiences in a positive manner (i.e., reframing),

4. set realistic goals and take action toward these goals, and

5. select a career in which they are well suited (i.e., goodness of fit).

Gerber et al. (1990) generalized these findings based on 71 individuals with learning disabilities in 40 different professions. This information has provided insight for understanding individuals with learning disabilities from a success model rather than a deficit model. However, there was a need for further research on successful adults with learning disabilities in specific professions to understand their attributions of success without superimposing the assumptions of the Gerber et al. (1990) research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research the phenomenon of success of adults with learning disabilities without preconceived assumptions. This was accomplished using a qualitative phenomenological research design. Through semi-structured interviews, accounts were gathered to describe what and how lived experiences of adults with learning disabilities influenced their attributions of success. Moustakas (1994) defined lived experiences as a term that emphasizes all human attempts and efforts, including change, expectations, emotions, and ideas. Ricoeur (1974) notes that analyzing the lived experiences of individuals focus on the meaning of their intentions or the "reasons for" rather than the "causes [of]" those intentions (p. 183).

Specifically, this study aimed to provide insight about attributions of success of adults with learning disabilities who are teachers of students with learning disabilities. Seeking the "reasons for" the phenomenon of success from the lived experiences of adults with learning disabilities presented the following questions: How is success defined?; How is it experienced? Phenomenological methods allowed

participants' lived experiences with success to emerge from their verbal descriptions. These perspectives were used to seek the participants' descriptive meanings of success and connect these lived experiences to other interpretations of success in the literature in order to validate or provide alternative perspectives on the phenomenon of success (Cooper, 1989). In phenomenological investigations, well-known assumptions in the field are bracketed or consciously aside in order to understand participants' meanings without undue influence of other prior research (Ricoeur, 1967, 1974).

Themes and issues about identity formation also were gleaned from existing literature (Moustakas, 1994); yet, no previous study on adults with learning disabilities interpreted participants' attributions of success using phenomenological methods. The final discussion focuses on similarities or dissimilarities of present findings to bracketed assumptions from prior research. The discussion returns to the review of literature to distinguish present findings from others' prior research. Future research and implications also are discussed.

Research Questions

Two broad research questions guided the development of this study:

1. How do the participants describe the meanings of their success within the context of having a learning disability?

2. How do the participants' perceptions of success influence their teaching philosophy?

Limitations

There were six limitations in the study:

1. Only adults with learning disabilities, who were labeled as having learning disabilities sometime during their K-12 educational experience and who currently teach students with learning disabilities, participated in this study.

2. These participants were assumed to be successful by the researcher based on current employment as teachers.

3. Adults with learning disabilities tend not to disclose learning disabilities (Love, 1997), resulting in a smaller identified population. Therefore, the choice of 4

teachers with learning disabilities in Texas was a purposive sample (Kvale, 1996).

4. Supported by Kvale (1996), who recommends small sample sizes for qualitative research, this sample included only 4 female/Caucasian teachers.

5. Documentation of participants' learning disabilities relied on self-reports, a practice used in several other studies of adults with learning disabilities (Gerber et al., 1990; Vogel & Reder, in press-a).

6. Participants were considered successful based on current employment as teachers.

Significance of the Study

This study extends existing research of successful adults with learning disabilities. To determine the success of an individual, Halpern (1985) suggested that the following be considered: (a) societal accepted and expected achievement of certain accomplishments for a particular developmental period; (b) an individuals' perception that he or she is doing well and is satisfied with his or her current life situations; (c) a match between the individual's perceptions of accomplishments, experiences, relationships, and activities, and the individual's self-

perceptions and aspirations. This definition was used to validate that the participants were successful individuals.

Specifically, adults with learning disabilities were interviewed as primary informants to gain verbal descriptions of how the context of having the disability affected their attainment of success. Linkages to the phenomenon and lived experiences were explored (Stewart & Michunas, 1974). Insight was gained from the findings as to participants' (a) definition of success, (b) strategies attributed to success, (c) goals attributed to success, and (d) perspectives on encouraging others' success as a result of services they received. Phenomenological perspectives were used to describe constructs of success in order to contribute to the ongoing dialogue in the field of learning disabilities regarding characteristics of successful adults.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine how teachers with learning disabilities defined success, what influenced their attainment of success, how their disability affected their success, and how their experiences affected their teaching philosophy. The foundational basis of phenomenology comes from positioning current research findings in relation to the review of literature, connecting ideas to assist in validating or providing alternative understandings to existing knowledge (Cooper, 1989).

In order to understand the phenomenon of success of the study's participants, a range of literature was reviewed. First, because all participants received special education services subsequent to the passage of PL 94-142, it is important to understand the procedures for identifying individuals with learning disabilities. Second, relevant literature defining and describing success of Americans in

general was reviewed. Third, affective characteristics and outcome studies were reviewed. This section described the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), and various other outcome studies. This section also focused on the Gerber et al. (1990) model of vocational success of adults with learning disabilities. The fourth section pertained to teachers with disabilities, and a study of a teacher with learning disabilities.

Identification of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Documentation of a learning disability involves consideration of many factors (e.g., culture, experiences, age, schooling, and many personal and task-related factors) (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999). The 1997 IDEA authorization mandated that alternative assessment be used by the year 2000 and accountability systems be put in place. Combining and implementing educational standards with personal and task-specific factors have presented challenges for schools. The identification processes are hampered by ambiguous

definitions and non-standardized assessment protocol; therefore, these areas merit review.

Definitions of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

The field of learning disabilities is complex as reflected by the numerous definitions that have been proposed since the early 1960s. According to Bender (1995), the definitions are a reflection of three identified influences. The influences are: first, the diverse professionals who worked independently during the development of the field; second, policy that implied who should receive services; and third, research with a focus on education and learning problems in general. According to MacMillan (1998a, 1998b), the purpose of a definition should be that of application, outcome, and study, to make it operational, not a diagnosis.

Hammill (1990) compared 11 definitions of learning disabilities and identified five common elements: task failure, achievement-potential discrepancy, etiological factors, exclusionary factors, and dysfunction in psychological processes. Although there is marked agreement among definitions, Hammill (1990) believes the definition of

the National Joint Committee of Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 1985) provides the best descriptive statement about the nature of learning disabilities. However, the United States Office of Education (USOE) definition is used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (PL 94-142, 1977).

United States Office of Education (USOE)

The USOE (1977) drafted the federal definition in the Education for Children with Handicaps Act (ECHA), PL 94-142, known currently as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It reads:

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 in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. This does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages. (USOE, 1977, p. 65083)

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities

In the summer of 1985, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) issued a position paper in which they recommended that the underlying constructs in the

current definition for learning disabilities be considered for the creation of an operational definition (NJCLD, 1985). The underlying constructs deemed important are: (a) academic achievement, (b) intelligence quotient, (c) occupational success, (d) educational background, and (e) internal vs. external attributions for success in academia. The NJCLD (1981) definition states:

Learning disabilities as a general term refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not, by themselves, constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other disabilities (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbances), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. (p. 1)

In addition, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) (1985) formulated a definition focused on adulthood, work, and permanence of the disability. It states:

A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding, and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or nonverbal means. This

disorder manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity. (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1985, p. 2)

In summary, the review of definitions revealed individuals with learning disabilities are recognized and identified by many organizations (NJCLD, 1981; RSA, 1985; USOE, 1977). The USOE (1977) definition indicates that individuals with learning disabilities have a disorder in psychological processes (one or several), difficulty in learning not due to other causes, and exists between a student's potential for learning and low level of achievement. The NJCLD (1981) definition indicates that an individual's problems (one or several) have a biological basis due to factors within the person (memory, oral language, auditory perception, and visual perception). The RSA (1985) definition indicates the individual has a disorder in psychological processes involved in language understanding, perceiving, and expression. The focus of NJCLD and USOE is to describe learning disabled children in special education and RSA is to describe adults for vocational services. The definitions show an individual's learning disabilities are unique to the individual yet have

common elements including discrepancy between achievement and potential, difficulty in learning, etiology, and neurological dysfunction (Hammill, 1990).

Criteria for Identification of Learning

Disabilities: Assessment Approaches

When looking at how students with learning disabilities are identified, the purposes and goals of assessment must first be considered (e.g., referral, screening, classification, and instructional planning). An assumption is made that the learning disability is intrinsic to the individual, which is why problems are the focus of assessment. Deficit models emphasize students' weaknesses rather than successes (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1988). Assessment has continued to be focused on weaknesses in students; how to adapt students to environments and tasks, and how to get students to learn skills (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1988; Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

Multidimensional and nondiscriminatory assessment processes were a primary goal of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA, 1977) (i.e., PL 94-142) and its subsequent revisions (IDEA, 1997). The purposes of assessment are to help plan for student success, to

facilitate their educational and psychological growth, and to assist in selecting an appropriate placement. Assessment is a process of data collection to clarify problems and should not be considered a testing process. The processes involve observing and interviewing parents, teachers, students, and peers; looking at past histories and records; and evaluating levels of task mastery and learning styles. Educational systems divide the responsibility for assessing and intervening by many different assessment measures and types of tools. Special education assessment personnel have to be skilled in strategies and tools to make appropriate decisions to maximize knowledge and problem-solving abilities (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998).

Assessment procedures will vary depending upon the focus necessary to benefit students: how to modify tasks, accommodations, or ways to help students learn to develop skills for success. Multidimensional assessment approaches are useful in intervening with tasks and setting levels of instruction (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

Assessment procedures can include norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced measures, curriculum-based assessment and authentic assessment (Keefe, 1996). Norm-referenced tests compare student's performance to a

standardized norm group of peers, whereas a criterion-referenced test measures an individual's mastery of skills based on predetermined criterion (Smith, 1994).

Curriculum-based assessment measures student's progress of the classroom curriculum (Germann & Tindal, 1985).

Authentic assessment shifts the focus from standardized testing to strategies that reflect observations about outcomes that are meaningful (Elliott & Thurlow, 1997). To encourage students to self-evaluate and offer feedback, these processes use demonstrations of performance, debates, oral reports, portfolios of sample writings, and other work. This fosters creativity, higher-level thinking, initiative, and responsibility.

Information needed for educational planning begins with identifying the learning difficulties, how best to intervene, and areas critical to a student's success. Informal evaluation strategies apply classroom tasks to identify characteristics that will facilitate success or identify what might get in the way of student success. Environmental variables that cannot be identified with standardized assessment processes may mask student abilities (Smith, 1994).

Appropriate equitable assessment procedures determine eligibility for special education placement and services (Keefe, 1996). Results of evaluations are used in the development of an Individual Education Program (IEP) outlining goals and objectives for a student's daily training needs and tasks, which are reviewed annually and updated as needed for continued services.

Criteria for Determining Learning Disabilities

The most common method to document that an individual has a learning disability is by determining if there is a significant discrepancy between that individual's potential and their achievement. There have been four major methods to determine ability-achievement discrepancy (Chalfant, 1985):

1. calculating a difference between grade placement and achievement level by subtracting the latter from the former,
2. calculating expected achievement based on intelligence and grade placement and then comparing the calculated expected achievement to the actual achievement,
3. calculating the standard score difference between IQ score and achievement standard score, and
4. using standard-score comparison with regression to the mean taken into consideration.

Many states use a standard score discrepancy procedure for identification of learning disabilities. Because the federal government did not provide specific criteria for defining a discrepancy between ability and achievement, state and local education agencies define the discrepancy at different levels (McKinney, 1987).

Issues surrounding discrepancy criteria in determining eligibility have been the subject of intense debate with educators and advocates for many years (MacMillan, 1998b). Yet MacMillan reported discrepancy criteria remain the primary method used in determining eligibility for services in K through grade 12.

After extensive reporting on discrepancy formulas, Zigmond (1993) concluded the formulas are in error because they do not show potential to learn various tasks. She described hard work as a better predictor of future abilities than norm-referenced IQ scores.

A study of adult assessment practices was conducted by Gregg, Hoy, King, Moreland, and Jogota (1992) to identify affective variables that should be considered in transitional and postsecondary program planning. The subjects were between the ages of 20 and 23, attending a university and self-reporting a learning disability

(\underline{n} = 16), or in a rehabilitation setting (\underline{n} = 26). Performance of adults with learning disabilities to college students without a disability also was compared. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) (Butcher, Dahlstrom, Graham, Tellegen, & Kaemmer, 1989) was administered to the participants who were seeking university degrees. The MMPI-2 was found to help plan learning strategies because it revealed academic, social, and emotional deficits. Group 1 consisted of normative college achieving students and group 2 was students in a rehabilitative training program. Affective variables were identified in both groups that should be considered in transition and postsecondary university program planning; feelings of fear, obsessive thoughts, lack of self-confidence, self-doubt, extreme self-criticisms, and short-term and long-term stress. Group 2 demonstrated feelings of self-doubt, social isolation, poor self-concept, and restlessness. Findings included assessment processes for adults with learning disabilities should consist of clinical interviews and self-report inventories in conjunction with personality assessment tools such as the MMPI-2.

In summary, identification of individuals with learning disabilities remains an area with debate and controversy

regarding definitions and assessment. Definitions for adults and children with learning disabilities differ in focus. The differences are that adult definitions emphasize vocational services and definitions for children have been written to determine eligibility for special education placement. Commonality in the NJCLD and USOE definitions include difficulty in learning, discrepancy between achievement and potential, and neurological dysfunction (Hammill, 1990).

Although controversial discrepancy formulas are the most frequent method for determining the existence of learning disabilities, there are specific types of assessment measures that focus on the student's interactions with tasks, environments, and broader contexts. Some assessment measures aid in decision-making processes, such as norm-referenced, criterion-referenced and informal evaluation techniques; curriculum-based strategies; and authentic/holistic processes. Team approaches that use multidimensional assessment facilitate planning with comprehensive interventions.

Understanding the phenomenon of success of individuals with learning disabilities required review of the identification processes. The next section briefly discusses the broad aspects of success.

Success of Americans in General

The literature indicates success is a nebulous term; a wide range of definitions from task specific to generalized concepts has described it. One definition of success is the "acquisition of an intended, favorable, wished-for outcome. Success in one field does not assure success in another" (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1977, p. 2091). Success is the experience of being put in an important, reasonable place in relation to something of personal importance, and an individual tries to yield to demands to keep the status (Keen, 1975).

Success in America has been described as achievement in personal, social, cognitive, and socio-economic domains (Charnley & Jones, 1979). Americans' criteria for success, as cited by Charnley and Jones (1979), was determined by research on adults who responded to an inquiry on personal and social achievement. Charnley and Jones did not theorize as to strategies for change in these areas in one's life; however, they made recommendations for future research how one could change personal and social areas to become a success.

Pollack (1994) described success as a sense of giving maximum efforts, feeling good about oneself, achieving goals, and a balance between these efforts and achievements. He discussed how Americans define the "measure of success" by their employment status, job title, and the amount of money they earn (Pollack, 1994, p. 163). In searching for keys to success, he did not find that success was automatic with the attainment of a formal education. Rather, success was attained when an individual established an acceptable personal identity. Therefore, he concluded that teacher efforts in the future should focus on guiding students in establishing an acceptable, healthy sense of self (Pollack, 1994).

Because each new success in life carries with it a potential for failure, many experience what has been called a fear of success (Reber, 1995). This term represents the spectrum of diversity influencing success, as reported in psychological dictionaries and reference materials. Fear of success may accompany achievement and success. Although individuals with learning disabilities may have a general need for achievement, social expectations may indicate that they should not achieve their goals (Reber, 1995).

To summarize, success means a positive experience in relation to something of personal importance. Pollack reported that Americans measure success by employment factors; yet, those who develop an acceptable personal identity and sense of self attain success. Some individuals yield to demands to attain and keep that status while others do not. Success requires one's giving maximum effort, achieving goals to feel good about oneself, but most critical is a balance between these efforts and achievements. Success has been described in areas of personal, social, cognitive, and socio-economic achievement; yet, more are needed.

The general concept of success also applies to individuals with learning disabilities. The following section briefly discusses success of individuals with learning disabilities.

Success of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Many adults with learning disabilities, who were in school when Public Law 94-142 was implemented, are now over 30 years old (Patton & Polloway, 1992). They are a diverse population who have needs to achieve and lead independent

lives in adulthood as much as those who have no disability (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1993). The success of individuals with learning disabilities continues to be in jeopardy as deficits continue into adulthood in functioning areas (e.g., reading, writing, figuring math, concentrating, and focusing) (Ginsberg, Gerber, & Reiff, 1994). Therefore, those who have found success in adulthood have had to overcome many obstacles. With predictions of an economically competitive and socially demanding world in the 21st century, Gerber and Reiff (1994) have been mindful of broader societal patterns projected to impact adults with learning disabilities in quality of their lives at home, at work, and in their communities. This section reviews literature about individuals with learning disabilities by examination of: (a) relationship of success and affective characteristics, (b) outcome studies of adults with learning disabilities, and (c) a model of vocational success.

