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AN INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY INTO PSYCHO-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND HOW IT
VIEWS FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

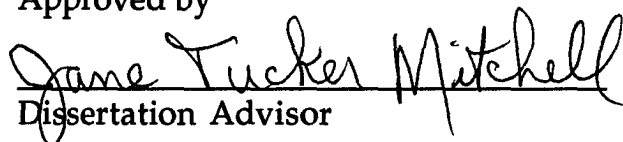
by

Patricia L. Bailey

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Approved by


Dissertation Advisor

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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BAILEY, PATRICIA L., Ph.D. An Interpretive Inquiry into Psycho-Social Development of Students with Learning Disabilities and How It Views Foreign Language Learning. (1995)
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This interpretive inquiry was undertaken to examine the psycho-social factors associated with college students who have learning disabilities. Specifically, twelve students with learning disabilities were selected for this study who were denied permission to use course substitutions for their foreign language requirement by the College of Arts and Sciences at a four year public institution. The interviewer and students became co-researchers into the psychosocial issues which lead to academic persistence and eventual success particularly in regard to learning a foreign language. Students were asked to talk about their lives as college students. Foreign language was never mentioned unless the student brought it into the conversation. Eleven of the twelve students did talk at length about the learning of a foreign language.

The questions which the students specifically addressed were: What specific psycho-social interventions do students with learning disabilities perceive as important to success in an academic environment? What are the self-perceived psycho-social strengths and weaknesses of college students with learning disabilities who have difficulty with foreign language learning? In addition, what types of counseling/teaching strategies are necessary to help

students realize their potential in foreign language learning as perceived by the students?

Foreign language learning for eleven of these students was a highly charged area which evoked a great deal of anger, frustration, and resentment. Seven of the twelve have been successful in completing at least one more foreign language course but there are lingering feelings of bitterness and indignation at being asked to complete this requirement with their specific learning disabilities. Specific pedagogical components in foreign language learning which were most important to these students are: 1) Slower pace; 2) High need for structure and predictability; 3) Repetition and review; and 4) Alternative testing. However, there is no set prescription or formula for what is required for success in the foreign language classroom. It is imperative that the student have a good understanding of their learning disability and be able to talk about their learning strengths and weaknesses in a variety of settings. They must also be willing to seek help. These students with learning disabilities often saw themselves negatively despite numerous successes when they can't do certain tasks, like foreign language, easily or efficiently. Thus, the goal for the foreign language teacher, the student and disability service provider is to make the experience of learning a foreign language energizing rather than debilitating. It is not enough to provide extended time and tutors. Strategies must be developed which help the student address their stress, anxiety, and fear of failing.

To my parents Agatha and Ernest Bailey,
and sister Donna Bailey Mackie, and daughter Thi Lynn Gallen

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This qualitative study has been a joy. First, the students gave of their time and expertise very willingly. They graced me with incredible stories of their trials and victories of being college students. There is collective wisdom and truth which they enthusiastically shared in the hope that others might reap some benefit from their experience. This study is a joint venture in trying to effect change in a system that attempts to make everyone fit the same mold. As an honor and tribute to them, there will be a pilot Spanish 101 course this coming Fall semester that incorporates a number of their suggestions for improving foreign language learning. The development of this course has been a cooperative effort by the College of Arts and Sciences, the Romance Language Department and Disabled Student Services to pool our resources and talents into designing a course which can benefit the student who learns foreign language differently. Hopefully, everyone will benefit.

The School of Education faculty have been incredibly supportive and nurturing through this process. Dr. Jane Mitchell played an instrumental role as chair of my dissertation committee. Through her dual appointment with the Department of Romance Languages in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Curriculum and Instruction Department in the School of Education,

she read and reasoned from both the pedagogical and content area perspectives. She tutored me through the extensive foreign language literature and opened my eyes to different pedagogical methods. She was particularly fascinated with the students' narratives, and winced more than once when she was reading them. I think that Dr. Mitchell has also set a new record for all doctoral committee chairpersons. She read and returned each chapter within twenty-four hours of receiving it. She is the dream of what every doctoral student wishes her/his chair to be.

Dr. Kathleen Casey conveyed keen insight into narrative research. Her classes were thought provoking and challenging. She brought deconstruction, interpretative community, and intertextuality to life. However, her real wisdom lies in the dialogue of ideas when she says, "Ah, yes! How about if you think about it this way....." She is brilliant and I want to acknowledge her insights in guiding this inquiry. She is the one who cautioned me to not mention "foreign language" when interviewing the students. Her premise was that if foreign language learning was as stressful as I supposed, then each student would bring it up on their own volition. Thus, both the voiced and unvoiced sentiments regarding foreign language became equally important. This was a pivotal point in the research and I am truly grateful to Dr Casey.

Dr. Ceola Baber's Global Education in the Curriculum classes were

intensive and interactive, but always energizing. Diversity issues were interwoven and that is where the seeds were planted for this research. She offered advice as to how to nurture and build a sense of community for different populations. Dr. Svi Shapiro guided me in the Dissertation Seminar and Interpretive Inquiry class. He consistently asked the political questions of, "What does this contribute to our social consciousness?" and, "Who is actually benefitting from this research?" Each committee member has contributed to my growth and understanding, and I look forward to continuing with them as colleagues and friends.

It has also been a joy to have companions and friends who have sustained, encouraged, and applauded me in this journey. Dr. Cherry Callahan is an understanding and supportive supervisor. Rita Maloy, Liz Shilliday, Mary Culkin, Dr. Diane Cooper, and Dr. Margaret Healy are enthusiastic colleagues. Dr. D. Michelle Irwin is one person who plays many roles for me, but the most helpful in this process has been that of mentor. She listened patiently and helped get the critic off my shoulder, so the light could shine through. She showed me how to use my wings.

For all my guides, masters, family, friends, teachers, and students,
"Namaste."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The foreign language classroom at the college or university level is for most students a unique learning environment with unique demands. Under the best of circumstances it is a place where the mastery of new verbal skills must take place through intense practice in an atmosphere of constructive pressure. It is a place where students are likely to be called upon to "perform" orally or in writing at least once per class period and usually more often. It is a place where students learn through listening and responding, in contrast to the typical classroom where the student attends a lecture and takes notes that can later be reread and reorganized, condensed and studied. In the typical classroom there is seldom anything like the pressure that exists in the foreign language classroom to produce grammatically correct utterances and to respond to correction when answers may be inaccurate. At its best, the foreign language classroom challenges students to active participation and pushes them constantly to try out newly learned material by responding to situations and challenges from the instructor and other students. It is clear that for many students foreign language courses present a difficult and demanding learning environment; for students with learning disabilities, the foreign language classroom even at its best may constitute the worst of nightmares. (Philips, Ganschow, & Anderson, 1991, p. 51).

Introduction

For growing numbers of students at the university level, the foreign language requirement is seen as a major obstacle in completing their undergraduate degree. This is particularly true for those with specific learning disabilities. Those in Offices of Disability Services have heard hundreds of stories of how demoralizing and devastating it is to try and learn

a foreign language as it is currently being taught in many institutions. The above description seems to capture the essence of what a great many students report they feel in the foreign language classroom. However, the students are not usually as rational as the above authors. It is truly a dilemma since second language learning can literally open new worlds to the student and be exciting, fun, and productive. This is a time when we are infusing ethnic and cultural studies into all disciplines and we perceive the world as a global community.