Relationship of Success and Affective Characteristics

The relationship between success and affective characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities is described in this section. Academic, social, and personal

areas influencing success are: academic self-concept and competence; social self-competence; social-emotional factors; social relationships; self-determination; and motivation (Zigmond, 1990). According to Zigmond, these characteristics have not been sufficiently addressed. It is important to note that affective characteristics change with experiences and age (Patton & Polloway, 1992, 1996). Therefore, the examination of these characteristics must consider differences between children and adults (Bassett, Polloway, & Patton, 1994).

Academic Success

Individuals with learning disabilities have many affective characteristics that influence their academic success, two of which are discussed in this section: academic self-concept and academic self-competence. These have been distinguished by two definitions and meanings: one being an inner-self belief in possessing academic abilities (Bandura, 1977) and the other one's performance (Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992).

Academic Self-concept. Unfortunately, as individuals with learning disabilities grow older, academic self-concept decreased due to comparisons with achieving students. However, this has not been evidenced in individuals who take

responsibility for their behaviors (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Academic self-concept is one's inner-self belief in possessing abilities to take control over situations that influence academic and social success (Bandura, 1977, 1978, 1986). A healthy academic self-concept is one's view of one's abilities to achieve success based on inner strengths and weaknesses (Marsh & Craven, 1997). Academic self-concept has been defined as related to academic self-perceptions of competence (Harter, 1990). Recently, it has been defined interchangeably with assessing general feelings of self-competence (Marsh & Craven, 1997; Marsh & Yeung, 1999). Academic self-concept is predictive of the learning potential of students with learning disabilities more so than IQ scores (Kershner, 1990).

In researching positive academic self-concept of individuals with learning disabilities, learned helplessness or a negative academic self-concept was an area of concern in the literature (Marsh & Craven, 1997). Learned helplessness is a term used to describe students who have developed an approach to tasks that demonstrate their expectations of failure in academic environments. Marsh and Craven (1997) indicated attitudes of learned helplessness have been attributed to low self-concept due to maximum

reactions to prior unsuccessful efforts. This has led to minimal control over their success.

Au and Watkins (1997) examined learned helplessness and expectation of future success of 12- to 13-year-old students with learning disabilities ($N = 165$). The study revealed that teachers fostered the belief in students that failures on norm-referenced tests were due to unchangeable personality traits. This frequently created attitudes of learned helplessness that made expectations of future success nonexistent.

In a study of 424 children in grades 3 to 6, the self-concept and competence of normal and low achieving students in regular classes were compared with students with learning disabilities (Leondari, 1993). Findings indicated a positive self-concept clearly was an important component of competence because self-concept determines the progressively more or less amount of effort given by the student toward future tasks for seeking academic success. Self-concept is formed through interactions with significant others such as teachers and parents with an emphasis on parental acceptance and the school environment during primary school.

As individuals with learning disabilities grow older, their academic self-concept decreases due to repeated

comparisons with normally achieving students (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Cosden and McNamara (1997) compared 50 students with learning disabilities to 50 students without disabilities to analyze academic and social self-competence. They found the academic self-concept lower in the students with learning disabilities. The nonacademic self-concept was the same for both populations, and the equal rating for the individuals with learning disabilities was accounted for by social supports and metacognitive abilities. The researchers' findings indicated that self-concept changed from the home to the school environment.

Academic Self-competence. Academic self-competence is the balance of one's inner strengths and weaknesses with one's ability to perform. Academic self-competence is defined as one's performance, whereas academic self-concept is defined as one's belief in possessing abilities to perform (Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992). Deci et al. (1992) investigated the affects of academic self-concept on developing academic self-competence and autonomy of 9- to 19-year-old students with learning disabilities and emotional disorders ($N = 450$). Research findings revealed that a higher academic self-competence was evidenced in students who showed a healthy self-concept and who took

responsibility for their behaviors. Also, academic competence of students was observed most often in the classrooms where the teachers gave the students autonomy to learn self-mastery.

Vogel and Adelman (1992) studied academic self-competence factors by relating academic failure rates to American College Test (ACT) (American College Testing Program, 1989) scores with 62 students with learning disabilities and 58 students without learning disabilities. Even though few differences were found in their high school grades or courses taken, the students with learning disabilities had a higher rate of college failure.

In a study conducted by Wiest, Wong, and Kreil (1998) predicting self-competence of 251 junior and senior high students in California, the findings revealed that the perceived academic self-concept of a student was a significant variable in their academic self-competence. A positive academic self-concept increased student's likelihood for success (Wiest et al., 1998). Teacher and parental support for autonomy contributed to the prediction of a good self-concept, which led to their increased academic self-competence. The research revealed negative academic performance was predicted when placement in special

education continued in high school. School social status was determined to contribute to their self-concept, self-control, and autonomy.

In summary, research findings concerning affective academic success reveal that one's perception of possessing the abilities to succeed influenced success by a belief in the ability to take control over situations. The academic self-concept of students with learning disabilities was more predictive of learning potentials than IQ test scores. When approaching learning tasks, students with learning disabilities find success most often when they have a positive academic self-concept.

Social Success

Smith (1994) described social success of individuals with learning disabilities as how well they get along with others and how they feel about themselves. Affective characteristics that have an impact on social success include social self-competence, social-emotional factors, and social relationships.

Social Self-competence. Social self-competence has been used to represent how well children get along in their social networks with peers, parents, siblings, and others in general (Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995). It plays

an important role in the formation of one's identify. Findings revealed one's social self-competence (i.e., awareness of positive and negative interactions with other people) resulted in positive feelings of happiness and belonging or in negative feelings of depression and loneliness.

In a longitudinal study, Coie and Kupersmidt (1983) found acceptance, rejection, and neglect from peers were influences on children's social self-competence. Children who have shown low social self-competence displayed psychological distress, such as social adjustment difficulties, academic problems, and elevated anxiety. These children were likely to be aggressive, even though there was no expression of distress shown over social failures with peers. It was hypothesized that this aggressiveness had an external cause. On the other hand, children who exhibited the outward signs of being withdrawn were seen as having problems with an internal cause.

In another study investigating social self-competence of students with learning disabilities, Bursuck (1989) studied 24 elementary students. Of these 24 students, 8 were low achievers, 8 were high achievers, and 8 were learning disabled. Three social dimensions were used to rate the

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students: peer ratings, teacher ratings, and self-ratings. Findings from these social dimension ratings indicated that students with learning disabilities were at a higher risk to fail socially when compared to the low and high achievers. Peers reported students with learning disabilities had few friends because they exhibited negative social behaviors (e.g., disruptive and shy). However, the teacher ratings and self-ratings did not rate these areas as significantly different than the low and high achievers. The peer ratings were predictive of later-life adjustment with negative attitudes and lower social self-competence.

In a study advocating resource rooms for children with learning disabilities, Coleman, McHam, and Minnett (1992) compared the social self-competence of children with learning disabilities to academically comparable children without learning disabilities in grades 3 to 6. The research methodologies used in the study were self-report and peer rating systems. The findings indicated few differences existed in self-report and peer ratings. The students' high ratings on social skills appeared to be associated with students' placement in resource rooms. Coleman et al. (1992) suggested a resource room was an uncomplicated social

environment and encouraged social interaction of students with learning disabilities.

In the Vaughn and Hogan (1994) longitudinal analysis of social self-competence of 10 children with learning disabilities over a 6-year period, the social skill scores of children changed between kindergarten and fifth grade. Findings showed that social mastery at any one time has not been an indicator of social self-competence over time.

In Massachusetts, a study of 106 elementary children with learning disabilities and mild cognitive delays in fourth through sixth grades revealed the importance of social world to their social self-competence and adjustment (Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). To understand the children's social world, findings revealed focus must remain on family support and support networks as a whole. Findings indicated that peers' acceptance was important in children's adjustment, however, the family remained the primary source of support and continued to play a key role in adjustment. Family support helped children with learning disabilities build competence to deal with negative school environments and relationships with peers. Students with learning disabilities have to behave in a manner that elicits support

and know how to interpret another's behavior as providing that support (Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997).

Social-emotional Factors. Although psychological characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities are frequently addressed by organizational and academic deficits, it is important to note that social-emotional interaction makes for life success. Therefore, social characteristics have been critical in understanding success of adults with learning disabilities (Smith, 1994).

A good parent-child relationship impacts many areas of a child's development. Keogh and Becker (1973) found some parents have not communicated high expectations and pushed their children with learning disabilities, creating lower social and academic development. Children with the most social and academic difficulties have grown up with parents who rarely were involved in school, emotionally unresponsive, and less accepting of their disability. Social adjustment and achievement are higher when children learn competence and a positive self-concept from their parents.

The school has a major role in guiding students to build healthy social relationships, self-esteem, cognitive skills, and becoming socially and emotionally adjusted in adulthood. Interventions and interactions of learning

disabled students have created successful social-emotional development with peers in social skills training, families in counseling, and teachers in consultations. Isolated social learning environments create poor social-emotional development (Wiener, 1987).

Ultimately, success in life is acceptance of oneself and others. Since educational goals include promoting autonomy and abilities to govern one's life, it is critical to help students with learning disabilities understand how to control their lives and be responsible for their actions. Role-playing has helped to build control by learning to identify and apply concepts of control to one's daily life (Smith, 1994).

Individuals with learning disabilities need to have good social experiences to strive to be accepted by peers and adults. A delay in social strategies creates difficulties in understanding another's position. Some social skills problems of individuals with learning disabilities include an inability to interpret cues of affection, anger, asking for forgiveness, inferring the next actions from gestures, or describing feelings of others. Social-emotional strengths have to be developed by seeking areas of talents, persisting in things that are hard,

undertaking motivating challenges, and pursuing contentment interpersonally with their employment, families, and friends. Despite low self-concept regarding school functioning, many students with learning disabilities are satisfied with one's social-emotional worth as an individual (Smith, 1994).

Social deficits create quality of life issues and work problems for many adults with learning disabilities. In 1984, the transition initiative of the U.S. Department of Education focused on independent living, employment, and social skills of individuals with learning disabilities. Yet, social components remain virtually nonexistent in school service-delivery systems (Brown, 1994).

Outcome studies of children with learning disabilities found the more severe the childhood social-emotional difficulties, the more severe were their difficulties and experiences in adulthood (Bruck, 1992). The discrepancy in this finding was that the greater the amount of education, the frustrations over social-emotional difficulties lessened. However, females continued to have more severe difficulties than males in adulthood.

Social Relationships. Polloway, Schewel, and Patton (1992) suggested that future research looking at adults with

learning disabilities consider developmental models over a lifetime. They interviewed 51 adults with learning disabilities to determine developmental challenges, coping strategies, positive influences, and school experiences. Results provided insights into characteristics associated with learning disabilities that persist in the daily lives of adults with learning disabilities. The study revealed that much can be learned from the experiences of those who have encountered being labeled learning disabled from examining their personal coping strategies. They recommended a more fine-grained analysis of social relationships to show influence of support systems on successful adjustment. Areas in need of fine-grained analysis are quality-of-life variables where "much can be learned from persons who have grown up and come to grips with a disability" (Polloway et al., 1992, p. 520).

In summary, social success of individuals with learning disabilities is primarily positive feelings about oneself, and how well one accepts others. Variables such as social self-competence, social-emotional factors, and social relationships impact social success. Social self-competence is how well a person gets along with another. It is primarily developed by interactions with family, peers, and

teachers. Healthy social-emotional interactions make for success in life. Good parent-child relationships require communications with high expectations, involvement in school, and acceptance of their disability. Parents are their primary competence builders. Healthy social relationships, self-esteem, cognitive skills, and social-emotional adjustment are created by interactions with parents, peers, and teachers. Isolated social settings only facilitate poor social-emotional development. Adults with learning disabilities must be responsible for their actions because that is a key to finding autonomy and control in life. They need good social strategies to be able to interpret cues of another's actions. These social-emotional strengths develop by seeking areas of talents, persisting in things that are hard, undertaking motivating challenges, and pursuing contentment interpersonally with their employment, families, and friends.

Personal Success

The effect of affective characteristics on personal success of individuals have been explored extensively (Bandura, 1986; Marsh & Craven, 1997; Marsh & Yeung, 1999; Pollack, 1994). Marsh and Craven (1997) suggested that self-

determination and motivation have influenced individuals' personal success.

Self-determination. Self-determination has been defined as "direction from within only, without influence or force from without" (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1977, p. 1888). Self-determination has been defined as a person making choices and taking actions, with a vision of the future, on self understandings of personal interests and values (Abery, 1994). Abery reported that self-determination is reflected in a person's quality of life and global self-concept.

From an ecological perspective, self-determination has an "ongoing interaction between individuals and the environment" with influences of both effecting their development (Abery, Rudrud, Arndt, Schauben, & Eggebeen, 1995, p. 171). They investigated a multicomponent educational support program on students with learning disabilities. The purpose was to evaluate a program designed to enhance and build on self-determination through curriculum. The program built on social self-competence, family education, and support interventions. Through the curriculum, these students with learning disabilities demonstrated enhanced interpersonal skills in problem solving, self-regulation, and personal advocacy. Assumptions

included adults with learning disabilities who lack self-determination usually develop poor job histories, which follows with a continued need to be dependent on parents and not involved in community activities. In their findings, the students functioned as self-determined individuals and exercised personal control over their lives. Findings were evaluated by a follow-up of 7 months of competence-based building sessions in the classroom.

Motivation. Motivation has been defined as feelings and beliefs that produce the inner-drive which helps individuals to achieve goals, especially influences and incentives inducing actions that boost participants' chances of success by choosing or rejecting a course of action (Cross, 1981). Cross (1981) theorized that motivation to succeed begins with self-evaluation and attitudes about past experiences. He continued by stating that some external conditions also direct motivation (i.e., goals, expectations, barriers, opportunities, transitions, information, and participation). Adults with learning disabilities who have high self-esteem expect success, those with low self-esteem do not. Cross reported that when adults have accurate information and inner-drive, opportunities override barriers.

Vogel, Hruby, and Adelman (1993) studied whether high levels of motivation and persistence among adults with learning disabilities were crucial in their attainment of success. The adults with learning disabilities were compared to peers without learning disabilities regarding their success in terms of educational and career attainment, job satisfaction, and economic reward. The successful adults with learning disabilities were aware of their disability, understood and accepted it, and viewed it as a strength. Self-awareness, understanding, and acceptance were areas within their control.

In summary, affective characteristics regarding personal success are multidimensional. Interactions between individuals and their environment play a role in their self-determination and motivation levels. Self-determination may influence the success of individuals with learning disabilities and is connected to personal success by enhancing interpersonal skills. These skills lead to healthy adjustments in different settings. Self-determination is built from many factors, but interactions with family and peers play a major role. Many times, personal control in life is created by self-determination. While there is not a large research base to draw from, it appears that motivation

creates psychosocial explanations of behaviors, which in turn affect success. Motivation is an internal state that creates actions, usually because of specific drives, goals, expectations, motives, and learned behaviors.

Outcome Studies of Adults with Learning Disabilities

A position paper by the National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) (1985) spurred interest in researchers to address adult issues in the field of learning disabilities (Patton & Polloway, 1992). "As the field of learning disabilities has matured, so also have the individuals who inspired those professionals who selected this field as their career focus" (Patton & Polloway, 1992, p. 410). To review the outcome studies, the literature was divided into two groups: (a) the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), the National Adults Literacy Survey (NALS), NLTS and NALS comparison, and (b) postschool adjustment studies. First, a brief review of the NLTS and the NALS database reports were provided. The NLTS and the NALS are two studies that have produced comprehensive databases of data on adults with disabilities, including adults with learning disabilities. The NLTS, a longitudinal

study, included participants who were 13 to 21 years old in 1985 (Wagner, Newman, et al., 1991). The NALS, cross-sectional survey, included individuals who were 24 years old and above in 1985 (Vogel & Reder, in press-b). Second, several reviews were cited to discuss outcomes studies of adults with learning disabilities regarding various dimensions of their postschool experiences and employment adjustment.

National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS)

The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) was mandated in 1983 by Congress as part of Public Law 98-199, sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) (Wagner, 1992a, 1992b). However, the NLTS study did not begin until 1987. The NLTS research investigates experiences of adults with disabilities in America. The adults investigated were youth in 1985 in American secondary schools (Wagner, 1992a, 1992b). The purpose of the NLTS was to examine important information about the experiences of adults with disabilities in transition from student to adult. The findings look into effects of school programming on adult adjustment.

The NLTS data were collected in 1987, 1989, and 1990. School records, telephone interviews with the subjects

and/or their parents, and survey information from school personnel were the sources of the database. Even though the NLTS findings covered 13 reported disabilities, the individuals with learning disabilities represent 61.2% of the subjects in the first report (Wagner, 1992a, 1992b). This section contains only the individuals with learning disabilities statistical data.

First Comprehensive NLTS Report. Wagner, Newman, et al. (1991) reported the first comprehensive NLTS findings. The representative sample was investigated by analyzing students' records, abstracts, and/or transcripts for either the school session of 1985-1986 or 1986-1987. At the time of this first NLTS study, a representative sample was more than 8,000 youth who were or had been in special education programs some time during their secondary school experience. The subjects, ages 13 to 21 years old in the 1985-1986 school year, represented 13 disability categories. None of the subjects had been out of high school more than 2 years. Of the subjects, there were 73% male and 26% female.

Second Comprehensive NLTS Report. Findings in the second comprehensive NLTS report included data on many different areas of inquiry (Wagner, 1992a, 1992b; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992. Dropout data

were investigated through standardized tests and parent responses. Researchers looked at data for predictive factors in regard to students' life skills and students who stay in school. Many positive and negative outcomes were determined from this investigation. A positive finding was that subjects with learning disabilities scored at a high percentage rate in functional self-care skills determined by standardized tests (66.7%) and parent responses (98%). A negative outcome was low academic competency (Wagner, 1992b).

Wagner et al. (1992) reported that females with learning disabilities received inadequate school training. Females with learning disabilities were more likely than males with learning disabilities to be trained in unskilled service occupations (e.g., food services), resulting in unsuccessful employment outcomes for females with learning disabilities. Conversely, males with learning disabilities were generally more successful as they were trained in technology and manufacturing skilled vocations. In comparing the outcomes for men and women with learning disabilities, findings also revealed that 2 years after exiting school women were more likely to have parenting responsibilities (12% female versus 4% male). This rate of parenting

increased to 30% for females versus 15% for males 5 years after high school. The competitive employment for women 2 years after leaving school was 32% versus 52% for men, and within 3 to 5 years after leaving school, it increased to 40% versus 64% for men. Also, the parents of subjects reported a higher functioning level for men than for women.

Third Comprehensive NLTS Report. Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, and Newman (1993) reported findings from the third comprehensive report from the NLTS. The purpose of this report was to advance the understanding of experiences of students with disabilities and to compare aspects to findings to the first NLTS report conclusions. This sample included 5,442 (92%) of the subjects from the first NLTS report in 1991 sample ($N = 8000$). The eligibility criteria required participants to have 4 years of data available. These criteria were met in the following domains: 2,200 on performance data available; 720 on teacher reports; and 4,399 on drop-out estimates (e.g., transcripts, school record abstracts, younger than 24 years old while in school, and enrolled in regular school in most recent years).

Wagner et al. (1993) focused on secondary school performance and examined subjects' relationships to school variables, other people, and family members. They compared

3- to 5-year postschool experiences of a group of about 2000 subjects with their 2-year postschool experiences. The findings examined various relationships as academic achievement indexes, postschool work and training, and outcomes of school and work. This revealed that variables other than high academic achievement directly influence successful outcomes in adults with learning disabilities. One variable predicting the successful outcomes to competitive employment was participation in school-to-work programs. Unsuccessful outcomes were related to inappropriate school services and training while students were in school which carried over once they left school. Of those youth who had been identified as having learning disabilities, 18.1% went on to 2- or 4-year colleges. The report concluded that life skills courses in high school should be offered as part of the curriculum but that more challenging courses are essential to provide balance between needed skills for successful employment and school outcomes (Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993).

National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS)

Literacy was defined by Congress in the National Literacy Act as abilities to use language (i.e., read, write, speak [in English]), problem solve, actualize goals,

realize potential, and perform. The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) was mandated by Congress in 1985 to carry out "assessment of literacy skills of American adults" (National Institute for Literacy [NIL], 1998, p. 6). Reder, as a primary researcher for the National Institute for Literacy (1998), reported the findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). Reder reported that NALS contains the most reliable, comprehensive literacy data in the United States. Responses represented data from approximately 26,000 interviews since 1993. The report was broken down into micro parts literacy abilities to "fuel new ideas about lifelong learning and higher levels of literacy in 21st century approaches" (NIL, 1998, p. 7). Literacy involves a continuum of levels depending upon different kinds of tasks. Based on the NALS findings, the continuum was divided into five levels: level 5 represents the highest literacy skills while level 1 represents the lowest. NALS created three scales to classify literacy: prose (e.g., find article in newspaper), document (e.g., complete a job application), and quantitative (e.g., find a zip code on a chart) (NIL, 1998).

National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS): Analysis

Vogel and Reder (in press-b) reported findings on literacy proficiency of adults with "self-reporting learning

disabilities (SRLD)" (p. 160). They studied variations within literacy proficiency by gender, as well as the implications of these findings to benefit adult educators, teachers of learning disabilities students, and literacy providers.

Three literacy scales (i.e., prose, documents, and quantitative) were measured by the NALS which were averaged into composite scores (Vogel & Reder, in press-b). The target population was defined as a sub-population of individuals living in the U.S. who met five conditions: (a) born in the U.S, (b) spoke english before entering school, (c) did not report having mental retardation, (d) not students at time of survey, and (e) 25 to 64 years old. Only 8,332 females and 6,242 males ($N = 14,519$) satisfied the five selection criteria. The self-reporting learning disabilities (SRLD) respondents included males (56%) and females (44%) who reported having learning disabilities. The total NALS sample was grouped into four age categories (i.e., 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years, 45 to 54 years, and 55 to 64 years). Findings indicated that SRLD men and women did not perform differently on NALS literacy tasks. When prevalence rate at each level was compared, 15% of all males scoring at Level 1 had SRLD, whereas only 11% of females.

The prevalence rate of males and females with SRLD was identical for those scoring at Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4. More than half the SRLD group on the NALS scored at Level 1.

SRLD is not just a reading problem but a cluster of symptoms that are pervasive and resistant to change (Vogel & Reder, in press-b). Findings revealed a lack of significant differences in literacy proficiency among males and females with SRLD. Self-reporting has been used in several other national surveys (e.g., national databases that began in 1985) asking respondents if they have a learning disability. There is a precedence for the use of self-reporting to determine the prevalence of disabilities in the nation as a whole.

Implications of the NALS findings were that severe literacy problems persist into adulthood in over 50% of adults with SRLD. This finding has important implications for professionals responsible for preparations and staff development in fields such as literacy and adult education (Vogel & Reder, in press-b).

NLTS and NALS Comparison

Vogel and Reder (in press-a) reported discrepancies in the NLTS and the NALS database findings regarding dropout rates and graduation and beyond. They compared the cross-

sectional database titled the National Adults Literacy Survey (NALS) to the longitudinal study titled National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS). The findings from the NLTS database (N = 8,000) were compared to NALS database (N =14,519). Reported were foundational outcome studies from 1985 through 1995, which set up their report of finding on educational attainment of adults with learning disabilities (LD). Utilizing the NLTS and the NALS to collect data, the researchers explored interaction of gender and learning disabilities on educational attainment to benefit professionals (e.g., specialists, teachers, and other researchers).

Vogel and Reder (in press-a) looked at the NALS database for the purpose of comparing self-reporting learning disabled (SRLD) to those without a learning disability. The NALS used different assessment methods, which combined a literacy profile, open-ended questions, and a survey. The survey asked questions pertaining to everyday functioning (e.g., problem-solving abilities). The NALS database reported 48% among the SRLD graduated high school and/or attended college, whereas NLTS as 61%. One hypothesis for this discrepancy was younger NLTS participants (i.e., 13 to 21 years old in 1985) who received help from individual

transition plans (ITP). Therefore, NLTS younger participants had more opportunities than the NALS older participants. Yet, higher expectations were found for the younger adults in the NLTS database (i.e., 25 to 43 years old in 1998).

To focus on postsecondary graduation rates, 8% of the younger adults in the NLTS database earned college degrees, as compared to only 3% in the NALS database. Compared to peers without learning disabilities, both databases reflected undergraduate degrees of the adults with learning disabilities take 6 years as compared to 5 years of others without disabilities (Vogel & Reder, in press-a).

Vogel and Reder (in press-a) found contradictory findings between NALS and NLTS. Results were that men with SRLD (31%) completed zero to 8 years of education and 6% went on to complete a higher educational degree; women with SRLD (23%) were reported as completing zero to 8 years of education and 13% went on to complete college. In the NLTS database women with learning disabilities went to school fewer years, which contradicts this NALS database.

The NALS findings revealed there were 84% more adults with SRLD (\underline{n} = 485) who work in part time jobs with a lower status and earn less money than non-SRLD adults. The implications from the NALS findings confirm a critical need

for early vocational courses. Also, career counseling should encompass assessment to explore career options and be broad enough to provide direction for those who intend on attending post secondary school and those who do not. Course offerings should consider these plans in placement: basic skills versus vocational courses. Whether or not to take vocational courses or basic skills should depend upon the student's future plans (Vogel & Reder, in press-a).

In summary, the follow-up studies and the cross-analysis surveys do not reveal an optimistic outlook for adults with learning disabilities. Of the 8000 participants in the first NLTS study, statistics revealed 61.2% were adults with learning disabilities, yet only 8% attained a bachelor's degree. However, the NALS statistics revealed only 3% attained a bachelor's degree, which were approximately 10% lower than statistics for the general population. Females showed high parenting responsibilities and inadequate curriculum that emphasized life skills as factors in lower academic and career ratings. Males, however, received technical training that led to skilled jobs and higher pay.

Postschool Adjustment Studies

A needs assessment by the Learning Disabilities Association of America ("Adults with learning," 1994) identified areas of difficulty from responses of 587 individuals with learning disabilities from 48 states. Over half (57%) of the 587 respondents were adults, and the results emphasized areas of difficulty in adulthood which included: social relations (56%), postsecondary education (53%), job advancement (40%), attention deficit disorders (39%), depression (38%), and anxiety disorders (32%). This outcome study on individuals with learning disabilities revealed remedial assistance had a direct impact on the likelihood of success in adulthood. Assistance areas included assessment, vocational services, and language therapy ("Adults with learning," 1994).

Haring, Lovett, and Smith (1990) examined indicators of positive "postschool vocational and community adjustments of recent special education graduates from a southwestern metropolitan school district" (p. 108). The sample ($N = 64$) included students with learning disabilities who had attended self-contained classes at 12 high schools. The sample was randomly selected to include both males and females whose average age was 21 and had measured IQ scores

within normal range. Males represented (60%) of subjects, and they had exited school from 1 to 4 years prior to the study. Haring et al. (1990) administered a questionnaire to the subjects either by telephone or in person. Three domains for assessing adult adjustment were: employment, residential environments, and social networks maintained.

Employment results indicated that fewer females (39%) compared to males (76%) were competitively employed. Females earned less than half the wages compared to males. All subjects earned minimum wage or less; only 5% were employed beyond entry level, and only 11% had ever received a raise. Yet, the subjects reported a high degree of job satisfaction. Findings on residential environments revealed that: 79% were living at home or with relatives, 21% were living independently or with a roommate, and/or 9% were living with or married to a spouse. Data indicated few specific social activities were reported; however, 75% of women and 80% of men reported they were satisfied with this aspect of their lives (Haring et al., 1990).

Haring et al. (1990) reported that the strongest indicators of positive adjustment and job satisfaction in adulthood of students with learning disabilities were the use of social ecologies (e.g., family, friends), contacts

made in public school, and agencies that provide job-seeking assistance. Suggestions were made to: (a) teach students in special education programs to use personal contacts when seeking employment, (b) reexamine educators' attitudes toward families and students to show acceptance, and (c) give students the chance to reach their potential.

Levine and Edgar (1994) analyzed gender differences in postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities who graduated in 1985 ($N = 549$) and in 1990 ($N = 398$) from three school districts in Washington State. Employment, school attendance and graduation, engagement, independent living, marital status, and parenting were analyzed. The data set used was part of a large project titled Decade Project, which was a 5-year longitudinal follow-up of both special and regular education programs. The participants were contacted by special education directors via letters to parents requesting an interview with student. The interviews were conducted 12 to 16 months apart by five interviewers.

Levine and Edgar (1994) reported the purpose of the study was to differentiate male and female postschool experiences. The results indicated that males in the 1985 interviews were employed at higher rates of pay than the females, and differing parenting responsibilities were

suspected to be the reason. The findings revealed many of the females with parenting responsibilities were unmarried, living with parents, and not working nor attending school. This indicated females with learning disabilities were at risk for early parenting, which was a gender difference that should be a focus of educational and human service programs. Suggestions were made to mainstream pre-college curriculum to prepare students for employment immediately after high school, to make pregnancy prevention program a priority, and to have school district engage in follow-up studies to improve their programs.

Reis, Neu, and McGuire (1997) examined perceived academic success of 12 college seniors and graduates with learning disabilities. The participants reported that they experienced success in social and academic environments when they gained personal strengths and learned strategies. The researchers reported that adults with learning disabilities created their own academic success by designing personal plans, persevering, working hard, building support networks, and believing in their abilities to succeed. The participants reported their primary asset was the pervasive presence of parental support. Experiences provided them

beliefs in their abilities to succeed, strategies, and knowledge about their disability.

In a related study, Doren and Benz (1998) focused on variables associated with employment outcomes for 212 young people with disabilities. The participants were students with disabilities that had been subjects in larger follow-up studies conducted in Oregon ($N = 315$) and Nevada ($N = 107$). The participants were either high school dropouts or were in their last year of high school. The basic areas of inquiry were characteristics, services received in K through 12th grade, quality of life in and out of school, school achievement, and postschool services. The findings indicated five variables that were related to positive employment outcomes: "family income, self-concept, number of jobs while in high school, continuing vocational instruction, methods used to find competitive employment" (Doren & Benz, 1998, p. 431). The two-way interaction between the first two variables, family income and good self-concept, also were reported. Doren and Benz (1998) indicated fewer young females were competitively employed 1 year after leaving school when compared to males.

Doren and Benz (1998) indicated the predictors of post school career success for females were high self-esteem,

social support network in job search, and higher family income. The study showed that females who had low self-esteem when exiting high school were three times more likely to remain unemployed 1 year later. Females whose household income was less than \$25,000 were 6.58 times more likely to remain unemployed. These variables did not effect males' employment status, but employment for females was six times less likely when both variables were present. Positive predictors for females employment was support networks and having two or more jobs in high school. School-to-work programs should be developed and implemented with awareness of these variables. Females should be targeted in transition program with learning opportunities. Transition programs should provide equal and fair opportunities to females for them to have higher wage careers. Doren and Benz (1998) recommended future researchers look to identify and understand characteristics, factors, and events that contribute to the success of females with disabilities who are successful in adult life.

Wittle and Philips (1998) surveyed 55 self-identified adults with learning disabilities who graduated from college to study their job satisfaction. Of the 55 participating in the study, 26 individuals with learning disabilities were

identified prior to college, and the others were identified in college, due to low grades or problems in foreign language classes. The mean grade point average for the participants was 2.79 on a 4.0 scale, and the average number of years to complete the bachelor's degree was 4.6 years. Adults with learning disabilities are at high-risk for job dissatisfaction because of poor job selection and histories of jobs resulting in unsatisfying experiences due partially to their non-disclosure of disability in the work setting (Wittle & Philips, 1998).

In summary, the reviewed outcome studies indicated that remedial assistance areas included assessments, vocational services, and language therapy, which had a direct impact on success of adults with learning disabilities ("Adults with Learning," 1994). In examining adult adjustment in employment, residential environments, and social networks, Haring et al. (1990) found fewer females (39%) compared to males (76%) were employed postschool, and those females who were employed earned less. Yet, the females who were employed reported job satisfaction. Findings on residential environments revealed 79% of the participants lived at home and only 9% were married. Findings on social networks revealed 75% of women and 80% of men reported few specific

activities, but they were satisfied with this aspect of their lives. In larger follow-up studies, traits, quality of life issues, school achievement, and postschool services were the focus of inquiry. Doren and Benz' (1998) findings indicated family income, self-concept, job in high school, vocational instruction, methods to find a job, and interactions of family income with a good self-concept were variables which effected outcomes.