More and more universities are discovering that a significant number of students exhibit specific learning disabilities that make mastering a foreign language, even at a level of minimal competence, virtually impossible in the context of the usual college classroom. It is not at all unusual that many students are identified as learning disabled after college entry primarily *because* of their difficulties with foreign language learning. There have been several studies on predictive and diagnostic variables of foreign language disabilities and the measurement of these disabilities (Block, 1992; Gajar, 1987; Ganschow, Sparks, & Miller, 1992; Goodman, Freed, & McMannus, 1988; Sparks & Ganschow, 1993). Goodman et al., Gajar, and Block concluded from their studies that tests are not sufficient determinants of foreign language disability. The studies find it preferable to put the primary emphasis on the student's classroom experience and prior history in foreign language. Therefore, this study investigates the psychosocial factors associated with

college students who have learning disabilities. Specifically, students with learning disabilities were selected for this study who were denied permission to use course substitutions for their foreign language requirement by the College of Arts and Sciences at a four year public institution. The researcher asked these students to become co-investigators and explore the psychosocial issues which lead to academic persistence and eventual success at the college level.

Significance of the Study

The passage of legislation to protect persons with disabilities has encouraged institutions of higher education to acknowledge that something must be done to address the needs of these students. For example, in 1975 Public Law 94-142 was passed, guaranteeing all individuals with handicaps the right to a public education in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment. A second law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, assures protection for individuals with handicaps in institutions of higher education. Section 504 states that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Section 504 also mandates that *reasonable* modifications of academic requirement must be made for students with disabilities. The impact of these laws was not recognized by most colleges and universities until the mid-1980's (Vogel,

1986), and the past ten years have seen a dramatic rise in college programs and services for students with learning disabilities. (Astin, Green, Korn, Schalit, & Berz, 1988).

Just the establishment of an office to provide services to students with learning disabilities is a political act. It is a controversial arena. Every state sets its own criteria for what denotes a "learning disability." There is a definite lack of clarity in defining a learning disability. Kavale (1993) states that the lack of consensus is attributed, in part, to the complexity of the phenomenon under study, demonstrated by the absence of any single variable identified as a primary source of learning disabilities in more than 1,000 studies reviewed. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the researcher utilizes the most recently revised definition of learning disabilities from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD):

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be 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 handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction) they are not the result of those conditions or influences. (NJCLD, 1990).

The results of this study will give narrative accounts of what learning in the college classroom is like for students with learning disabilities. Specific attention will be given to learning in the foreign language classroom for these twelve college students. It is critical that university faculty and professional staff have a better understanding of how the LD population learns if the students are to have an equal chance to learn in the foreign language classroom.

Statement of the Problem

There are approximately 161,000 students with learning disabilities in post-secondary institutions nationally. This number comprises 1.3 percent of all post-secondary students in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1989). Block (1992) states that one of the issues faced by those professionals who work with this population is the question of how to help the students who come to college without the admissions requirement of a foreign language, and also how to help students who have repeatedly tried to acquire a foreign language at the high school or college level without success. Many students with learning disabilities have not been diagnosed until they encounter the college level foreign language requirement. It is the experience of the researcher in working with college students with learning disabilities over the past fifteen years, that fulfilling the foreign language requirement is the biggest road block for gaining a college degree.

There have always been some students who were virtually incapable of learning in the foreign language classroom. Philips (1991) describes these as the baffling students who would earnestly claim that they had spent extraordinary amounts of time in study and who would often produce copious evidence to prove it: meticulous notes and endless lists of vocabulary and verb endings. But when faced with a situation in the classroom that forced them to produce a coherent utterance in the target language, these students would become absolutely paralyzed, unable to say or write anything. If they did respond, it often consisted of a hopelessly garbled version of the correct response. These are the types of students who may be documented as "learning disabled."

There is research (Gajar, 1987; Ganschow & Sparks, 1991 (2), 1992, 1993 (2); Hill & Downey, 1992; Block, 1992; Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1993; Vogel & Adelman, 1993) which is beginning to address the cognitive development of college age students with learning disabilities and how it impacts their foreign language learning. Implicit in these studies is the notion that there are psychosocial issues which may contribute to the academic rise or fall of the student. Upham (1994) called for more examination of the psychosocial factors which college age students need to succeed at the postsecondary level. Olikier (1990) wrote that due to the limited research available on college level learning disabled students, the identification and synthesis of factors pertaining to these students is necessary

to enable more precise large-scale description and prediction. It is the intent of this study to describe the psychosocial needs of students who have been identified as learning disabled. More specifically, it is to look at those students who have particular difficulty with their foreign language requirement.

Research Questions

The following questions informed this inquiry into specific learning disabilities of students involved in learning a foreign language:

What specific psychosocial interventions do students with learning disabilities perceive as important to success in an academic environment?

What are the self-perceived psychosocial strengths and weaknesses of college students with learning disabilities who have difficulty with foreign language learning? In addition, what types of counseling/teaching strategies are necessary to help students realize their potential in foreign language learning as perceived by the students?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Two bodies of literature will be used to initially frame the interpretation of the data of this study. The psychosocial development of adults with learning disabilities and the research and literature of adult foreign language acquisition . Other interpretive frames are expected to emerge from the analysis of the data.

Psychosocial Development in Persons with Learning Disabilities:

Literature Overview

In studying students with learning disabilities who are most likely to achieve at the postsecondary level, McGuire and Shaw (1987) reported that significant characteristics for success were study skills and social/emotional factors, such as motivation, personal responsibility and commitment to becoming an independent learner. Mangrum and Strichart (1983) reported that personal characteristics related to college students with learning disabilities include low self-esteem, insecurity, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-confidence, over dependence on others, vulnerability, hypersensitivity, frustration, pessimism, suspicion, an inability to clarify values, immaturity, irresponsibility, self-centeredness, and defensiveness.

In a study of vocational achievement, Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1992) discovered psychosocial issues to be paramount in the success of adults with learning disabilities. In their national study of 71 successful adults, they detected a key set of themes or patterns, termed alterable variables by the researchers, to increase the likelihood of vocational success. These theoretical implications are: a strong desire to gain control of their own lives, a desire to succeed, goal-orientation, an internal reframing of the learning disabilities, persistence, the use of compensatory strategies, a goodness of fit between one's abilities and the work environment, and a social ecology of support systems.

Upham (1994) reports that social issues are being given increased attention concerning those with a learning disability, however, there is not always a clear distinction between personal issues and social issues. Overlap is often found in the literature when these topics are discussed. Mangrum and Strichart (1988) suggested that college students with a learning disability typically have difficulty with the following social issues:

- Establishing good relationships with others
- Making friends
- Working effectively with others
- Maintaining appropriate family relationships
- Reading body language and facial expressions
- Manifesting appropriate social behaviors
- Avoiding saying or doing things that are later regretted
- Knowing what to say in a situation'
- Understanding humor and sarcasm
- Engaging in "small talk"
- Maintaining appropriate personal appearance

- Relating to authority figures such as professors and advisors
- Maintaining appropriate personal space
- Anticipating the behavior of others
- Keeping appointments. (p.18)

In addition, studies by Hoffman et al. (1987) and Osman (1990), concur that the major issues of adults with learning disabilities are frustration, lack of self-confidence, the inability to control one's emotions, temper and depression. In a study of 381 adults with learning disabilities, Hoffmann et al. (1987) reported that 33% of the sample felt that talking or acting before thinking was the most frequent problem they encountered. The second and third most frequently reported problems of these adults were shyness (31%) and dating (27%). Thirty-eight percent of service providers viewed adults with learning disabilities as being dependent upon others. An indication of the dependency factor for adults with learning disabilities was cited in a study by Rogan and Hartman (1990) who purported that even though 79% of the individuals were living independently, they all "consulted with family members regarding major purchases, income management, and complex reading. The family support systems have been and certainly continue to be vital factors in the lives of these individuals" (p. 101).