Model of Vocational Success

Gerber et al. (1990) developed a model of vocational success based on their study of 71 highly and moderately successful adults with learning disabilities in 40 professions. The model connected variables of individual functioning and environmental factors. Control was emphasized as the dominant factor in participant success and was evidenced by the interaction of internal decisions and external manifestations. The interaction of internal and external variables was an indicator of successful vocational adjustment and revealed the extent individuals took control of their lives. Internal decisions included desire, goal orientation, and reframing. External manifestations included persistence, goodness of fit, learned creativity, and social

ecologies, which were actions/coping mechanisms contributing to their control. Four of these variables were reported to be necessary for an individual to achieve high success (Gerber et al., 1990).

Persistence was defined as "a way of life in order to accomplish aims . . . [and] the reality about how they had to go beyond the norm in order to reach ultimate goals" (Gerber et al., 1992, p. 482). Persistence and desire were related to participants' ability to resist being distracted from goals. Goodness of fit involved choosing a good job match in an area of personal interest where personal strengths were optimized and the likelihood of success was increased. Learned creativity referred to strategies to enhance handling of their environment to capitalize on strengths and minimize weaknesses. Reframing referred to a positive reinterpreting of experiences. Reframing involved: recognition of the disability; acceptance of both the negative and positive aspects of the disability, understanding how to build on personal strengths and weaknesses; and taking conscious action toward personal goals. Social ecologies were defined as support networks of helpful people. Willingness to seek and accept support led to success more often than shying away from help.

Ginsberg et al. (1994) re-examined their 1990 model of vocational success. They reported that standards of success for Americans revealed the valuing of people with wealth, power, and high status careers. Standards of success measured many different alterable variables, such as values, income, education attainment, job satisfactions and status, and prominence in a field. Therefore, attaining job success and making a lot of money usually bring control in daily life. However, individuals with learning disabilities have daily challenges and struggles that hinder this control.

In 1996, Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg again looked back to examine alterable variables identified in their 1990 study to look at participants' education, job satisfaction, job classification, and income level. The adults with learning disabilities who were identified with the highest probability of being successful had the most internal desire, realistic long-term goals, and persistence.

In summary, the model of vocational success developed by Gerber et al. (1990) included changeable internal and external variables: education, job satisfaction, job classification, and income level. The adults with the highest probability of being successful set realistic long-term goals, built on experiences by reframing, and were

persistent. Gerber et al. (1990, 1992) reported five assumptions from their research that were incorporated into their model of vocational success. Their assumptions suggest that: (a) successful adults with learning disabilities take control, have a strong desire to excel; (b) recognize and accept aspects of being learning disabled; (c) build on experiences by reframing; (d) set realistic goals, take action toward goals; and (e) make good career choices. By continuing examinations of their model, Ginsberg et al. (1994) described success in terms of financial and job factors.

The concept of success of individuals with learning disabilities was examined by focusing on a specific profession. In the following section, issues are addressed regarding teachers with disabilities.

Teaching with Disabilities

Perspectives of teachers with learning disabilities and literature focusing on teachers with disabilities were examined in this study. Although laws have been passed to promote the success of individuals with disabilities in such professions as teaching, changes in legislation do not necessarily change attitudes (Reilly et al., 1998). Even

though the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990) brought attention to on-the-job needs of adults with disabilities, there remain discriminative attitudes.

Reilly et al. (1998) examined 87 undergraduate college students' attitudes toward teachers with disabilities. Participants viewed videotapes of history lectures given by one physical therapist who did portrayals of a teacher with a physical disability, a teacher with a learning disability, and a teacher without a disability. Disabilities were made evident by the use of a wheelchair, self-disclosure of being an adult with learning disabilities, and by the omission of the self-disclosure statement. The teacher in a wheelchair received the most favorable ratings, the teacher with no disability received the next favorable ratings, and the teachers with a learning disability received the least favorable ratings. The unfavorable ratings of the teacher with learning disabilities were accounted for by (a) a lack of knowledge of the disability, (b) a lack of visible physical signs of a disability, and (c) the participants' assumptions that the teacher was an underachiever in school.

Another study used open-ended questions in interviews for self-descriptive reasons for individuals with disabilities to enter the teaching profession (Keller, Karp,

& Simula, 1992). The focus was on training and employment experiences of 17 female and 8 male teachers ($N = 25$) with physical disabilities, medical impairments, learning disabilities, brain injuries, visual, hearing, or speech impairments. Findings revealed the teachers with disabilities were valuable to schools and to students as role models. The participants were influential to students and coworkers in assessing realistic limitations of disabilities.

Gilbert (1998) studied one adult with learning disabilities in a student teaching assignment. The study investigated accommodation issues regarding basic essential functions of teaching. Reasonable accommodations for the student teacher were suggested as not meeting students' needs. Future research recommendations were discussed regarding individuals who may not meet essential requirements to be classroom teachers.

In a different study, Gilbert and Steffey (1996) surveyed 127 educators or professionals in Illinois to determine their perception of the basic essential functions of teaching. All individuals had a "slight learning disability for which they learned to compensate" (Gilbert & Steffey, 1996, p. 15). Respondents had divergent opinions as

to reasonable accommodations and for essential functions for teaching (e.g., communication, planning, and organization) and knowledge needed in academic areas. The areas recommended for future research from the study centered on the issues of accommodations for teachers with learning disabilities.

The connection between disability and teaching as a career option for an adult with learning disabilities was investigated observing the alterable patterns in the Gerber et al. (1990) model of vocational success. Gerber (1992) studied a 1st year teacher. The data were collected through interviews and observations. In 13 visits, at 3- to 5-week intervals, with the subject and two visits with the principal over a school year, a total of 24 hours of interview and observation time were completed. Audiotaped interviews were transcribed, and detailed field and summary notes prepared. Data analysis reduced data into issues, reoccurring responses, and feelings about being learning disabled and a beginning teacher. The analysis was divided into three phases. Phase 1 summarized data, isolated themes, and formulated questions for future interviews. Phase 2 focused on data charts, listing categories with quotes, field notes, and low inference areas (e.g., teaching,

knowledge of learning disability). Phase 3 contained data conclusions and validations through the emergence of patterns and themes linked to being a beginning teacher with learning disabilities. The issues that emerged were goodness of fit in job selection, disclosure, teaching performance and instructional factors, support systems and job performance, and advocacy and change. These issues parallel the majority of alterable variables identified by the model of vocational success. Only goal orientation did not emerge as a theme from the analysis (Gerber, 1992).

Gerber (1998) continued the above research with the same teacher during his second year of teaching. His study revealed that the subject gained self-confidence through his ability to handle difficult situations in his second year of teaching.

In summary, attitudes are difficult to change, yet adults with disabilities on the job require fair and equal rating of work performance (Reilly et al., 1998). The study with the same individual portraying a teacher with and without a disability shows negative attitudes still exist regarding the abilities of individuals with learning disabilities (Reilly, 1998). Negative associations were made toward individuals with learning disabilities in teaching

roles (Gilbert & Steffey, 1996). However, teachers with learning disabilities were determined to be valuable resources to students and schools as reported in a study of a beginning teacher with learning disabilities (Gerber, 1992). Gerber (1992, 1998) reported teaching is a good fit in a job for adults with learning disabilities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative phenomenological procedures, this study examined the phenomenon of success from perspectives of 4 teachers with learning disabilities (LD). Kvale (1996) describes phenomenology as

elucidating both that which appears and the manner in which it appears. It studies the subjects' perspectives on their world; attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects' consciousness, to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings. (p. 53)

Further, it attempts to make the invisible visible. The data for this study were the participants' description of their lived experiences of success. Specifically, the study focused on what influenced participants' attainment of success, how their learning disabilities affected their success, and how their experiences influenced their teaching philosophies.

In phenomenology, a key step involves bracketing any preconceptions or assumptions that might superimpose meanings from others' research. In this study, the

researcher's assumption that the participants were successful based on current employment as teachers was set aside. Next, the Gerber et al. (1990, 1992) model of vocational success was bracketed in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of success from the participants' own perceptions. Bracketing these assumptions allowed the investigation results, from a phenomenological perspective of understanding meanings and participants' own perceptions of success to remain central to the analysis.

In phenomenological research, the diligence and scope of the search and selection process for published works are introduced in the methodology chapter to justify and validate the current study (Cooper, 1989; Moustakas, 1994). For this study, searches were conducted using manual and computerized systems at the following libraries in Texas: Eastfield College, Southwest Medical, Texas Woman's University, Texas A & M University, University of Dallas, and University of Texas. At each library, the systems used included abstract databases, citation indexes, Dissertation Abstracts International, ERIC, First Search, journals, PsychINFO, references in books, Sociological Abstracts, and Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms. Systems were browsed for relevant terms including phenomenology, success, and

individuals with learning disabilities, teachers with learning disabilities, and characteristics of students with learning disabilities. A table was designed to reflect the summary of the diligence and scope of the search, which is an element in phenomenology (see Table 1).

Covering the years 1979 through 1999, there were over 10,000 titles and citations (at best count 14,570) reported in the combined manual and computer searches. Studies in foreign languages were eliminated. The majority of titles and citations were from computer abstract databases such as ERIC, First Search, and PsychINFO. By scanning through the majority of the titles, 427 were selected with the appearance of relevance. The 427 abstracts or citations were selected for review to determine subject matter. This number was further reduced to 127 by eliminating those appearing irrelevant after closer review. From the 127 abstracts and citations, 87 were selected as containing relevant subject matter. The 87 original published works were located and reviewed for applicability. This process determined that 1 focused on a teacher with learning disabilities, 1 investigated successful adults with learning disabilities, 25 discussed success, 21 dealt with general information on

Table 1

Search Summary for Key Words of Success, Learning Disabilities, and Phenomenology

OVT-Online Catalogue	Related Terms (RT)**	Broader Terms (BT)**	Narrower Terms (NT)**
Success 1031*	Failure 273**	Conduct of life 625**	Academic achievement 312**
	Fear of Success 13**	Fortune 136**	Life skills 203**
			Prediction of teacher success 15**
Learning Disabilities & Learning Disabled 425*	Minimal brain dysfunction 56**	Cognitive disorder 44*	Reading disability 45**
	Mentally handicapped 5**		Learning disabled adults 7**
Phenomenology 250*		Philosophy, Modern 12**	Phenomenological Psychology 69**
Totals	1706*	347**	651**

*Totals from browsing key words on the computer at Texas Woman's University, OVT--Online Catalogue.

** Results from looking up key words in the Volumes III and IV in the 1997 Library of Congress Subject Headings. The numbers represents the total books, journals, audio tapes, film strips, and special collections with those words as a subject heading.

learning disabilities, 10 considered quality-of-life effects of learning disabilities, 24 analyzed outcomes of adults with learning disabilities, and 6 looked at unrelated issues with phenomenological research methods. There were no studies on phenomenological methodology with individuals with learning disabilities.

Covering the years 1920 through 1978, there were also over 10,000 titles and citations reported (best count 18,400) in a computer search after adding the term brain-injured to the search topics. Due to the magnitude, randomly 300 abstracts and citations were selected to read just by looking at the title. Of these, 48 original published works were located and reviewed. The majority of the subject matter dealt with teaching strategies, legislation, diagnostic, and characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities. However, no contributions were found specifically about teachers with learning disabilities or phenomenology with teachers with learning disabilities.

This chapter contains detailed descriptions of phenomenological procedures used to organize, analyze, and report data. Human Subjects Committee approval was obtained (see Appendix A). In addition, criteria for participant eligibility, sample size, recruitment, preliminary screening

interview, confidentiality and consent, and demographics are explained. Specific instrumentation, research design, procedures, and bracketed assumptions also are described.

Participants

It was essential to the purpose of this research that all the participants had experienced the phenomenon of success as adults living with learning disabilities. To determine the success of an individual, Halpern (1985) suggested that the following be considered: (a) societal accepted and expected achievement of certain accomplishments for a particular developmental period; (b) an individual's perception that he or she is doing well and is satisfied with his or her current life situation; and (c) a match between the individual's perceptions of accomplishments, experiences, relationships, and activities, and the individual's self-perceptions and aspirations (Halpern, 1985). In light of the data concerning the problems of underemployment and unemployment of adults with learning disabilities, the indicator that the phenomenon of success had been experienced was the attainment of a teaching position.

Criteria for Eligibility

The selection process required that the participants received special education services for learning disabilities sometime during their K through grade 12 school experiences, currently teach students with learning disabilities, and were willing to discuss their learning disability in an interview. Information regarding the first two criteria were based on self-report of a learning disability, which means they make known their LD (Vogel & Reder, in-press-a).

Sample Size

Kvale (1996) suggested a small purposive sample should be utilized to have a well-controlled qualitative design. With the extensive research and analysis including in-depth interviews, full transcriptions, detailed lengthy analysis, and report writing, Kvale (1996) indicated 4 participants were a suitable sample for qualitative investigation.

Recruitment

During the recruitment process, potential participants were located by asking university professors, teachers,

principals, and individuals with learning disabilities if they had knowledge of teachers in special education who were adults with LD. For this study, 4 potential participants were referred, and all met the eligibility criteria.

The purpose of the study, eligibility requirements, and their minimum involvement were described to the potential participants via a telephone conversation, and all agreed to participate. Frequently self-reporting is used as the method of verification of the existence of a disability when clinical reports are not needed (Gerber et al., 1990). Therefore, participants were asked questions related to their knowledge of their specific learning disabilities (see Table 2). In addition, they were questioned about their diagnosis to document knowledge of deficit areas: organization, oral language, written language, memory, and mathematics.

Selected Participants

The 4 potential participants were deemed eligible as determined by the following criteria: their statement of a formal diagnosis of LD sometime in their K through grade 12 school experiences, placement in a special education program in K through grade 12, and employment as a teacher of

Table 2

Group Biographical Information and Learning Profiles

	Pseudonym of Participants			
	Amy	Meg	Sally	Katie
Age	32	33	32	30
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Dominant Language	English	English	English	English
Type of LD Challenge	Reading Spelling Written Expression	Reading Spelling Written Expression Math	Reading Spelling Written Expression	Reading Spelling Written Expression
Formal Diagnosis	Learning Disability & Dyslexia	Learning Disability & Dyslexia	Learning Disability & Dyslexia	Learning Disability & Dyslexia
When Entered	Grade 4	Grade 4	Grade 3	Grade 1
Kind of Special Ed Service Received	Pull-out Program	Pull-out Program	Pull-out Program	Pull-out Program
When Exited	Grade 6	Grade 6	Grade 6	Grade 6
Degree(s) Earned	BA	BA	2-MA	MA
Teaching Position & Assignment	Elementary Special Ed Students with LD	Elementary Special Ed Students with LD	Elementary Special Ed Students with LD	Jr. High Special Ed Students With LD
Years Experience Teaching	8	8	8	6

students with learning disabilities. All 4 teachers volunteered to participate in this study, and a time and location for each interview was determined during the telephone interview.

Participants were aged 30 to 33 with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 8 years. The demographic characteristics were identical with respect to ethnicity (Caucasian), language (English as first language), and gender (female). All participants went to Texas schools in K through grade 12 and currently taught students with LD.

Protecting the confidentiality of the participants was ensured through confidential handling of the tapes and notes and by their use of pseudonyms on audiotapes and transcripts (Kvale, 1996). Audiotapes were destroyed after being transcribed in full. Specific identifying information also was omitted from the narrative reporting of results. The participants voluntarily signed consent forms to participate, which are on file with the Human Subjects Department at Texas Woman's University (see Appendix B).

Instrumentation

In a qualitative phenomenological approach to research, the instrument is the researcher. Kvale (1996) addressed the

ethical responsibility of the researcher's awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity required of a "formal analysis of everyday language" (pp. 105-106).

The open-ended questions in Appendix C were asked in a semi-structured interview format suggested by Holstein and Gubrium (1995). These questions focused on participants' lived experiences and their success as individuals with LD. The length of the interviews varied from 2 ½ hours to 3 ½ hours.

Research Design

The Gerber et al. (1990) model of vocational success is well-known research and has influenced thinking about successful adults with learning disabilities. However, the purpose of this study was to offer new insights about success of individuals with learning disabilities from the participants' interpretation without superimposing the assumptions from the Gerber et al. informants. Because phenomenology involves the examination of descriptions in searching for life's meaning (Moustakas, 1994), it was chosen as the best approach to frame the participants' perceptions of their success.

In this pursuit, the well-known information from the Gerber et al. (1992) model of vocational success was bracketed as assumptions. Moustakas (1994) reported that well-known assumptions can influence the design and procedures used in phenomenology; therefore, the Gerber et al. (1992) model of vocational success was identified and bracketed (see Table 3). By bracketing these assumptions, an attempt was made to free the research from others' bias and beliefs.

Procedures

Important to this study was the exploration of the participants' perception of their adulthood success. To accomplish this goal and ensure the procedural integrity of this study, the following phenomenological steps were employed (Moustakas, 1994):

1. Potential participants were recruited by contacting individuals associated with education or the field of learning disabilities.

2. Potential participants were contacted by telephone to explain the study and determine eligibility based on the following criteria: received special education service for

Table 3

Model of Vocational Success: Assumptions

Assumption	Description
<hr/>	
1.	Successful adults with LD take control of their lives and have a strong desire to excel.
2.	Successful adults with LD recognize and accept positive and negative aspects of their disability.
3.	Successful adults with LD understand how to build on strengths and minimize weaknesses by an ability to interpret experiences in a positive manner (reframing).
4.	Successful adults with LD set realistic goals and take action toward these goals.
5.	Successful adults with LD have selected a career for which they are well-suited (goodness of fit).

Adapted from: Gerber, P., Ginsberg, R., & Reiff, H. (1990). Identifying Alterable Patterns of Success in Highly Successful Adults with Learning Disabilities. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 25, 475-487.

LD sometime during their K through grade 12 school experiences and currently teach students with LD.

3. The majority of the participants (i.e., 3) were interviewed at their schools, and 1 participant was interviewed at her home. The length of the interviews varied from 2 ½ hours to 3 ½ hours.

4. The audiotapes from interviews with participants were transcribed in full by the researcher. Pseudonyms were used rather than their names. Any identifying data that might be recognized were omitted.

5. Written transcriptions were read to locate statements which could be clustered into meaningful units of ideas relevant to the participants' success and teaching philosophy.

6. One database contained the transcriptions of all participants' statements. This database was divided into 17 separate databases, representing each identified cluster of meaningful unit (i.e., subject matter/ideas). An imposed title was given to each separate database determined by the subject matter within the cluster.

7. Each separate database, then, was reprinted and reread for possible rearrangement of associated ideas. A separate database was created with a different title when a

clearer label or heading fit the subject matter. Databases with the same subject matter were combined.

8. The emergent databases were given a definition for their assigned titles to represent the subject matter or ideas.

9. A printout was made of the data set to mail or hand-deliver to the participants. A members check was obtained in the following manner: 1 subject was seen in person and 3 were contacted by phone to review the clusters, interpretations, and ideas. Researcher interpretations agreed with participants' feedback, and, thus, no changes were made.

10. Responses were checked for similar wording to avoid the duplication of ideas. The titles for clusters of meaningful units were established, which were now referred to as themes. The themes were defined (see Appendix D).

11. Findings were reported using the databases to present the results. Themes established the justification of the selected participants' quotes in answering the research questions.

12. Findings were integrated with findings of the Gerber et al. (1990) model of vocational success looking back to the review of literature and to bracketed

assumptions for connections to confirm or provide alternative understanding of the phenomenon of success.

Summary of Methodology

Phenomenological procedures were used to explore the phenomena of success of 4 teachers with learning disabilities. Phenomenology emphasized the importance of listening to detailed, lived experiences to gain answers to the research questions through systematically detailed steps. Descriptions of lived experiences of teachers with LD were connected to their attribution of success. The participants' teaching philosophies were explored to understand the impact of their lived experiences on their approaches to teaching.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study was initiated to understand the phenomenon of success of 4 teachers with learning disabilities. This chapter presents the participants' interpretation of their experience in relation to their attainment of success and teaching philosophies. From the participants' knowledge of their lived experiences, the study aimed to understand the phenomenon of their success. Phenomenology provided the detailed methodology to interpret and describe this phenomenon. Lived experiences provided links between participants' disability and their success. Therefore, the participants' verbal descriptions led to distinctive interpretations of their success and teaching philosophy. Participants' descriptions were acquired through a semi-structured interview with each participant.

The findings revealed that each participant had a similar vision of success. In addition, four themes were identified as: (a) setting goals by declaring aspirations and expectations, (b) understanding self, (c) approaches to

achieve success, and (d) teaching students with LD how to be successful. Each theme was broken into components (see Table 4).

In phenomenology, structural (i.e., what) and textural (i.e., how) descriptions are essential in interpreting responses of experiences. Identification of themes are explained and supported with excerpts of data and interpretations of meanings.

Keys to Success

From an analysis of the participants' responses, there was evidence that they shared a similar vision of success to become a teacher. Descriptions of their lived experiences defined their success and how it evolved. Participants described their beliefs, challenges, expectations, desires, motives, and compensations.

Participants indicated that they had a vision of success with specific words and phrases such as "my dream," "vision," "found my niche," "personal choice," "I'm going to go to college," and "didn't want to be average." As related in the following excerpts, the participants used their desire to be a teacher as a key to their success.

Table 4

Keys to Success

Theme 1. Setting Goals by Declaring Aspirations

- Being Included with Peers

- Making Good Grades

- Proving Wrong Some Expectations of Teachers

- Living up to Parents' Expectations or Proving Some Expectations of Parents Wrong

Theme 2. Understanding Self

- Self-acceptance

- Feelings of Competence

- Knowledge of Effort Required

Theme 3. Achieving Success

- Personal Strategies

- Utilizing Strengths

- Valuing and Using Support Systems

 - Parental Support

 - Teacher Support

 - Peer Support

Theme 4. Teaching for Success

- Strategies for Building Students' Success

- Effects of Making Invisible Disability Visible

Wasn't going to work at a grocery store the rest of my life. . . . God just kind of said, "You need to be a teacher." So, I'm halfway through a drafting degree, and I change my degree. I went to talk to a counselor and said, "I want to get into teaching, tell me what I need to do." This is when goals started happening for me. . . . I finally found my niche. . . . And once I found that, I've just been rolling with it. This [teaching] is what I want to do in life. I'm successful. (Mel)

Ever since I was little, I always enjoyed playing teacher. I always felt that was neat, but it wasn't until I actually said it. "Yes, that's something I've always wanted to do"--that I knew I could . . . I was real determined about getting through college. . . . My goal was for me to become a teacher and I have done that. (Katie)

I am a success. I think just graduating [college] and getting a job teaching, which I love doing, has helped me become very successful. . . . I knew before I ever went to college that I was going to be a teacher, and I . . . had to graduate to become a teacher. (Amy)

Success is based on what you know. I tell people to follow their dream, now. You need a dream. I have to have a dream. . . . I have to have a vision to go after. . . . My dream was to teach. . . . I'm going to teach forever. . . . This is my dream. (Sally)

Theme 1. Setting Goals by

Declaring Aspirations

Participants' verbal descriptions of goals (i.e., day-to-day and long-range) were interpreted as major contributors to their success in adulthood. These goals

induced efforts to satisfy their own aspirations: being included with peers, making good grades, proving wrong teachers' low expectations, and living up to or proving wrong parents' expectations.

The participants' responses described their struggles, resilience, perseverance, and reframing abilities in seeking fulfillment of self-expectations. Their actions were interpreted to mean they set high standards, and had a willingness to do whatever it took to meet their own expectations. High and low self-expectations were described as they struggled to overcome challenges in seeking success.

The harder it was, the more likely I was to read that textbook. . . . I was very challenged. Whatever I did, it wasn't good enough. I was constantly setting goals for myself. . . . I always set bigger goals than they [my parents] expected for me. . . . Yes, self-motivated. I was very self-motivated. You know, the more people told me I couldn't, then, the harder my effort became, the more I began to try. (Sally)

Yes, I have very high expectations . . . , and I refuse to lower them. . . . I have very, very high expectations. They're not unreachable, but they are very high. . . . Anything I decide that I can do, I will do. Yes. Anything that is any part of my life that I decide I'm going to do, I do it. Just about anything, really anything that I set my mind to, I do. (Amy)

I was scared to death of failure [in elementary]. I was so afraid that I was going to screw up so bad. I didn't even try. . . . [In high school]

tried so hard--had to . . . anything to pass that class. (Mel)

I was driven with school . . . having that driving force is just kind of a way of life. . . . I was so driven . . . just worked at little daily goals and big ones--and making bigger ones--worked were very hard. . . . I was real determined about getting through college and everything. . . . Now that I'm a teacher, I just don't feel as quite as ambitious as I was getting to this point. . . . Yet, I don't have a big need for that drive anymore like I did. I was too driven . . . sacrificed a lot in life to get here [to teach]. (Katie)

Being Included with Peers

Some of the participants described situations of segregation from peers as a result of having a learning disability. These actions created goals that were the direct result of being placed in an alternative environment (e.g., resource room, program, and grouping). This component emerged from Mel's dislike of being in resource room and Sally's parents making plans to move her to a school they felt was easier. Additionally, participants expressed similar situations over which they had limited control but created actions to try to be included in non-disabled environments. The following excerpts from transcripts of the participants' responses reveal these interpretations.

I wasn't in the same room all the time because we were departmentalized for reading and math. And I didn't get to go [with friends to reading and math

class]. Like we had a high, medium, and low, and when those kids dispersed to go to their classes, I had to go to resource room. I didn't like it. I didn't want to go [to resource room] any more. . . . I made my mom write a note and say, "Mel doesn't want to go any more to resource." My mom went ahead and wrote the note and sent it up there [school office]. They kept me in that low class anyway. I didn't like it because I wanted to be with my friends. (Mel)

I actually went to private school all the way through 12th grade. . . . But when it came time to go to high school my mother said, "Why don't we just send you over to the public school, you know private school is just too hard." Mom said, "You will--just going to come home crying every day" that it is too hard. Well, it just made me mad. . . . I'm going to private school. I'm not switching away from my friends. . . . My mom went and talked to the nuns at the school who were very familiar with me--my struggles and my learning disability. And one of the nuns up there was actually my mother's teacher. So, we had a generation thing--she had a connection with Mom. She said, "If [Sally] wants to do it hard enough, let her go." I finally got my shot. Yes! I was going to my private school! They tested me again--put me in remedial classes--called essentials. . . . So, I have three remedial courses my freshman year, but I got to stay with my friends . . . at the same school, anyway. . . . I was always in a slower class. It was definitely a class that was designed for the tested kids. They figured out these kids are behind. They grouped us together and moved through things a little slower. . . . I was getting some self-confidence back because I was "A"s and "B",s and I didn't have to leave. It wasn't easy. Yes, I did come home crying and frustrated about a variety of things, but I was getting to go to school with my friends. (Sally)

Making Good Grades

Making good grades emerged as a goal for 3 participants. The following excerpts described their desire to excel in their school work, even though they realized that good grades required greater effort and time to accomplish such tasks.

I was grade motivated. I wanted the grades for myself. . . . I knew other kids were making better grades. I knew that they were getting things right. And I knew that it wasn't because I wasn't trying because I did study. . . . The grades mattered to me because I knew everybody's grades were different. (Sally)

I wanted to have good grades. . . . In junior high school through high school, I worked hard. I decided I didn't want to be in special education classes any more because I didn't like them. And so, I worked very, very hard on my grades my last year in junior high, which was our 9th grade. I was in our junior high, and by 10th grade I was in all regular classes. (Amy)

Grades had to be a certain level to be a cheerleader. . . . I had to make good grades because I liked being a cheerleader. (Mel)

Proving Wrong Some Expectations of Teachers

Teacher expectations were perceived as challenges to some participants' positive self-concept and feelings of competence. When perceived as negative or de-valuing, participants took actions to recapture their self-concept. Negative remarks made by childhood teachers were described

as motivational by 3 of the 4 participants. They described goals to overcome such low expectations. Low teacher expectations were a powerful incentive to work hard to confirm one's success potential and to show that the negative expectations were incorrect.

The 3 participants' responses revealed that they tried hard to prove wrong those teachers who expected them to fail. Participants also revealed their desire to save other children from similar experiences. Therefore, these experiences created an inner-drive to become a teacher. Proving expectations of teachers wrong led to specific goal setting. Reframing these negative experiences challenged participants to seek successful outcomes in a career.

In elementary school, my teachers actually told my parents that I was retarded. That I was a slow learner. That I would never be able to do anything. And when I was in junior high school, I had a teacher tell me that I would never graduate from high school. And that greatly impacted my life, too. (Amy)

My middle-school teacher said that I would never graduate from high school. And as I've become older, I'm sure that she was trying to prepare me to take classes that could help me live a life. But all I got from her was saying that I would not graduate. I'm a rebellious type of person, and like I said before, if someone tells me I can't do something, I'm going to do everything I can to prove them wrong. (Amy)

The teacher I had back in elementary school that didn't think I would amount to anything, she felt that I was lazy and stuff. And I was really tempted to send her an invitation [to graduation] . . . not so much to be mean, but it was an added bonus that she was wrong because she was a negative influence. It just kind of proved her wrong. (Katie)

Ms. [name] was such a hard teacher. I never liked that woman. I don't know if it was because that's really when all my learning disabilities came to a head. But she was not a complimentary woman. (Mel)

Living up to Parents' Expectations or Proving Negative Expectations of Parents Wrong

Living up to parents' expectations or proving negative expectations of parents wrong became goals in the participants' pursuit of success. Negative parental expectations became a challenge to prove them wrong. Sally described her parents' low expectations as a threat to her self-concept, self-worth, and self-respect. Sally's description of perceived low expectations of her parents provided her with a challenge to succeed and prove their expectations wrong. The level of motivation for 3 participants increased when expectations were perceived as negative. The following excerpts of responses revealed their goals that contributed to their success.

When I heard Mom saying things like, "It's going to be too hard for you," I worked hard and said, "Too bad, so sad, I'll prove you wrong." And that

is what it came to down with college. Basically, without saying it, she told me, "You're not going to make it." And I said, "Oh, yes, I will." I just went after it myself. I went to the local college like I said, and then, I went to [university name]. And I won't say that it was easy, but I'll tell you this, in college I only made "A"s or "B"s. I've got two master's degrees, and I have never, ever made a C in college. Third grade--with problems I was having, Mom and Dad just kind of wiped out expectations. So definitely not college --forget that. There were no other options for my three older siblings! They had no choice. They were going to college. Why are my parents giving me a choice? I felt like they weren't expecting the same out of me as they were expecting out of my siblings and out of the high school students. Almost everybody in my high school goes to college. . . . It was kind of one of those things where misery excites me. (Sally)

My mother has confided in me. . . . She knew that I wanted to be a teacher but was scared, knowing I would have to graduate from college. When I was in middle school and high school, she was scared that I may not be able to have the ability to do it. But I think a lot goes with determination--and just the want. (Amy)

My mom and dad did not go to college, but it was expected that my sister and I would go to college. My parents couldn't help us financially, but we were going to college . . . get a job and . . . pay for your school. So, to please them I worked three jobs--and went to college. . . . Just--I just remember, "You're going to go to college. . . . They [my parents] were strict. . . . That was a challenge. Even up into my late 20s . . . , I tried to do what would make them [pause] approve of me. (Mel)

My parents, they were structured, but it actually did end up helping. . . . They [parents] pushed me a lot in school . . . pushed real hard for me to

get in mainstream classes. . . . I tried very hard . . . to make them happy with me. (Katie)

Theme 2: Understanding Self

As participants described situations and events that created and maintained their success, understanding self emerged as a factor. Some of the general phrases that demonstrated their self-understanding were "that's part of who I am;" "it helped me structure my life;" and "if I hadn't had trouble then, and I don't think that I would be in touch." Specifically, understanding self was revealed through descriptions of self-acceptance, feelings of competence, and knowledge of effort required. Each of the 4 participants' responses described understanding self as contributing to their success.

Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance fits into the larger theme of understanding self as described by 3 participants' responses. Participants' self-understanding was influenced by feedback from parents, teachers, and peers. Their self-acceptance contributed to the participants taking action to recapture their self-image and feelings of self-worth.

I was smart, and I had a learning disability and everything and constantly talked about that. . . .