Putnam's (1984) research of college students with learning disabilities supports a failure syndrome which is perpetuated by fear of mediocrity, fear of failure, and fear of success. Gerber's et al. (1990) work cited that this condition only worsens in adulthood. Over one quarter of the one hundred thirty three

adults responded that they felt their learning disability worsened in adulthood. Gerber believes that the major problems may stem from increasing demands of their work and daily routines and result in a greater dependency on others.

Thus, learning disabilities affect adults not only in academic settings, but may also affect the workplace and home. Ryan and Price (1992) agree that "both the literature and our experience clearly agree that psychosocial problems are critical hurdles if adults with learning disabilities are to accomplish their goals in the work place, at home, in social settings, and in school" (p. 15). Just as students with learning disabilities function better when they understand the reasons for their academic problems, they also need to be aware of the emotional ramifications of their disability. What other students learn naturally and take for granted, students with learning disabilities often do not learn and need to be taught. Similarly, they must be taught strategies for coping with psychosocial issues.

Foreign Language Acquisition: Literature Overview

In the area of learning disabilities and foreign language learning, researchers have studied the affective and cognitive domains in an effort to understand why students with learning disabilities have had such difficulty. Block (1992) stated that the literature has focused on predicting which characteristics are likely to produce poor language learners, and on the

examination of policies and procedures for dealing with the foreign language requirement on college campuses. Recent research has focused on the connection between native language problems and difficulty learning a foreign language.

Ganschow and Sparks (1993) posit that foreign language difficulties are caused by Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH) in the native language rather than affective variables. Sparks et al. (1993) hypothesize that students with LD and others who have difficulties learning a foreign language may have basic native language problems in the phonological, syntactic, and/or semantic "codes" that impact on learning a foreign language. These researchers base their hypothesis upon reading disabilities research by Velluntino and Scanlon (1986) who studied the role of the linguistic "codes" - phonology, syntax, and semantics - in good and poor readers. Most poor readers have difficulty with phonology and syntax but not semantics. Sparks, Ganschow, and Javorsky (1993) have hypothesized that most poor foreign language learners have particular difficulty with the phonological code of language and concomitant problems with syntax, but most do not exhibit semantic difficulties.

The LCDH is conceptually similar to Carroll and Pimsleur's views of foreign language aptitude. Carroll (1962, 1990) proposes that there are four variables important for foreign language learning: (1) phonetic coding (ability to recognize, learn, and remember the sound of a language and their

symbols); (2) grammatical sensitivity (ability to make judgments about the grammatical relations of sentences); (3) inductive language learning (ability to infer rules governing language); and (4) rote memory (ability to quickly learn large numbers of phonetic and grammatical associations). These four variables form the basis for the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll and Sapon, 1959).

Pimsleur and his colleagues (1965) wrote that "underachievers" in a foreign language have particular difficulty with "auditory ability," i.e. skill in discriminating sounds, associating sounds with written symbols, sequencing sounds, and memory for sounds and symbols. Gajar (1987) and Goodman, Freed, and McMannus (1988) have used the MLAT more recently and discovered conflicting results. Gajar detected that the fourth and fifth subtest are moderately related to success in foreign language for students at Penn State. However, Goodman, Freed, and McMannus (1988) led researchers to the conclusion that the MLAT is not adequate to determine foreign language learning disability with students at The University of Pennsylvania. They wrote that the emphasis should be placed on the students' experiences in the foreign language classroom and prior language history. Block and Burke (1989) surmised that classes where no one has any prior knowledge of the language help the LD student to feel more competent than classes where some students already have a background in the language (p. 12).

There have been many studies undertaken in the field of language acquisition. The literature is saturated with information on techniques, variables that affect learning, and theories that have been developed (Bialystok & Frohlich, 1978; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Skehan, 1989). Much has been written on learner differences and how they can be addressed in the foreign language classroom. Horwitz (1990) states that learner differences can generally be broken down into cognitive, personality, and affective domains. These variables refer to the way that individuals process information and interact with the learning environment. Krashen and Terrell (1983) claim that adults have two distinct ways of developing competence in second languages (L2). The first way is via language acquisition which is using language for real conversation. For a large part, this is subconscious. The second way to develop competence in L2 is by language learning. Learning refers to "explicit" knowledge of rules, being aware of them and being able to talk about them. "Implicit" knowledge would come from language acquisition. In Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis, he states that when we produce utterances in a second language, the utterance is "initiated" by the acquired system, and our conscious learning only comes into play later (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 30).

There has been great interest in what makes successful learners successful and what factors impede the learning process of other learners.

Brown (1987) explains that there are hypotheses concerning the importance of the field dependent/independent dimension to foreign language acquisition. One hypothesis is that field independence is important in a classroom setting that involves analysis, attention to details, and the mastering of information through exercises, drills and other structured activities. Field independent individuals are thought to be independent, competitive and self-confident. The other, and Brown believes conflicting, hypothesis is that field dependent individuals will be successful in attaining communicative competence. Field dependent individuals are thought to be more empathetic and aware of the thoughts and feelings of others. Brown concludes that both styles are important to foreign language learning.

In looking at anxiety, Tobias (1986), Horwitz (1988), and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) posit that foreign language anxiety is different or separable, from general anxiety. This could explain the low correlation between general anxiety and foreign language proficiency.

Vygotsky (1962) was a Soviet psychologist who perceived learners as being imbedded in a social matrix or context. He wrote that human behavior cannot be understood independently of this matrix. He also viewed language as the most important psychological tool. He described language as an agent to free us from our immediate perceptual experience and allow us to represent the unseen, the past, and the future. Thinking and language are dynamically related; comprehending and producing language are processes

that transform, not merely influence, the process of thinking. Vygotsky supports the belief that development can be understood only by looking directly at the process of change, not at a static moment in history. The process is more important than the product. It is important to be looking at the full spectrum of the life of a college student with a learning disability and not just his/her experience in the foreign language classroom.

Blatt (1992) and Brown and Campione (1986) are targeting important research issues. It is critical that students with learning disabilities be studied as learners in a variety of classroom settings. "It is also important that we begin to investigate specific academic domains to assess what it is that must be learned. Until we look beyond the deficits of individuals to the settings in which they learn, it will be hard to provide much more than accommodation. For many students that will never be enough" (Block, 1992, p. 21). It is also critical that students be enlisted as co-researchers and not viewed as "objects" to be studied.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This is a qualitative study where narrative and interpretive inquiry are the primary tools for constructing meaning. Interpretive studies begin from the perspective that the setting under investigation is contextually bound, the realities of the people in the setting are multiple and constructed, there is an inseparable relationship between the knower and known, and inquiry is always value-laden (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These assumptions guide the development of an emergent research design which will ultimately provide a "thick description" of the setting and the perspectives of the participants in that setting (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As part of educational research, collective stories are one vehicle in which to use our skills and privileges to give voice to those whose narratives have been excluded or not heard in the academy. As Richardson (1990) states, writing collective stories enlists our informed imagination, as we convert private problems into public issues, thereby making collective identity, and collective solutions possible. However, from this perspective, the educator speaks as a narrator, a person with a point of view; an embodied person responsible for his or her words (Richardson, 1990, p. 27).

Personal Perspective

In light of the above, I feel compelled to speak of some of my experience which informs this writing. Catherine Bateson (1989) begins *Composing A Life* with, "This is a study of five artists engaged in that act of creation that engages us all--the composition of our lives. Each of us has worked by improvisation, discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (Bateson, 1989, p. 1). Bateson captures the relevancy and passion that narrative research holds for me. There is a richness and aliveness in the research which gives it a life of its own. Bruner (1987) states that narratives structure perceptual experience, organize memory, and give purpose to the events of a life. It was just for that reason that Catherine Bateson wrote *Composing a Life* . "It started from a disgruntled reflection on my own life as a sort of desperate improvisation in which I was constantly trying to make something coherent from conflicting elements to fit rapidly changing settings" (Bateson, 1989, p. 3).

I would like to argue that it is for similar reasons that I am pursuing narrative research for my doctoral dissertation. I am acting upon the assumption that I am to choose a burning issue about which I would like more clarity. In my professional life, I work with students who have physical and learning "disabilities" and find that I frequently listen to students as they are trying to find solutions to their dilemma(s). By far, the most time and

energy is spent on helping students meet their foreign language requirement. I have heard hundreds of stories of how demoralizing and devastating it is to try and learn a foreign language. At the same time, I am convinced that most students are able to learn another language. (That statement is a paper for another time.) Thus, we have conflicting elements and lots of improvisation to meet the changing demands for these particular students.

From prior experience and research, I know that there are standardized test scores for achievement, intelligence, and aptitude which I can compare and contrast with current and past grades in various subject areas to help predict the success of students in foreign language. I know that there are placement tests and learning style inventories and supplemental instruction techniques which can be utilized as part of the treatment in the research design. However, the heart of what I want to address in my dissertation are the psycho-social issues of these students when they are learning a foreign language. It appears that their "fear of failing" and/or "anxiety" immobilizes them. I repeatedly hear, "but you don't understand what this does to me." I see narrative research as a vehicle to address this psycho-social dimension in learning and that indeed it may help me to understand.

In order for you to have a little more sense of who I am, I would like to share some of my personal philosophy about working with students who have disabilities. I find the students are an exciting, capable, and innovative group of persons who can contribute to the total life of the university

community. I see my job as enabling students to fully participate in every aspect of the campus community while ensuring their academic success. I see myself as a developmental educator who values the diversity that these students bring to campus. I am also a political creature who demonstrates, lobbies, and protests inequality wherever I find it. I am a feminist who cares deeply about injustice and work for the political, social, and economic equality of the sexes regardless of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or ability. With these perspectives, I struggle to maintain a sense of what is "fair" and "reasonable" when it comes to accommodations for students with learning disabilities. I see myself as a "people-person," someone who has good interpersonal communication skills, yet, I cannot "know" what it feels like to have a specific learning disability. I yearn for wisdom which would help bridge the growing chasm between some students with learning disabilities and foreign language learning.

Through my asking students to tell about "their life as a college student," I expect each student to reflect upon and describe his/her perceptions, ideas, images, and feelings about his/her self as learner -- especially in the foreign language classroom. Denzin (1989) states that narratives situate the person in specific "social, economic, cultural, structural, and historical" contexts, and uncover "forces that shape, distort, and otherwise alter problematic lived experiences" (p. 75).

Since I am part of the support environment for the majority of the students to be interviewed, there is a sense in which I am part of the "interpretive community." Therefore, I have access to the students and some level of trust is already established prior to the interviews. This "intersubjectivity of shared experience" (Denzin, 1989, p. 27) will help me make meaning out of the "stories" told. The Personal Narratives Group cautions us:

Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters "outside" the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them. (Riessman, 1993, p. 22)

Therefore, I believe that the pre-existing relationship of the researcher with the students may be viewed as an asset to the study. There were a variety of prior contacts which covered a full spectrum of emotions and verbal exchanges. Both the students and the interviewer will be informed and make new meanings from the context of the interviews and this study.

Co-researchers:

The twelve students selected for this project are all college students with learning disabilities who have been denied course substitutions for their foreign language requirement. The students were told that they were being

asked to be part of the study because of their expertise with learning disabilities. No mention of the denial for a foreign language substitution was ever made. The rationale for this thinking was that if foreign language learning was such a "hot issue" for these students then they would bring the topic up of their own volition without any prompting from the interviewer. If they did not mention it, then that was also significant information for the study. Once the student mentioned the topic of foreign language learning, then the interviewer was free to explore his/her feelings on the topic.

Six of the students have been successful in passing at least one more semester of a foreign language after having been denied the substitution. The other six students have not yet been successful in completing a foreign language course. The rationale for selecting these particular students is that all were denied course substitutions but some were successful and some were not. I need to note that I feel all of the students are leading successful lives. It is just that the foreign language requirement is giving these twelve and particularly the six who were not successful a very difficult time.

The researcher's stance is one of "Help me understand." The primary question is: "Tell me about your life as a student." Additional questions or probes are: "Describe yourself as a student."; "What would you most like people to understand about you?"; and/or "How do you cope with difficult situations?" The students are collaborators with the researcher. They are the experts on their own lives and through this project are forming a community

where we can start to make meaning and interpret their experience in the foreign language classroom. It is a collective effort to explore the students various methods of learning and how it affects their psycho-social development.

Component I: Interview

The primary method for collecting this information is private interviews with each of the twelve students. The interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half in a comfortable and private space for the student. Some were in the students' homes while others were in the interviewer's office after hours. Permission was granted by each student for an audio-tape of the interview. Each student was given a typed copy of the transcription for his/her review and comments to be returned to the interviewer.

Component II: Questionnaire

In addition, a post-interview questionnaire was given to each student so that basic demographic, health, family history information, and post-interview reflections could be obtained. Personal and familial understandings of learning disability diagnosis are included on the questionnaire.

Component III: Co-researchers interview Researcher

While doing the transcribing and analyzing the data, it became evident that the researcher has a voice and experience with the co-researchers. Assumptions and decisions were being made for a collective narrative but the

co-researchers needed a time to interview the researcher and check their perspectives with her. Therefore, a night was set aside in the Student Center for the students to collectively interview the researcher. As is turned out, two students interviewed me on separate evenings.

Interpretation and Analysis Procedures:

The transcribed interviews, post-interview questionnaire, and student interview of the researcher are the primary basis for the interpretive inquiry. Interpretation and themes emerge as the data are examined. This information concerns assumptions, thoughts, and feelings about the self in relation to learning and particularly to learning a foreign language. The researcher looks for patterns of agreement and commonalties or contrasts among the narratives. These themes are compared and contrasted with the information in the literature and serve as a guide to the researcher. A framework is constructed which allows initial ideas and concepts to arise. Interpretive analysis and theory building are an interactive, living process that is on-going.