I think that's more because I'm so accepting of my disability. I don't look at it in any way. That is just who I am, and so that's part of who I am, and they accept me for who I am. . . . My goal was for me to become a teacher. I've done that, and I also feel now that I've accomplished that there's something more I need to do. (Katie)

I remember when the light went on . . . I was reading. . . . Now, I don't feel that [being learning disabled] hinders me in any way. I don't feel like it takes away from me, not at all. . . . I guess it was good that I was just treated normally. So I didn't grow up thinking, "Oh, I'm stupid, and I can't do this." I felt real good about who I was. . . . I turned out so successful . . . I'm very self-driven. . . . Survival . . . then, it blossomed. (Mel)

Who I am is as individual as my fingerprints, and I like my fingerprints. . . . I've learned along the way . . .; I've learned what I need to do to make sure I'm successful. . . . It's all about choices. I feel like you have to be successful. You don't have to have a college degree to be successful. I chose to go to college because of the career I wanted and what I wanted for myself. . . . I am extremely successful. . . . I am a very happy person. To be successful, it is what you want and whether you are doing what you want to do. (Sally)

I like who I am. . . . I have learned to understand myself. . . . I need different ways and I know that I have learned how to supply that for myself when I don't get it from a class . . . I can take that . . . I teach myself . . . to get to play with them [friends], I had to be tough. I couldn't cry. I couldn't whine, and I had to play by their rules and a lot of that that helped me mold into the person I am. I know that if you just whine about things, that's not going to change. You have to take action or you will be excluded. (Amy)

Feelings of Competence

Self-understanding also was exhibited through the participants' belief in their competence. Of the 4 participants, 13 described their perceptions of possessing the ability to accomplish tasks, achieve goals, and bring about personal success. Participants indicated that, at some time during their school experience, they were able to develop a belief in their own competence. Specific references made to competence beliefs included "I can," "I can achieve it," and "I can do anything." The following excerpts reveal the extent of their competence beliefs.

Extremely [on how determined she is]. Anything I decide that I can do, I will do. Yes. Anything that is any part of my life that I decide I'm going to do this, I do it. Just about anything, really anything that I set my mind to, I do. . . . I have learned how to supply that for myself when I don't get it from a class or I don't get it from whatever I'm supposed to be learning. (Amy)

Have high expectations . . . achieve it. Believe. (Katie)

Community college was the best thing that ever happened to me. I learned how to do the math . . . about English and grammar. It was kind of like everything coagulated because of those low classes, and I was--it was so cool--like I wasn't the only one. It was all self-paced. I was myself. I was comfortable with that. I got my degree, I was shocked that I got it. Yeah, I really was, and I thought, "If I can do this, I can do anything." It took me a long time to get to be that person. (Mel)

I do realize the cycle was just kind of like breaking in high school. It broke right around sophomore year because I think for, from my point of view, I think that I learned enough coping skills. I learned enough, I learned enough-uh-modifications for myself, that I could do things for myself. If you believe it, you are going to start doing it. You can get better. If you think that your reading skills can improve, then, they are going to improve. . . . You've got to hear, you've got to see it, and you've got to believe they can learn. They are almost reading. It's what they believe. (Sally)

Knowledge of Effort Required

Another aspect of understanding self related to the participants' understanding that, because of their learning disability, they had to put forth a great deal of effort to achieve success. Their accounts demonstrated their unwillingness to give up and their willingness to put in the extra effort and make the sacrifices necessary to achieve their goals. As Sally replied, "Never give up, never give up! Do what it takes."

Yeah, it [LD] has [impacted life]. You know-I had a harder time at school than the average student did, but it wasn't a thing where I had any major problems with it. . . . But I did notice that I was--tried harder than my sisters and my friends. (Katie)

I knew that it took me a lot longer to do things, and it didn't matter. . . . [I] did my homework until I went to bed. I didn't have time for anything else, but that was my choice. That was what I wanted for myself. . . . There are always sacrifices, but I didn't look on it that way. In

college, because of my learning disability and because it took me twice as long to study, I had a relatively little social life. That was never an option for me. Not because I couldn't do it socially, because I could have fit in with those people. I couldn't do it because I couldn't spare that much time away from my studies. But it was my choice. That is the choice that I made, and it's what I made for myself. Nobody said I had to make it. I chose to do that. . . . I used to get laughed at because I always went to bed, or I went to bed early, so that I could think the next morning in class. I got laughed at about it. I got harassed about it. But, you know what? I could think at 8:00 in the morning when I had a class.
(Sally)

I'm an overachiever. I worked very hard for each and everything that I learned. Because of my hard work, because I took that average IQ and said, "This is what I'm going to do with it." I feel like I created that. I created an overachiever out of myself. (Sally)

Each and every skill that I master, I worked hard for it. It doesn't come easily to me. It has never come easily to me. It was really heart sickening for me to know how many hours I had studied for a test, and how many hours she [college roommate] had studied for a test. And to look at our grades which were within a few points-the same grade, but that's just part of it. That is the way it is. Too bad, so sad, but it was extremely frustrating. If that is what it took for me to pass that course or get that grade, then that is what I was going to have to do. It didn't matter; it didn't matter what it cost. (Sally)

I would say I never gave up. Never give up. Do whatever it takes to learn--to find success. Go somewhere, ask somebody, get tutoring, you know--find something. You just can't ever give up because when you give up, it's over. The game is over if you give up. Don't ever say, "I can't."

. . . If you say can't, you won't ever do it.
(Sally)

Theme 3. Approaches to Achieve Success

Approaches to achieve success emerged as a theme as participants described specific direction and processes they used to take control of their life situations and events to achieve success. There were three major approaches that contributed to their success: using personal strategies, utilizing strengths, and valuing and using support systems. A pattern of understanding how to succeed emerged as participants described individual action plans to accomplish specific goals and desired outcomes. Examples of phrases that represent these domains include "how to study," "how to supply that for myself," "all about choices," "modifications for myself," "realize the cycle," "I created," "pushing me," "appreciate more," "family stood behind me," and "family impacted." The following excerpts reveal some of their approaches.

Personal Strategies

All 4 participants described personal strategies that helped them overcome challenges and obstacles as individuals with learning disabilities. Using personal strategies

described their attempt to have control over their success in situations and events. Specific phrases that described their personal strategies were "connect it to something;" "organized my brain certain ways;" "train my mind;" "visually see;" "my own little games;" "having a bag of tricks to constantly pull from;" "assimilate it;" "changing, monitoring, and adjusting;" and "make it fun." The following excerpts reveal their personal strategies contributing to their success.

I've learned to take notes while I'm reading instead of having to flip through the book, and read it again. Just write it out. I've learned how to make things faster. I've learned coping skills.
(Sally)

I can't learn like everybody else does. I need different ways, and I know that I have learned how to supply that for myself, when I don't get it from a class, or I don't get it from whatever I'm supposed to be learning. I can take that. I have them [mnemonics] for the colors of the rainbow. I have--if I don't have a phrase, then most likely, I can't remember it. My memory skills are very low unless I can connect it to something, and so I'm constantly trying to make connections for my children, and we take a lot of field trips. And I always draw back on that information. (Amy)

I went off to college. One of my friends had come in, and she asked to borrow it [spelling ace book] and she goes, "It's right over there." "How did you know that?" She goes, "In every single room, you have it in the exact same spot. And you put it back in the box." . . . Everything has to be organized certain ways. . . . I have things also organized in my brain certain ways, and so that

way I know exactly where to go in and find it. I have to have that part organized so it overflows into the organization of my school life. I train my mind; mental notes have to be a certain way. So that when I visually see them, it just kind of overflows into my learning style. I think [my style] would be different than what general people's organization in their brain would be. Learning how to organize your thoughts and everything is a big problem [when LD]. (Katie)

I decided I knew I've got to pass, so what I did is, I said, Okay, I'm going to make this fun. I put some stickers on the book cover. I had my papers in order, just everything to make me feel good about going to that class. . . . I had to pass it, so I was going to make the best of it. . . . I connect this to something, associations [or] playing games. . . . I'm continually reading and searching [for] . . . a new way. What did you use that worked? I mean continuously. I've just got to keep reading and keep doing my best. If it doesn't work, start something new. I mean constantly changing, monitoring, and adjusting. Having a bag of tricks constantly to pull from. Little games-my own little games. (Mel)

Utilizing Strengths

By cultivating specific interests and engaging in activities that built on their strengths, 2 participants took control of their lives. They described these interests and activities as ways that helped them attain some sort of success. Some of the words that revealed these included "musical," "spiritual," "athlete," and "cheerleader." Mel and Amy described the positive effects of activities as contributing to their success. The following excerpts of

responses to an interview question revealed this emphasis (i.e., What experiences helped you become successful?).

I played basketball, soccer, softball, [and] baseball in the yard. We played everything. And that did help a lot and that's where I learned a lot. . . . [Also] I was in the orchestra and on . . . a boy and girl cheerleader team. . . . I was a winner outside my classes--a very good athlete. I was very, very good at all this. . . . That feeling was great then, still is. . . . So, I got confidence; I could figure out ways to win at other things. . . . I started to make friends and become more social. . . . I was always very shy, so I didn't make friends very easily. . . . I made quite a bit of friends in college. I still have them. . . . That's how I figured out ways to be my best--at anything. (Amy)

Basically, I tried hard because cheerleading was real important to me. So, I figured out ways to do good at school . . . keep the level that is needed to keep being a cheerleader. I was a really good cheerleader. . . . [Also] becoming a Christian and being in young life church group . . . ways to find power within me to get through things . . . , [and] don't get in a rush. (Mel)

Valuing and Using Support Systems

The participants described family, teacher, and peer support that they valued and used to build a foundation on which to grow and survive everyday situations. Parental support was a common thread described by all 4 participants in contributing to their success. Teacher support was described by 3 participants' responses. Sally was the only 1 to

describe peers as valued and used as a support. The parental support excerpts were followed by comments regarding teachers and peers.

Parental Support. Participants used parental support for encouragement, strength, comfort, moral guidance, and for detouring failures. The participants indicated they used family support in the following areas: logistical support for special programs or training, emotional support in the form of belief in the participants' capabilities coupled with high expectations, and academic support by providing them with assistance in studying. The following excerpts from the transcripts describe how participants used strong parental support as valuing and using support systems to succeed.

I feel I had a lot of support from my family. My mother picked me up at school every day. And she drove me downtown to Scottish Rite every single day for 4 years. . . . My family had always stood behind me and always helped. I have a very good family. They always helped me feel real good about myself. And when I was down, they would bring out the good points. (Amy)

Yes, my parents were wonderful [at providing support during school]. They were great. Dad was always very supportive . . . So, having them [parents] constantly being there--saying that they know you can do this. (Katie)

I knew other kids were making better grades. . . . Everybody tutored me in a different subject. They

depended on what I came home with as to whose job it was to help me with it. . . . My family impacted me more than my friend. . . . My family was a guiding light over the years. They spent a lot of time with me, too, at home. Mom did my reading with me, and so she would read the novels with me. Mother knew that she had to read it with me, or I would read it to her. She didn't do that with anybody else in my family. She only did that with me. . . . I went away to a university only 45 minutes away. I came only every Saturday, every week. I was home by Friday night, and there was a lot of times that the kitchen table got taken over with my homework because Dad still had to do chemistry and physics with me at the college level. I remember trying to do a research paper at the university and not being able to figure out the library. I couldn't find anything on my topic. My sister would come up there . . . , and she'd find 10 articles. . . . They were always there to support me. (Sally)

I remember my mother calling the Peewee football coach because I had to be a certain level to be a cheerleader--and I was in resource room. They said resource kids couldn't be cheerleaders. Mom called everyone, and it changed the rule so I could be in resource. . . and keep being a cheerleader. (Mel)

Teacher Support. The positive role teachers played in developing positive attitudes and in encouraging their success was alluded to by the participants. Responses of these participants revealed perceived support of teachers. Responses showed they were positively influenced when teacher remarks and attitudes reflected confidence in their abilities. Specific phrases that revealed positive influences were "wonderful teacher," "made me feel good,"

"brought my self-confidence up," "my mentor," "believing in me," and "showing me the strategies." All participants indicated that some teachers helped them to recognize realistic dreams and wishes that matched their strengths. The following excerpts from the transcripts revealed the positive impact teachers had on their success.

Teachers were very supportive, [I] had wonderful, wonderful teachers all through school. . . . High school-actually, I had this one teacher and--actually I'm still in contact with--and she's kind of my mentor. She's retiring today. (Katie)

My teachers believing in me and pushing me, and just, you know, continual success and stuff like that and being able to see it. Gradually move out of the resource classes and stuff like that. (Katie)

She [my 2nd-grade teacher] could have gotten fired. . . . They [school administrators] would have not approved of a referral for any special training programs for me. . . . My 2nd-grade teacher met with my parents and said that I was so much further behind everybody else at that time. She also let them know that she didn't think the school could help me. She suggested going to Scottish Rite Hospital for testing. . . . My parents would have known what to do or would have caught on for a few more years if it hadn't been for that teacher. . . . She has been my mentor for years. (Amy)

I had a wonderful teacher who made me feel good so she brought my self-confidence up. She was wonderful . . . self-esteem booster, really just very kind. . . . One time my teacher wasn't there, our resource teacher, so I had to go into the low group-you know-with another teacher. . . . She would call something out, and I would answer it.

And I was answering it quicker than the other kids in the class, and it was so cool because everybody stopped and goes, "Wow, you know." So it was like, "Wow. I know what I'm doing now," you know, so it was really neat. This was because my resource teacher was just working one-on-one with me and showing me the strategies and the skills. . . . It [college] was a different teaching environment. Those professors were fantastic. So supportive. . . . They were great. Awesome teachers. (Mel)

As a 1st-grade student, I didn't know I was any different than any other child. I did notice that my grades were lower. I honestly was clueless, I guess. But at the end of my 1st-grade year . . . , she [my teacher] pulled me over to her desk and she said . . . "I love you so much, I want you to stay with me next year." . . . "Wow, I'm special." So, I never thought that it was a bad thing to repeat first grade because of the way she initiated it. The teacher told me that I was so special that she wanted to keep me with her next year. And so I started first grade the second year thinking I was special because I'm repeating it. . . . I know the way she made me feel so special was one reason I ended up successful. (Sally)

Peer Support. Sally indicated that peer support was important to her success. She described how a childhood friend had helped her to succeed in school. This friend provided the subject with both academic and emotional support. Sally's support helped her because she felt understood. The following excerpts revealed how being friends with a peer helped Sally succeed.

I befriended a girl who I am still best friends with to this day--along fourth grade. She would look at me and know whether I understood or not. And when she knew that I didn't understand, she

would back up when we had a chance, not during class, but at lunch or after school and say, "Okay, this was what she was trying to say here"-- what it was, especially with . . . literature readings. My friend would explain a lot of the stories. The novels that she read to me, she would read a chapter. She would say, "Okay, this is what they did." She could tell whether I got it or not. (Sally)

Theme 4. Teaching for Success

Teaching students with learning disabilities (LD) how to be successful emerged as a component of the participants' teaching philosophy. All participants believed they could teach their students with LD to become successful. In addition, the participants believed that disclosure of their learning disability could help students envision success. Excerpts from participants' responses showed classroom practices that they perceived to bring out their students' strengths as well as their own. Specific phrases that revealed this philosophy included "something better," "better way to teach," "more than one way to reach the goal," and "child thinks success." Other phrases that described their philosophies included "child's success," "it's what you think," "cared more," "everyone can learn," and "teach skills to be a lifelong learner." The following

excerpts were included to reflect participants' responses to describe this emphasis, teaching for success.

Everybody can learn and you can be a lifelong learner. I've got to teach them how to read to be a lifelong learner. (Mel)

But I think we're kind of lumping too many other students into that instead of trying to push them to be successful and teach them to be successful. On their own, we're kind of helping them too much. Giving them a crutch instead of teaching them to walk on their own. (Katie)

Success. . . . You can't show them what it is going to look like because it's individual as your fingerprints. It's what that child wants. It's what the child views as success. . . . It's not something that can be measured. . . . There is more than one way to reach the goal. So, I knew that I wanted to teach. . . . I look at each student as an individual. I don't care what their special education test said that got them into my room. I don't care what happened before they got to me. I pull from my philosophy from knowing that there was a better way to teach. . . . My kids aren't going to be frustrated. I want them to have more. . . . I look at them daily as an individual, what they've accomplished, what they need, and where they need to go next. I decide on the spur of the moment what I am going to teach them next, and how--based on where they are, what they are showing they need to know. I try to make everything tie back to something transferable to the real world. (Sally)

We [need to] see a little bit past just teaching. . . . I respect each one of my children, and I never downgrade them. I'm trying to let my children be the problem-solvers because those are things that they're going to need in life and this may not be things that they're learning at home. We talk about how every child is responsible for himself, for their actions, and for the words that

they say. . . . I let them know when someone comes up and says so-and-so is bugging me. I'll say, "Can I fix that problem?" And I make them think through it. They're the only one that can fix that. And we talk about how every child is responsible for himself, for their actions, and for the words that they say. (Amy)

Everything you do in life is a choice. You can choose to do what I expect as a teacher, my children always know what I expect of them. I expect a lot from each child in my classroom, and I let them know what I expect. That's part of my philosophy--that every child can learn and every child can reach expectations--and that's why they are very high. . . . I expect a lot, and they can tell me where they're falling short and how they might be able to reach that goal. . . . I think of this--in learning disabled children, for all children, is to love them, unconditionally, and let them know it. Let them know when they do something that you don't approve of--why you don't approve of it--what you expect, and let your child come up with things. And what they could do next time instead of what they did. (Amy)

Strategies for Building Students' Success

The participants related how their personal experiences with being LD had influenced their classroom strategies. Strategies included increased one-on-one time, respect for each individual child, emphasizing student strengths, communicating with parents, guided readings, using few worksheets, not proceeding until the child masters the previous lesson, and teaching coping skills. The following excerpts describe these strategies.