Riessman (1993) proposes that the anticipated response to the work inevitably shapes what gets included and excluded and in the end the analyst creates a metastory. The values and theoretical commitments of the researcher shape the narrative and we thus end with a hybrid version of what was re-collected by the tellers.

Two studies particularly influence this translation of the students' narratives. Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg's (1992) study of 71 successful adults with learning disabilities who have attained vocational success is extremely beneficial as the authors purpose is to identify the patterns which fostered the adults with learning disabilities vocational achievement. These patterns form a model of success based on internal decisions and external manifestations. The authors intent was to emphasize the potential for significant achievement rather than focus on limitations of learning disabilities. Reiff et al. anticipated that this work might serve as a foundation for instructional adaptations in serving postsecondary students with learning disabilities. The seed is planted. The driving factor underlying the success of these 71 adults was an effort to gain control of their lives. The authors perceive that there are internal decisions such as a desire to succeed, goal-orientation, and an internal reframing of the learning disability which motivates each of the adults. In addition, there are external manifestations which help the adults to adapt to their environment. These external manifestations are typified by persistence, learned creativity, a goodness of fit between one's abilities and the work environment, and a social ecology of support systems.

I read the narratives for this dissertation with the categories or variables that Reiff et al. used for their population. Notations and illustrations were made from the students' stories. This helped to organize and structure some

of the student's experience, but the categories did not begin to encompass all of the student's feelings or experiences. The developmental differences in age needed to be addressed. The students in this inquiry are about the business of composing an adult self and it actually consumes a great deal of their life as a college student. Thus an entire chapter is created to address this issue in this inquiry.

Another concern became that the Reiff et al. model appears more hierarchial in nature. The authors' noted that there is an interactive relationship which enhances the efficacy of the decision-making process but that it does vary from person to person. Developmentally, the college students are very eclectic and trying out new roles. Patterns that worked for one "successful" student didn't necessarily match another "successful" pattern. A metaphor was needed which could allow for more diversity in building a profile of a "successful" learner. Thus, the metaphor of the web evolved. There are numerous strands or threads which create a variety of patterns or shapes to describe a "successful" student.

The second study which informed this analysis came from a presentation at a Qualitative Research Conference in Athens, Georgia. Rennie and Brewer (1987) interview 10 individuals who have great difficulty in completing a thesis and 6 students who had relatively little difficulty. A structure of categories is created using grounded theory method of qualitative analysis. Control over the thesis is the core category and is supported by the

two properties of dependence-independence and structuring the task. The latter property is subsequently supported by project meaningfulness, political expertise, and time management. While reading about students who blocked or became stymied in writing their dissertation, I saw some correlation with students who were blocked or stymied in their foreign language learning. I again read the student's narratives using Rennie & Brewer's categories. There was some overlap with Reiff et al.'s categories and gradually, the following threads or strands emerged: autonomy, self-efficacy, meaningfulness of the foreign language, persistence, turning points, creativity, and use of support network.

Other categories or framework could emerge from these narratives, but this is one translation which I hope adds to the academy's understanding of learning in the foreign language classroom.

Assumptions:

The researcher believes that attempts to remain "objective" and "neutral" is impossible and, perhaps, fraudulent. The researcher will strive for a "relational analysis" as described by the Popular Memory Group. "What is most important is neither the "objective" (structure) nor the "subjective" (culture), but the relationship between them; neither past nor present, but the relationship between them, neither dominant memory nor commonplace understandings, but the relationship between them" (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p. 211).

The basic idea is to use as much text, context, and subjective information to help make meaning for a particular interpretation or framing. Casey (1993) states that "factual disparities" or discontinuities between structural and cultural readings become, in the Popular Memory Group's alternative epistemology, sources of valuable insight, not problems of distortion (p.12).

The validity of narrative research lies in what is discovered, unearthed, or "constructed" by each participant in the process. Clark & Holquist (1984) have remarked, in relationship to Bakhtin's work, "We are all authors, creators of whatever order and sense our world can have" (p. 348). Collaborators can maximize their interpretations when evidence can be provided by the teller's accounts and alternative interpretations are presented. This makes the research more plausible and persuasive. In addition, credibility is increased when the participants are given the written scripts back and are asked to offer their insights and suggestions thereby strengthening the validity of the study.

CHAPTER IV

COMPOSING A PROFILE

Introduction

The academic community needs to look beyond the “deficits” of individuals to the settings in which they are learning, before we can provide much more than accommodation (Blatt, 1982; Brown & Campione, 1986, Oliker, 1990, Block, 1992, Upham, 1994). What do we know about the lived experience of students with learning disabilities? What motivates them? What undermines their self-confidence? What impedes learning? What makes learning a foreign language such a daunting task? To begin this work, it is important that the reader have a sense of the collective profile of the students involved in this study.

Constructing self

First and foremost, these twelve students are engaged in a creative act of composing an adult self. Contemporary views of identity development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966, 1980, 1987, 1991) tell us it is a lengthy and complex process. It is done in bits and pieces starting with attachment in infancy and continuing throughout the life span. What makes adolescence such a vortex for identity issues is that for the first time individuals are physically, cognitively, and socially mature enough to synthesize their lives

and pursue a viable path toward adult maturity (Santrock, 1994). Like others their age, the students in this study are busy finding their place in adult society exploring issues of work, love and identity. It is significant to note, therefore, that in their narratives these young people express a fervent need, want, desire to be seen as "normal," as no different from any typical student. And, indeed, they are.

These twelve students are in the thick of constructing their own identities and are seeking a balance that places them squarely in the middle of the continuum of normalcy. The fact that they happen to have a specific learning disability is, in the narratives, only one small fraction of who they are and what they want to become. One student summarizes:

I'm rather normal. I have very good abilities, with lots of the other applications. As long as I can use those -- capitalize on those -- I do very well. ...It's not like I'm abnormal. It's kind of like, I'm different, like everyone's different from one another, or can be different and that my differences are noted by my "disability". It's basically just a notation of difference.

However, this "notation of difference" can undermine a healthy sense of self. No matter how the students try to minimize the impact of their learning disability, they expend tremendous energy trying to appear "normal." This can be a real challenge when individuals know that they learn differently from their peers. Often schools see the *student* as the problem, rather than the delivery of instruction as not matching the learner. Students recount that they were told that they "needed to apply themselves," "stop daydreaming," or to "try harder." When the products of their efforts to learn did not match

standardized skill expectations, they were told they had “low motivation,” even though they were working diligently. These “tape recordings” are buried deep in their selves and become core beliefs.

Hindsight

Seven of the students completed all of their K-12 schooling not knowing that they had what others would label as a *learning disability*. One young man began his interview with a disclaimer that he did not know he had a learning disability in high school. He says:

I didn't know that I was learning disabled. I had little hints here and there. Some things were bothersome. I failed at English while I excelled at other things. I failed at languages while I excelled at other things. That always confused me. It was upsetting to know the material and not be able to spit it out.

Because this student was not able to complete two years of foreign language in high school, he was admitted to the university with an entrance deficiency in foreign language. He took Spanish 101 pass/fail and squeaked by but says, “I was happy. It was like making a little peg to cling on to the next one.” It was after two unsuccessful attempts at Spanish 102 that his parents suggested he be tested for a learning disability since his younger sister had just been diagnosed. With the diagnosis of a learning disability, he is now able to put more of his learning difficulties into perspective.

Another student, who was not identified as learning disabled until his fourth year in college, remembers not doing well in high school literature

courses. He read the material but could only remember "bits and pieces".

"Sometimes I felt like I just didn't understand it enough to learn from it or that other students were reading something different from me." This student has a diagnosis of a learning disability for two years now and says,

I don't know that I fully understand my disability. I might need to read something three or four times before I really understand it. It's just my reading and comprehension skills are weak.

Denial

This young man has not disclosed his learning disability at work. He reflects the feeling that many students with learning disabilities have -- that they must hide their disability. If somebody gives him something to read and expects him to remember things from it, he goes back to it and looks over it a couple of times. "I do that on my own and try and not make it public knowledge to everybody. ...Besides maybe they're doing the same thing or have been around it long enough that they don't have to do it from the start." He also reflects the notion that this must be how everybody does it -- This is "normal." Even after the fact that he has completed a college degree and has a recent an LD diagnosis, does not change his need to perceive of himself as a regular guy. And he is "regular," but he also processes written language differently and needs more time to decode it. The learning disability is an integral part of who he is. This young man reflects the feeling that many students with learning disabilities have -- that they must hide their disability.

This student is not alone in choosing to remain "closeted." Most of the

students prefer to remain private about their learning disability. One offered his opinion that he did not want to “wear it on his sleeve” as if he were a “victim.” Another student related an encounter with a young woman he had occasionally dated while he was standing in line to preregister for classes. He had his registration card stamped by “Disabled Student Services” so that he could get priority registration. According to the student he was tremendously embarrassed by her response and has not said much about his learning disability since then.

She goes, 'DSS? What's that?' And I go, 'Disabled Student Services.' She's like, 'Really? You're disabled?' I'm like, 'Well, yeah, I've got a learning disability. It's dysgraphia. It's nothing major. My handwriting comes out scrawled.' She goes, 'It's so good that you've been able to overcome your difficulties and that you've come so far.' And I'm like, 'I don't have a problem. I don't have a problem. DSS is for people that have problems. I'm just kind of here for the registration thing.'

The embarrassment of being “found out” or seen as being different is humiliating. According to the majority of the students, most would rather take a lower grade in a course rather than be treated differently. One young woman stated, “I’m very private about it in that I guess to me I expect much more of myself. I just generally don’t talk about it [LD] and sometimes I forget about it.” She repeated that same theme again in her post-interview questionnaire, “I don’t tell many of my professors about my LD because I don’t want them thinking I need special treatment or am asking for it. I am going to make the grade on my own effort. I don’t want an instructor to feel sorry for me and give me a grade.” They have internalized that *they* are the ones who

must accommodate the system, not that the system has failed to accommodate them.

Remember that all of the individuals interviewed are 20 to 30 years old. They are not in the adolescent identity formation stage (Erikson, 1968) but are well along in their path to adult maturity. This does not mean that their identity is fixed. A person who develops a healthy identity is flexible, adaptive, and open to changes in society, relationships, and in careers. This openness assures numerous reorganizations of identity features throughout the life of the person who has achieved identity (Santrock, 1994).

These young adults are in the process of synthesizing their identity. diagnosed with learning disabilities. They are juggling numerous negations and affirmations of who they are. This is not unlike the genetic difference between males and females. Both genders share 22 pairs of chromosomes that are identical. It is the last pair of chromosomes that determine gender and gender greatly influences how the individual is treated by society. The same is true for race. We are far more alike in what makes us members of the human species than we are different. The physical features that distinguish us (skin color, shape of the eyes, etc.) account for only 5% of our make up. Yet race, like gender, elicits "predictable" responses of "others" in our society. Students with learning disabilities find the same response that Ryan (1976) calls "blaming the victim." Is it any wonder that students are hesitant about disclosing their learning disability?

Depression

According to Weinberg, McLean, Snider, & Nucklos (1989) and Maag & Behrens (1989), depression is truly a prevalent condition among the learning disabled population. The percentages vary from 22% (Maag & Behrens, 1989) to 64% (Weinberg et al., 1989). This trend is demonstrated in this inquiry as five students (42%) report depression or temper outbursts. Three of these students were not diagnosed as learning disabled until college. It may be for these three students that not having a diagnosis caused them to internalize their frustration. Now these three, as well as the other nine students, are experiencing a major shift in identity.

Many professionals point out that specific cognitive deficits and their related psycho-social problems do not disappear with age. These psycho-social issues may have a greater impact on the lives of adults with learning disabilities in slightly different forms such as depression and negative behaviors and feelings (Cruickshank, Morse, & Johns, 1980; Gerber, 1991; Maag & Behrens, 1989b; Renick & Harter, 1989).

"Bad anxiety attack" is how one student describes the start of his learning disability diagnosis. "I've always had trouble with depression." This student feels that he is learning to live with the depression but would like to be off medication at some time in the future. He feels that he needs it for as long as he is in school as it helps him focus.

A woman student feels her temper affects her relationships with

roommates and co-workers. Within the first five minutes of the interview, she was talking about the difficulty she has in keeping roommates. "I guess in a way, I'm hard to live with. My roommate says that I am nit-picky." After reciting a litany of examples, this student proceeds to say she has learned to "temper my temper."

I kind of put myself in time out. I remove myself from the situation until I can cool down and be able to stop the yelling. I will come back when I can talk about it calmly and openly and express true feelings. Like, I feel angry or feel upset instead of actually showing those feelings.

This student does not feel that her temper affects her classroom behavior except for a personality clash with one professor. This is the student's perception but as a service provider, a suspicion remains that her high frustration level with her attention deficit may contribute to her outbursts.

The positive note is that as these students are coming into adulthood, they are learning effective coping strategies to deal with their learning disability and thus reduce some of their frustration level. Therefore, it is necessary for service providers to include services that address psycho-social issues with their students.

Time of exploration

College age youth are all involved in defining who they are and wrestling with identity and commitment issues. Erikson's (1968) phrase of "identity crisis" has been modified by Marcia (1980, 1991) to be more a period of identity development during which the adolescent is choosing among

meaningful alternatives. Most researchers now use the term exploration rather than crisis (Santrock, 1995). These students with learning disabilities are just as much involved in this exploration as any other young adult. Archer (1989) proposes that individuals who develop positive identities follow a common pattern of "MAMA" cycles, cycles of *moratorium-achiever-moratorium-achiever*. These cycles can occur throughout life (Francis, Fraser, & Marcia, 1989). The individual with a learning disability diagnosis in college may create such a cycle.

An example of the "MAMA" cycle is illustrated by one student who compares his freshmen and senior experience with French. As a freshmen he said that he just wanted some help and understanding, but when he approached the instructor she seemed cold and detached. "As a freshman you think yeah, it's time for me to take responsibility, so you don't ask for help from the teacher and I just got further and further behind and frustrated." He couldn't remember the exact history of his foreign language sequence at his first institution. He attempted French at least three times and only passed 101.

This student then transferred to this institution and waited two years before he attempted French 102. "Just because of the frustration and everything else, I didn't attempt it. I just took time off; just concentrated on my other courses; and just didn't deal with it." In the summer of his senior year, he failed 102 then passed with a D- in the following Fall term. It was at this point that he went for a learning disability assessment. He attempted 203

in the Spring and withdrew.