I spend a lot of the time in guided practice. . . . Guided practice is where we are kind of doing it together . . . on the board or at the table. But it's usually a one-on-one or a very small group--three or four kids--and not many more than that so they can all see the paper. We are actually working together. . . . I've learned coping skills, and so that is what I teach kids. I teach them ways to compensate for their disability. . . . I always make sure my kids are successful. . . . It is not uncommon to find me on the floor with kids--working it out . . . on their level. I don't stand above them because you have that power struggle. I always make sure to kneel beside the child if they are in their desk. . . . I give them a math page, and they bomb it--I'm not moving on to the next lesson. We are going to re-do this lesson until they have got this lesson successful. If they didn't understand it, then it's all done the exact same way. . . . I keep a file of all of their work. And I pull it out, and I say, "This is what you did August the 25th, and this is what you did December the 25th." I point out their successes, but I make sure that they have successes. I make sure of it. . . . I think testing, in general, is okay. It is nice to know what peoples IQs are. It is nice to know what kids' achievement levels are. I tell my kids, "You are smart," because in order to be in learning disabled you have to have at least an average IQ. . . . I'm a real proponent of phonics. It is definitely the way to read, but I have come across children where phonics doesn't work. More children will be successful with phonics. But there are some children that phonics doesn't work for, so then, you have to throw that out. (Sally)

I really believe in guided reading . . . where I would find out exactly what level each child is on and I would make sure that they have books that they can read on their level. . . . We would use self-selected books. . . . They have to make a decision--Is it easy? Is it just right? Is it a challenge? They learn how to monitor that. (Mel)

Sometimes, these children come in and they might not have eaten. And I have cereal back in the cabinet. And I'll pull out a cup and give 'em a cup of cereal. I think that love is so important and then respect. And I respect each one of my children and I never downgrade them. . . . When we discuss whatever is happening or occurred . . . I don't think that anybody else in the class needs to see everything. . . . When children come up and tattle on each other, I bring the other child in and I have them talk to each other. I'm trying to teach more social skills instead of me being the problem solver. I'm trying to let my children be the problem solvers because those are things that they're going to need in life, and this may not be things that they're learning at home. . . . I let the parents know what level their child is reading on. I try to point out if I'm seeing them learning or what things they are doing positive. And what things can help because every child can improve. Every child may need to improve in something, but there is no child that is not doing something good or that's not improving in some way. So it's always important to point those out and think of ways for a parent to help a child. . . . That is one of the great things about guided reading because . . . it is books that they can read. They take books home, and they read every single line at home--books that they can read all by themselves. . . . I have the tables first of all; I don't have desks. I have tables in my classroom . . . think creatively. My children work cooperatively together. I'm not a person that can sit still for more than about 10 minutes, and I don't expect that any child--we're in different centers, we're going different activities--all the time, so that they're constantly moving. They're constantly being able to share ideas and suggestions with other people. . . . I have very, very few worksheets in my classroom. I would much rather the kids create something to explain a worksheet instead of just do a worksheet. We read, and we write almost constantly because reading and

writing go together. The better you read, the better you write, and the better you write. (Amy)

I come up with something that I like that I think is meaningful. . . . To learn the order of the planets, we make up sentences or phrases . . . use mnemonics. . . . So it's something, a key to help them recall different information. . . . I have them [use mnemonics] for the colors of the rainbow. I'm constantly trying to make connections for my children, and we take a lot of field trips. And I always draw back on that information . . . kids haven't experienced a whole lot; therefore, they don't have a whole lot of knowledge base to write about. So, we would go on a nature walks around our school. We would find things so we're creating experiences to write about. . . . I think it's very important to let children work at their ability level. . . . It's not going to do them any good to force them to do it. It is, in a way, downgrading that child. . . . So, make sure that your children are reading things that they can read by themselves and feeling successful. (Amy)

Students learn how to put their notebooks together . . . when you're showing them--like when I'm doing math and adding up decimals. . . . I mean, money you deal with every single day; it has decimals in it. Every single day, you deal with money in some way, and it has decimals in it. Even if you're just adding how many quarters you got in your pocket . . ., show them as much as possible how it relates to real life. . . ., how it transfers over. And they're constantly in need of every simple little thing. You know. Not only do we read this . . ., reading a manual or reading the description on what sandwich. You've some funky name of a sandwich, you've got to know how to read what's in that sandwich or you may get something you don't like. So, as much as possible, I try to relate the real world to how it applies. (Katie)

Effects of Making Invisible Disability Visible

The participants related how they used self-disclosure of their disability to provide the students with first-hand knowledge of how they overcame some of the same challenges their students were facing. Some of the specific phrases that revealed why they self-disclosed their disability included: "you're struggling right now, but you're going to make it;" "I learned differently than a lot of people;" "I know how it feels to struggle, and I tell my kids all the time;" and "I tell parents a lot I talk about it now openly." The following excerpts reveal the reasons why they self-report being a teacher with LD.

I know how it feels to struggle, and I tell my kids all the time, "I couldn't read when I was in first grade, but you read even better than I did." You know, I want them to know that they're going to be successful. "You're struggling right now, but you're going to make it." . . . It seems like from sixth grade until I was in my late 20s, I never said a thing about it until I was in a special education class at a university. At first I thought, people are going to think she's special education--she has no clue. . . . I'm going to help somebody; this is what I want to do in life. . . . So, I did. I learned to [self report]. . . . Yes, I tell parents a lot. I talk about it now openly, but when I first started teaching, I didn't bring it up because I didn't know if people were going to be judgmental. Now, I don't. (Mel)

I would let them know that I learned differently than a lot of people. I let the kids know if we do something 1 week, we may do it different another

week. I key into different children. When I was in school, things were just said or just read from a book, and that's not how I learn. I have to be able to see it; I have to do it. And knowing that about myself I know that children in my classes need to do things. They can't just see it, because there are different learners, and I want all of my children to feel successful. And that's--my job just isn't to teach, it's to be able to teach each child in my classroom. . . . I always let them know that I have dyslexia. I did have to go to a special school for help. (Amy)

I tell my friends and colleagues, whenever the situation rises, all of my friends know. I think just about everybody here at school knows. (Katie)

Yeah, I told the teachers. I go to the teachers and tell them. . . . I tell my students. I tell my story about a little girl and . . . how horrible I felt and what it was like. And I say, "But you know what, you know that girl is here standing in front of you . . . to teach you . . . to guide you . . . to help you become successful." If you make the choice, because it's all about choices. . . . You don't have to have a college degree to be successful. . . . It's your choice. I chose to go to college because of the career I wanted. (Sally)

Summary

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 participating teachers with learning disabilities (LD). The interviews included open-ended questions to seek answers to the research questions: first, how do the participants describe the meanings of their success within the context of having a learning disability? and second, how do the

participants' perceptions of success influence their teaching philosophies?

Analysis of the interview responses revealed that themes were interlaced throughout the teachers' stories of their success. Keys to success emerged with four themes: setting goals by declaring aspirations, understanding self, approaches to achieve success, and teaching for success. There were five components of setting goals by declaring aspirations, three components of understanding self, three components of approaches to achieve success, and two components of teaching for success.

Supporting excerpts from the participants' responses followed an interpretation of the identified components and sub components. The group of participants had unique life experiences that emerged to reveal attributions of success.

Analysis of the data revealed strong self-understandings of strengths, weaknesses, goals, and dreams. Participants declared their goal during their K through 12 school years: to become a teacher. Setting goals came easily; yet, knowing how to achieve their goals was much harder than declaring them. Their responses indicated that the other goals they wanted to achieve were directly related to teaching: being included, good grades, and living up to

or proving wrong others' expectations (i.e., teachers and/or parents).

Comparing the participants' responses in the beginning of the interview to the ending responses, the participants systematically progressed from declaring the desire and struggles in becoming teachers to being confident teachers with lived experiences full of insight to help others achieve success. In recounting their lived experiences to reach their goal, participants had to make sacrifices (e.g., "studied all night," "couldn't go out with friends").

Prefacing how success was achieved, descriptions were made in the process of understanding self: self-acceptance, feeling of competence, and knowledge of the effort needed to achieve success. Their descriptions were how they moved from what they wanted (teaching job), self-understanding, how to achieve it (approaches), to attempting to transfer those lessons learned by teaching for success.

Phenomenological methods were used to connect the literature to these findings in the next chapter. Also, the findings were connected to the assumptions in the study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONNECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter is arranged as follows: first, the study was summarized. Second, to follow phenomenological procedures, connections were made with findings connected to the review of literature and the bracketed assumptions. Third, implications for a future project were suggested. Fourth, the conclusion was presented.

Summary of the Study

Success in adulthood for teachers with learning disabilities was altered by diverse experiences, influences, and environments in the process of developing between childhood and adulthood. Success was found to be closely connected to setting goals by declaring aspirations, understanding oneself, using strategies to achieve those goals, and teaching others' with learning disabilities how to be successful. Ongoing communications with parents played

a vital role in creating self-acceptance and feelings of competence, which brought about success. The success of 4 teachers with learning disabilities was closely connected to their goal of teaching and how they employed strategies to achieve their vision of success. The same themes and similar components of those themes were found throughout the 4 teachers' transcripts. A members' check validated the findings as representative of their intended meanings.

Discussion

The research study context has been derived from excerpts of verbal descriptions of the 4 teachers and through their interpretation of meanings. The context was the participants' keys to success. Suggestions were offered from ideas that emerged in the findings as a point of entry for future projects. Suggestions were made to provide further explanations and to answer the initial research questions. How do the participants describe the meanings of their success within the context of having a learning disability? How do the participants' perceptions of success influence their teaching philosophies?

The participants in this study were first diagnosed with learning disabilities during their early elementary years. At this time, they entered special education. All participants were mainstreamed with a continuum of services of supportive and resource room assistance. Of the 4 participants, 2 were taken to another location for these services while 2 spent a portion of the day in resource rooms. They exited at the end of 6th grade. It should be noted that these services were provided during the initial stages of implementation of PL 94-142; less information was available, strategies were being developed, and assessment techniques were being explored. These adults were products of this early implementation. In spite of the limited structure of special education services during this time, they succeeded in reaching their goal of teaching.

The previous chapter of findings answered research questions by using excerpts of participants' responses and interpretations of meanings. In this chapter, connections are made to the review of literature and bracketed assumptions.

From the participants' responses, success was defined as the acquisition of goals through overcoming struggles and challenges by continually doing whatever it takes for self-

improvement to make things better for self and others. Success was evident when a person achieved a balance between effort exerted in pursuit of goals and actual achievements. Becoming a success required a person to set goals, understand self, develop approaches to overcome challenges, build on support systems with ongoing communication, and encourage the success of others with learning disabilities. Sally defined success by stating, "It's all about choices.

"It is whether you are doing what you want to do."

The participants' beliefs in self were essential to their attainment of success. Self-acceptance and feelings of competence were evidenced in possessing abilities to bring about success and having optimistic views of self. The participants' goal of success transformed into their desire to encourage success in adulthood. In the process of seeking their goal, they looked for reasons for their actions. They made appropriate changes to create atmospheres conducive to success.

Their academic, social, and vocational successes were achieved through overcoming challenges. As teachers, they continually reminded their students that success may be hard to achieve, but worth the efforts. Their achievement of goals further built their confidence.

Suggestions were made for other educators to challenge students to set realistic goals, make plans to achieve goals, and continually update those plans. Participants believed that teachers should bridge the gap between success and failure by helping students develop a personal vision of success.

Influences that increased focus toward goals were perceived as threats to their self-concept or competence beliefs. Some of the participants had strong aspirations to prove negative expectations of teachers and parents wrong. Participants confirmed their potential for success by a number of different strategies.

Support from family members played a key role in their success. Systems of support and expectations contributed significantly to the participants' success. Parents were the most powerful influence in forming their healthy self-concept. Belief in their importance as a person was created, in part, from their family of origin. Therefore, educators should encourage active participation of parents in every way possible.

A primary source of participants' career choice came from a perceived negative expectation from either a teacher or parent. Participants expressed numerous negative

expectations from their teachers. When responding to questions regarding their own success, participants did not report their school environment as a primary factor in attaining success. However, when responding to questions regarding their teaching philosophy, they viewed their classroom as leading to others' success. Declaring the desire to be a teacher attributed significantly to their success. Therefore, suggestions were made that job planning should begin at earlier ages in school and at home. Life-skills courses are important but should not be the emphasis of any curriculum for students with learning disabilities.

Connections

Connecting Findings to the Review of Literature

Suggestions, resolve, and explanations were provided in this section to contribute to the field. The literature provided a source to further describe the findings by connection of the review of literature to findings in this study. Success of individuals with learning disabilities depends upon autonomy in adulthood. Therefore, the direction

of interpretation shifts in this section from the process of the attainment of success to providing explanations why success was possible for the teachers in this study.

Specifically, the insights that emerged have value for others with learning disabilities by suggesting a need for a plan of action and a need to continually update the plan. The plan of action within this dissertation was to provide information within the review of literature to connect findings in the study to others' published works. Suggestions were ideas from the findings presented for generalization to others. The narrative was designed to connect findings to the review of literature. The following are the brief descriptions of the findings.

Finding 1. Setting Goals by Declaring Aspirations

As reflected in the participants' verbal descriptions, teaching was an appropriate job choice for the participants. The participants correlated their success to their professional status as a teacher. They described teaching as a balance between efforts exerted in seeking their goal to the actual fulfillment of enjoying their achievement. Achieving their goal gave them perceptions of self as being a success.

Connections to Review of Literature. This finding was discussed in the literature in the sections on successful adults with learning disabilities and affective characteristics. Connections between social-emotional strengths and this finding were described by literature on how feelings of others have an important role in one's success (Smith, 1994). Specifically, Wiener (1987) suggested that interactions of students with both their teachers and families play a major role in guiding and building healthy adjustment in adulthood. Keogh and Becker (1973) found parents who pushed their children with learning disabilities and have high expectations of them increased their competence level.

Suggestions. Career counseling should begin at an early age in school and at home. Internships should be provided in communities. Mentors should work closely with secondary students for transition into college, work, or other endeavors. Interests of students should be explored closely to assist in early focus of plan of action. Whenever appropriate, special talent areas should be encouraged as career options.

Finding 2. Understanding Self

The participants described getting to know who they are with attitudes of high self-worth, self-love, and self-respect. They used their knowledge to develop keys to success (i.e., teaching) as they continued to strive to excel. They reported it takes persistence; patience; bouncing back from setbacks; and, most times, giving up something else of value.

The participants' lived experiences showed their increased awareness provided them grounding of their own worth and value as adults with learning disabilities. Participants reported continuing challenges, struggles, new goals, rewards, and disappointments. Self-acceptance, feelings of competence, and knowledge of effort required to succeed were described by the participants as keys to their success.

Connections to Review of Literature. This finding was strengthened by literature with a common thread throughout the readings. Specifically, this finding had a strong connection to the section on personal success and success in general. The literature on teaching with a disability provides both positive and negative information regarding this aspect.

Vogel et al. (1993) reported that adults with learning disabilities attained career success, job satisfaction, and economic reward when they have self-awareness, understanding, and acceptance of their disability. Polloway et al. (1992) revealed that adults with learning disabilities who experience good coping strategies acquire a higher quality of life.

Suggestions. The negative effect of expectations should be further researched to be generalized to others. However, current study findings are interpreted to be that a negative expectation can challenge one to strive to achieve high goals. The teachers in this study internalized the negative remarks by reframing them into challenges.

Teachers should guide students in learning how to set personal boundaries, realistic goals, and a plan of action to achieve goals. Teachers need to guide students to want to reach high goals without feelings of negative expectations. Negative expectations are interpreted to be a form of manipulation when a person does not have a sense of personal boundaries. Negativity should not be used, definitely not to challenge students.