I sat in that class and spent so much time doing the homework and not even doing a very good job at it; just straining in class and trying to take in every word and not being able to keep up. ...The frustration level just reached a point where I had to look for alternatives.

After receiving the LD diagnosis, he applied for a course substitution but was denied. The committee felt that he needed to try foreign language with support services before they could make a decision about the course substitution.

In order to graduate, this student chose to go to summer school at another institution for French 203 and 204 so that the grades would not be averaged into his cumulative average. He could not afford another failure or barely passing grade. A reasonable alternative was to go elsewhere for foreign language in order to meet his commitment to graduate. He did elect to disclose his disability to the instructors and engaged in supportive relationships with the instructors and tutor. It had taken him five years to get to this point of being comfortable about discussing his learning strengths and weaknesses and asking for help and guidance.

Finally, this student paid a large price for this growth. He recounted feeling lots of guilt, embarrassment, and loss of pride for taking so long to finish college. He went straight to work after graduation and never claimed his diploma. His mother had it framed and kept it for him. It took him a year to want to own it. "I just picked it up a couple of months ago and put it on my

wall at work. Finally, I'm a little more proud of it."

This student spends five years going through the "MAMA" cycle of exploring alternatives. He attempts French but isn't always successful. He takes two years off, trying to ignore the consequences. His commitment to the goal is vague. By his fifth year, he has his commitments well defined and is able to achieve his goal. Students with learning disabilities in addition to needing more time for cognitive processing, also need more time for commitment and identity development issues.

I have other things to do!

Chickering (1969) writes in *Education and Identity* that college students encounter strains, seductions, hypocrisies, opportunities, and dead spots in higher education. This is certainly true for these students. All are struggling with negative feelings about themselves and the institution. How these students experience "the institution" is very diverse. Most have a positive affiliation for the university, yet harbored strong feelings of resentment toward "the administration" that denies them the course substitution. Some perceive this decision as "making their life hell." One woman graduate reiterated, "I really hate the university for making my last year in school that way."

Yes, we know you have a disability but we don't want to tell you that you can't learn this so we're going to give you the opportunity to try. Well, shit, I've been trying for the last three years. I don't care. I know that if I had all the time in the world and this was the only thing, then I assume I could learn this. But it's not and I have other things to do. But they didn't want

to hear that. I'm still very mad about that.

She works so hard during the week that when weekends come, she just shuts the books and leaves town. "I mean it was so bad that I couldn't even stand this place or to stay and look at this campus." What she is angry about is very specific -- the foreign language requirement. She still feels positive about the university itself.

I really enjoyed college and I don't regret anything that I did and I feel like that I'll never be one of the 40 year old women who looks back and regrets that she didn't do something. I did pretty much all of it. I really enjoyed it. So, I'm really proud that I graduated from U.

Why does the foreign language requirement anger so many of these students? For most, the answer is that it takes too much time away from their other studies, from the commitment part of identity formation. They expend great effort and are rewarded for it by being told to "do it again." A student who has made the Dean's List says,

They are punishing me for passing the first level of Spanish. That's how I feel about it. I passed the first level of Spanish 102, by a very slim margin, and my teacher wrote that she felt it would be detrimental for me to go further. Then they said no, 'He's gotta keep going.' I question whether they even read the report.

The effort required for foreign language takes time away from what they care about most, what they have chosen as a career path. For some it means giving up their dream and selecting a major that does not require

intermediate foreign language. For one, it meant reluctantly leaving the institution even though he loves the English Department.

I can't face the Latin or foreign language requirement. I was denied twice or three times, you know. I would say that this university has the best English department that I have encountered. It's just tops! I wish I had stuck with it now but it's all over and done with.

They don't mind the hard work and effort required. They mind foreign language being made more important than investing time in their major and that it ruins their GPA.

There are complex issues involved in making a successful transition to adulthood. This occurs at the same time they are making a transition from high school to college. These young adults are in the process of separating from families and constructing an identity for themselves. The issues of constructing a sense of self, hindsight, denial, depression, exploration, and other agendas have just been discussed. It's time to look at the profiles of these students from the standpoint of family expectations, timing of LD diagnosis, length of time in college, language choices, and their use of support services.

Family Expectations

All twelve students in this study are white. This is not unusual since historically there is an under-represented number of minority students who have a learning disability diagnosis (Jarrow, 1990). The men and women in this study range in age from twenty to thirty years old. All come from middle

class families. Three are recent graduates, seven are seniors, and two are juniors. Only one student is the first person in her family to go to college.

All of the students report that their families expected them to go to college. As one student explains:

I was never pressured into going [to college] by any means, but it was always understood from family background. Most of my relatives -- grandparents, parents, had gone. It was just kind of understood. So it wasn't a question of if I'd go to school. It's where I'd go to school and what I'd study. Those were the two biggest questions.

These students' own plans for life after high school correspond to those of their parents. One woman says, "I never really thought about what I would do if I didn't go to college. I didn't think I would have a chance if I didn't go to college, so I always expected to go." One young man reports that his mother had to bribe him to go to kindergarten with the promise that when he got to college he would be able to read all the books that he wanted.

I've always wanted to come to college. I've wanted to come to college since I was in kindergarten. My Mom bribed me. She said I didn't want to go to school. I hated going to public school because it was a waste of my time. ...She said, "Well, keep going to school (I remember her saying this) and eventually when you go off to college, you can do all the reading you want."

According to their narratives, these students were unclear in selecting a major and identifying a career path. Two chose to start with a community college experience and then transfer to a four year institution. One student recalls:

I went to a community college first when I got out of high school. That was just because I had to go to school. A lot of my friends were going to college and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I wanted to major in once I got to college but I didn't know what I wanted to go to work in either, so college seemed like the best thing to do.

Two others started at a university and realized that a community college experience better met their needs. The atmosphere at the community college seemed friendlier to most of these students. The smaller class size helped, and having classes meet every day spurred their learning. One student describes this experience, "You learned more in class and were expected to learn less at home." With hindsight, this student wished he had waited to go to college. "If I had it to do again, I wouldn't have gone when I did. I wasn't ready." None of the others expressed a feeling that going to college when they did had been a mistake.

Timing of LD Diagnosis

An early diagnosis of the disability enables the college student with a learning disability to have the time to adjust to the disability and develop academic coping strategies (Oliker, 1990; Shaywitz & Shaw, 1988). All the students in this study claim that they knew they had problems in secondary school, but only five students had a diagnosis prior to entering college.

Oliker (1990) states that it is probable that the severity of the disability influences the date of diagnosis. Students having more severe manifestations should result in earlier identification. However, the

availability of appropriate resources for LD identification also influences the date of diagnosis. Socioeconomic status and rural schools could preclude an earlier diagnosis. Olikier (1990) also points out that students with reading disabilities were more likely to have an earlier diagnosis. Math and written language disabilities tend not to be as easily discovered in bright students until the educational level is sufficiently high. It is not at all unusual that students are not diagnosed until college, because the level of difficulty and volume of reading are such that their old strategies no longer work when they are in a stumbling block course. For this study, foreign language is the stumbling block course.