Finding 3. Approaches to Achieve Success

The participants took control of their lives by developing plans of action to accomplish desired outcomes. Some of the participants built on their strengths, such as being a good athlete, to achieve success. In other words, they knew how success felt in one context; therefore, they used that information to succeed in other areas. All the participants used personal strategies to cope with stress and to connect and remember information in a different environment. The participants benefited from support systems that gave them strength. Regardless of the quality of educational teaching strategies, support, and other modifications from others, the participants' family support was the primary factor in helping develop their self-concept, sense of well-being, and competence beliefs. Parents were found to have contributed to their individuality and autonomy through ongoing communication. Teacher support was also a contributor to their success.

Connections to Review of Literature. Literature sections on academic, social, and personal success strengthened the findings in this study. Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1997) indicated that peers' acceptance was important in children's adjustment, but family remained the

primary source of support and continued to play a key role in building competence. Reis et al. (1997) found experiences that provided competence beliefs were built around support networks and environments where personal strengths were utilized.

Literature about academic and social self-competence was connected to this finding. The literature on success of Americans in general and success of individuals with learning disabilities had links to this finding. Balance in life has been reported throughout the literature as finding a common ground between the environment and personal beliefs and values. Specifically, connections to literature were found in the sections discussing social-emotional factors and social relationships. Much of the literature in the review was connected to this finding, as it does take self-understanding, drive, and desire to strive for success.

Valuing and using support systems influenced the teachers' success. This finding was connected to the literature as the finding confirms literature sections on social success. Literature in other sections did show all types of support networks built a sense of well-being.

Suggestions. Life-skills courses are important but should not be the emphasis of any curriculum for students

with learning disabilities. Educators should challenge students with learning disabilities through the curriculum as it helps build high levels of belief in oneself. This comes from one's self-concept and competence beliefs in possessing abilities to bring about success and in having an optimistic view of self and environment.

Educators need to work with parents and encourage them by planning activities with them involved. Parents need to be involved with their children. Counseling should be provided through the schools to increase awareness in the influence and impact parents have on their children.

Finding 4. Teaching for Success

Participants have replaced their goal to be a teacher, with a related goal, teaching students to be successful. They see this as an opportunity to transfer what they have learned about how to be successful back to their students with learning disabilities. They have confidence in their teaching skills and in their ability to transfer attitudes of competence and self-concept to students. In an effort to transfer a positive outlook to students, they self-report their also being learning disabled. Participants chose to disclose their learning disability to others because it gave them a sense of control over the disability, as well as a

sense of self. Self-disclosing their disability contributed to their overall vision of success in the classroom as a teacher. It allowed them freedom to accept help from others easily. The participants gained control over their learning disability by not just acquiring knowledge about it, but by teaching others how to acquire a vision of success.

Connections to Review of Literature. Gerber (1992)

studied a teacher with learning disabilities and reported a goodness of fit in his job selection. Keller et al. (1992) found teachers with learning disabilities were valuable to schools as good role models for students. The Gerber et al. (1992) findings revealed control was an important element in attaining success. Wittle and Philips (1998) reported poor job selection resulting from unsatisfying experiences were partially due to non-disclosure of a disability on the job. Reilly et al. (1998) found unfavorable ratings for a teacher who disclosed being learning disabled as compared to a teacher with visible signs of a disability, as the teacher with learning disability was considered an underachiever in school. The section on teaching with disabilities shows positive and negative sides of self-disclosing.

Connecting Findings to Assumptions

This study suggested factors contributing to success, which were how a goal is promoted and the goal itself. The bracketed assumptions from the model of vocational success by Gerber et al. (1990), strengthen the findings in this study. A different population was studied in this investigation (i.e., teachers with learning disabilities) than was studied in the Gerber et al. study, which allowed for variance of findings. However, interpretations and explanations of findings found many similarities to the Gerber et al. work. Rejoined to the study, the findings are strengthened by the bracketed assumptions from the Gerber et al. (1990) model of vocational success (see Table 5).

Implications for Future Research

Internalized expectations of others were turned into challenges. Self-acceptance grew to accepting the challenges and reframing these challenges into goals. Proving expectations of others wrong may be a source of motivation for individuals with learning disabilities; however, further study is needed to understand the reasons for and implications behind this source of motivation. Research also

Table 5

Current Study Connected to Assumptions (Model of Vocational Success)

Findings	Assumptions
<p><u>Interpretation 1.</u> Teachers with LD took control and had strong desires to excel.</p> <p><u>Resolve 1.</u> Teachers with LD took control by doing what it took to have a good self-concept, high competence beliefs, perseverance, and determination.</p>	<p><u>Assumption 1.</u> Successful adults with learning disabilities take control of their lives and have a strong desire to excel.</p>
<p><u>Interpretation 2.</u> Teachers with LD recognized and accepted both positive and negative aspects of disability.</p> <p><u>Resolve 2.</u> Teachers with LD used knowledge of self to stay organized and make a plan of action to work toward success.</p>	<p><u>Assumption 2.</u> Successful adults with learning disabilities recognize and accept positive and negative aspects of their disability.</p>
<p><u>Interpretation 3.</u> Teachers with LD knew how to build on their strengths and reframe to be optimistic.</p> <p><u>Resolve 3.</u> Teachers with LD used reframing skills to maintain a good attitude about self.</p>	<p><u>Assumption 3.</u> Successful adults with learning disabilities understand how to build on strengths and minimize weaknesses by an ability to interpret experiences in a positive manner.</p>
<p><u>Interpretation 4.</u> Teachers with LD had a vision of goals and worked their plan of action to achieve success.</p> <p><u>Resolve 4.</u> Teachers with LD did set realistic goals.</p>	<p><u>Assumption 4.</u> Successful adults with learning disabilities set realistic goals and take action toward these goals.</p>
<p><u>Interpretation 5.</u> Teachers with LD and teaching are a good career choice.</p> <p><u>Resolve 5.</u> Teachers with LD are good teachers.</p>	<p><u>Assumption 5.</u> Successful adults with LD have chosen a career in which they are well-suited.</p>

is suggested to explore perspectives of other adults with learning disabilities in different professions. Further research is needed to explore perspectives of student teachers with learning disabilities and to follow-up on their progress during their beginning teaching years. Gerber's (1998) follow-up study of a teacher with learning disabilities in his 2nd year of teaching revealed that he gained self-confidence in abilities to handle difficult situations. Gerber's (1992) initial study of the teacher's beginning year determined a number of issues emerged similar to the model of vocational success (i.e., goodness of fit in job selection, disclosure, teaching performance, instructional factors, support system, and advocacy). A study replicating the model of vocational success with teachers with learning disabilities should add new insight.

Research is needed to explore students' perspectives toward teachers with learning disabilities. Reilly et al. (1998) studied attitudes of college students toward teachers with or without learning disabilities or physical disabilities through the use of videotaped portrayals by one teacher. The students perceived teachers with learning disabilities who self-reported to be underachievers. Students gave higher ratings to teachers with visible signs

of a disability. It would be beneficial to gather data from principals and co-workers regarding their perceptions of teachers with learning disabilities.

Conclusion

This study suggested success is attained and maintained by having realistic, personally valuable goals and continuously updating a plan of action. Individuals with learning disabilities, who are considering teaching, may learn ways they too could gain confidence as teachers through their lived experiences. By reading about these teachers' experiences, others may validate their convictions to pursue a career in teaching students with learning disabilities. Communicating with these successful teachers with learning disabilities may provide a glimpse of what is yet to come from work in this field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Committee Letter
Of Permission to Conduct the Study

**TEXAS WOMAN'S
UNIVERSITY**
DENTON/DALLAS/HOUSTON

HUMAN SUBJECTS
REVIEW COMMITTEE
P.O. Box 425619
Denton, TX 76204-5619
Phone: 940/898-3377
Fax: 940/898-3416

September 17, 1998

Ms. Lindy Henry
Early Childhood & Special Education


Dear Ms. Henry:

Your study entitled "Perspectives of Teachers Who Were Special Education Students" has been reviewed by a committee of the Human Subjects Review Committee and appears to meet our requirements in regard to protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters obtained should be submitted to the HSRC upon receipt. The signed consent forms and an annual/final report (attached) are to be filed with the Human Subjects Review Committee at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from the date of this letter. Furthermore, according to HHS regulations, another review by the Committee is required if your project changes. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Human Subjects Review Committee at the phone number listed above.

Sincerely,



Chair
Human Subjects Review Committee

cc. Graduate School
Dr. Charlotte Keefe, Department of Early Childhood & Special Education
Dr. Lloyd Kinnison, Department of Early Childhood & Special Education

Appendix B
Consent Form

Texas Woman's University
Subject Consent To Participate In Research

Title: Perspectives of Teachers Who Were Special Education
Students

Principal Investigator: Lindy Henry 972-938-2521

Principal Advisor: Dr. Charlotte Keefe--940-898-2272

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lindy Henry at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of individuals who have received special education services for learning disabilities and who are currently special education teachers. The research will focus on what school experiences in special education influenced my current teaching practices as a special educator and my success as an adult with a learning disability. To guide the inquiry, four areas will be explored: personal traits, cognition, locus-of-control, and school experiences.

I understand that for this study, I will be interviewed regarding my experiences and perspectives of special education services for individuals with learning disabilities from both the perspective of a teacher and also as someone who received special educational services at sometime during grades K-12. I will participate in a maximum of three face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately 2 to 3 hours each with the principal investigator in a conference room style setting at a location of my choice. I understand that if the interview time will last over 3 ½ hours, I need to reschedule the interview to answer the remaining questions. The Texas Woman's University, Multiple Classroom Laboratory's Conference Room, Denton, Texas is among the available locations for my convenience. I understand all interviews will be audiotaped for transcription purposes only, and a pseudonym (assumed name) will be used in transcription.

I understand that participating in this research may involve a risk of breach of confidentiality. In order to reduce this risk, interviews will take place in a private location where confidentiality is guarded. Pseudonyms will be used on all transcriptions, audiotapes, and in the final reporting. I understand that I should not state my name, or any other individual's name during the interview audiotaping. If I inadvertently do state a name, this will be omitted from the transcription. The tapes will be stored in a locked safe in the library at the home of the principal investigator/ researcher. The tapes will be transcribed in the library and no one except the principal investigator has access to the library safe. I consent to the recording of my voice being taped and understand

that the material recorded today may be made available for the making of a verbatim transcription of my words for this study. The tapes will be erased after I have had opportunity to review my transcript for accuracy. The transcriptions will not include any identifying information. I understand my transcript will be made available to me by the researcher bringing the transcript to a location of my choice to review for accuracy for 2 days of my choosing and will pick up transcription on the 3rd day. I understand the aim of the researcher is to complete and erase tape within 30 days after each interview. I understand that I can mark "no" on the bottom of this form if I do not want to review the completed transcripts, but understand the researcher will call me prior to erasing each tape to offer me the opportunity to review the transcription of the tape. The transcriptions will not include any names or identifying information about me or any person I mention inadvertently in the taping. The transcriptions will remain locked in the researcher's library safe for a maximum of one year, at which time all transcriptions will be shredded.

Another potential risk involved in participating is emotional distress (i.e., recalling experiences and school experiences related to the discussions on my learning disability). If I do experience discomfort for this reason or any other reason, I understand that I can terminate the interview at any time. I may also choose not to answer a particular question and can stop answering questions at any point. I can ask questions at any time during the interviews. If I feel as though I need to discuss my discomfort with a professional, the principal investigator will provide me with a referral list of names and phone numbers.

I understand that participating in this research may involve physical or emotional fatigue. In order to reduce this risk, interviews will be held to a 3 ½ hour maximum. The interview should last between 2 to 3 hours, and I may choose to take breaks as needed or reschedule for shorter periods of time. No one interview should extend beyond 3 ½ hours. A comfortable & professional atmosphere of my choice is the setting for the interview. I will inform the principal investigator/ researcher if I have any discomfort. I understand that I can stop, cancel, and/ or reschedule the interview at any time. A clock will be in sight to assist with time keeping at each session.

I understand that any costs associated with my participating (i.e., transportation) will be my own responsibility. I understand that there are no rewards, remunerations, and/or incentives for being a participant.

Participation is completely voluntary and I may discontinue my participation in this study at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions about the research or about my rights as a subject, I should ask the researcher whose name and phone number appears at the top of this form. If I have questions later or wish to report a problem, I may call the researcher, Lindy Henry at 972-938-2521, the Office of Research & Grants Administration at 940/898-3377, and Dr. Charlotte Keefe, Program Director for TWU's Department of Special Education at 940-898-2272.

The researcher will attempt to prevent any problems that could happen because of this research. I should let the researcher know immediately if there is a problem. I understand, however, that TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that occur as a result of participating.

I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. I have been given a copy of the dated and signed consent form to keep.

I understand that for my convenience, the researcher, Lindy Henry, will bring each transcript to me to review for two days and pick up the transcript on the third day.

☐ Yes ☐ No I would like to review my transcription of each audiotaped interview for accuracy.

Signature of Participant

Date

The above consent form was read, discussed, and signed in my presence. In my opinion, the person signing said consent form did so freely and with full knowledge and understanding of its contents.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

No I would not like to receive a summary of the results of the study.

 Yes I would like to receive a summary of the results of this study and am listing the address to which I would like these results to be sent as follows:

Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Questions

8. Do you feel you had a good self-concept during your school years?
9. Did you have any highlights or milestones during your school years? Tell me about some experiences that impacted you.
10. Are you a success now? What experiences helped you become successful?
11. Are you a determined person?
12. Do you feel that you currently have support as a teacher? Does this effect your current teaching practices?
13. Tell me about your teaching philosophy?
14. Does your philosophy encourage children in your classroom to become successful? How?
15. You are going to make a video to help parents, administrators, and others with learning disabilities titled "customized success". What are some success intervention formulas on how to build foundations for "customized success"?

Appendix D
Definition of Terms

Definition of Terms

Approaches to achieve success—are plans of actions to accomplish desired outcomes. The approaches include lessons learned in various contexts and situations to develop personal strategies for success in different environments.

Bracketing—refers to the first step in phenomenological data analysis which sets aside preconceived well-known assumptions in the field of study.

Clusters of meanings—refers to a step in phenomenological data analysis which assists in clustering statements into themes or units of meanings. Part of the process removes repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994).

Cognition—refers to an awareness and act of knowing one's senses (e.g., reason, significance, feeling, understanding) in ways to use and process facts on conscious and subconscious levels (Lexicon Universal Encyclopedia, 1988).

Competence Belief—is one's belief that he or she possesses the abilities to accomplish tasks, achieve goals, and bring about personal success.

Descriptions in phenomenology—are (a) structural descriptions of "how" the phenomenon was experienced by the participants in the study, and (b) textural "what" was experienced descriptions (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 45-57).

Intentionality—is being conscious always of experiences, based on images, meanings, and memory (Moustakas, 1994).

Lived experience—is a term that emphasizes in phenomenological studies the importance of individual experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Personal Teaching Philosophy—includes systematic principles of guiding students, ways of recognizing strengths, and knowing best classroom practices to bring out maximum potentials in students.

Phenomenon—is the concept of unusual occurrences, miracles, and wonders experienced by individuals in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology--is a theoretical point of view studying direct experiences taken at face value as recalled by participants in a study. It is knowing factors about the existence of an actual phenomenon and trying to define it through the study of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The focus is on awareness, perceptions, and influences of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Positive Teacher Influence—In helping one feel valued as a person, a teacher's influence is positive when remarks and attitudes build confidence in one's abilities and self-image. The component includes assisting one to recognize realistic dreams and wishes which match one's strengths.

Reframing—is a positive manner of reinterpreting experiences in the internal decision making process of acknowledging and accepting strengths and weaknesses of a learning disability, and acting in ways to advance the likelihood of success (Reiff et al., 1996).

Self-determination—is taking control of one's life by making and following through with decisions and understanding and accepting strengths and weaknesses of oneself (Deci et al., 1992).

Setting goals by declaring aspirations—are the participants' verbal descriptions of their goals. Attainment of goals was their perception of being a success.

Teaching for Success—is perceived as an opportunity to transfer lessons learned from past experiences to students with learning disabilities. Teaching for success was a way the participants' transferred attitudes of competence and a healthy self-concept to their students.

Understanding Self—is beyond knowing as it represents why one acts or thinks a certain way. It included areas in the participants' lives such as creativity, moral strength, self-love, self-nurturing, sense of belonging, trust and belief in others.