Does it matter when this diagnosis is made? Four of the students had been diagnosed with a specific learning disability when they were seven or eight years old. One was fifteen years old. The other seven were not diagnosed as learning disabled until they were in college. They ranged in age from twenty to twenty-nine years old when they were first "labeled" learning disabled. With regard to the particular focus of this study, there does not appear to be any distinction between when a student was diagnosed with the disability and his/her subsequent success with foreign language. Two of the 5 with early diagnosis were unable to successfully complete the foreign language requirement. Four of the seven with college diagnosis were unsuccessful. What may be most important about age of diagnosis is how soon the individual redefines how s/he learns relative to how instruction is

normally delivered. It seems that those with early diagnosis are less likely to feel "dumb" or "stupid" and more likely to seek help.

There is no nationally agreed upon definition of learning disability. The guidelines for the southern state, where eleven of these students completed their K-12 schooling, state that there needs to be a fifteen point discrepancy between an individual's aptitude and achievement score in reading, writing, math, or general knowledge.

All of the students have auditory processing difficulties, expressive language deficiencies, problems with mathematics, and with visual sequencing according to the individual documentation of each student. One student described his problem as "poor symbol correlation." Like many students with learning disabilities, he needs to have more time to process the information. He says, "I had a big lag on the switch-over from symbol use to thought." Another student describes the "mental anguish" that he goes through when trying to write.

I know something happens. I just can't remember what happens. I think I kind of blank out. I lose my ability to think rationally at the time. ...I start pacing or sitting and just try thinking. I spend a lot of my time contemplating, just getting my strength to go act on it. I've got to have time to prepare to act on it.

Four students had additional problems with short term memory and/or attentional difficulties. One remembers that his favorite word was "Huh? Unless they got my attention, all I heard was noise. I didn't hear words."

Three of the four students with attentional difficulties have not been successful with the foreign language requirement. The one who has been successful was on medication while he was taking the course. Only one of the three who have not succeeded is on medication.

Five of the students also reported a history of depression or temper outbursts. According to Weed (1992), both are ways of dealing with anger. Hoffman *et.al.* (1987) and Osman (1990) found that the major issues of adults with learning disabilities are frustration, lack of self-confidence, the inability to control one's emotions, temper and depression. Three of these five students with depression in addition to the learning disability have not met the foreign language requirement.

Length of Time in College

According to the Institutional Research *1994/95 Fact Book*, 25.9% of all enrolled students at the institution graduate within four years and 46.9% graduate within five years of their start date. Only two (17%) of the students in this study will be able to graduate in four years. Nine (75%) of the students have taken or will need five years in order to graduate. One student, who is gainfully employed, has dropped in and out of school since 1981. He only lacks the foreign language requirement to graduate.

Ten of these students changed their major at least twice and needed to take some additional hours in their last two years. For half of the students, the change of major meant additional foreign language. All of these students

had started with Business or Nursing which do not require intermediate level foreign language. Four students lost credits in transferring from other institutions.

While many students take reduced course loads because of employment, learning disabled students require reduced course loads as the main accommodation for their learning disability. Ten students had twelve hour course loads. Nine of the students felt they had received "bad academic advising." One relates:

I didn't have an advisor. The advisor they assigned to me was out of town on some study or something. So some senior, who was an assistant in the department, ended up advising me for my classes. That got me off on a bad start. It was like, 'Take this, it's cool.' Being 17 years old, you don't know.

I had the worst advisor on campus. I had missed Step-Ahead [Campus Orientation Program] and I walk into her office. I sat down and said, I need some help. Can you advise me? She said, 'I can't make those kinds of decisions for you. Here's a list of requirements for your major; if you want to know about other courses, here's a catalog.'

The most frequently repeated complaint is in the words of one student, "I tried to tag her down for the next three days and she was never in the office at the posted times." Academic advising was done haphazardly by "someone" in the department who would sign a registration card. Many "regular" students experience this problem as well, but the consequences of poor advising are more damaging for students who find learning in traditional ways to be a challenge all by itself.

Grade point averages is a major concern to all of the students. The

cumulative grade point averages (GPA) range from 1.97 to 3.49 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Students' Overall GPA

Language of Choice	Overall GPA			
	Successful Students (mean=2.44)		Unsuccessful Students (mean=2.35)	
	#1	#2	#1	#2
Latin	2.89	1.97	2.01	2.63
Spanish	3.49	2.39	2.20	2.83
French	2.10	2.20	2.41	2.01

Several students were not able to pursue their preferred majors because they did not have the required GPA. If they could have excluded the grades from the foreign language classes, these students would have satisfied the GPA requirement to enter their chosen major. Or as one student phrases it, "I know I would have better grades if I didn't have to spend so much time on Latin." One woman ended up choosing a major which did not require the intermediate level foreign language.

A recent graduate tells of being advised to take the foreign language requirement at another institution and to transfer it in so that lower grades

would not prevent him from graduating. He explains:

I even went so far as to schedule a meeting with the Chancellor, but I guess it got delegated. I spoke with some other people and I think the deal we ended up working out was I was worried about my GPA because even if I could suffer through it with D's and C's, my GPA would be just torn. It would really hurt me in the long run. ..They'd let me take it somewhere else and transfer the grades in. That way, I would take the course like they wanted me to, but then it wouldn't damage my GPA.

Another female frankly stated that "I was scared to take the foreign language here." She was not alone, as four of the students elected to take their foreign language course work at other schools so that the grades would not be reflected in their GPA.

How anxious are these students about foreign language and GPA? The short answer is "very." The average GPA for the successful group is 2.44 while the other group's GPA is 2.35. These students have enrolled in 50 college level foreign language courses and received credit for 27. This does not count courses attempted at other institutions which did not transfer. There were 17 grades of C,D, or Pass while there were 20 grades of F, W, or No Pass. Those who are being termed "successful" in this study have enrolled in 23 courses including seven at other institutions. Those who have not yet met with success fulfilling this requirement have enrolled in 27 foreign language courses, including three off campus. Three students are currently enrolled in language classes.

Language Choices

Four students focused on Spanish, another four attempted French, and four concentrated on Latin. Five of the students have attempted at least two languages. Seven of the students continued with the same language they had in high school, while the other five tried a different foreign language. Only one of the students had an entrance deficiency having not completed two years of a foreign language while in high school.

Does the choice of language make a difference in the success rate? Since there is no oral component in Latin, it has become the recommended language for students with auditory processing difficulties at this institution. Does it work? Of the five students who attempted two languages while in college, three moved from Spanish to Latin and two have been successful, but they only had to complete Latin 101 and were then given permission to substitute other courses for the foreign language requirement. The third student completed two semesters of Latin and then went on to take four semesters of Spanish at other institutions rather than continue with two more semesters of Latin. The fourth student started with Latin, completed two semesters then changed majors rather than take two more semesters of Latin. None of the 8 students who successfully completed French 101 or Spanish 101 were given permission for course substitution. One student passed Spanish 101, failed 102 twice and was told to take Latin. He passed 101 and was denied a course substitution since he passed. See Table 2 for a history

of foreign language courses.

Table 2

History of Foreign Language Courses

Key:

IP= In Progress

*= Summer School

T= Transfer

	FRENCH				
	Course	Grade	Course	Grade	
Successful Student #1	Fre 101 Fre 102 Fre 203 Fre 204 Fre 204	T T T F C+	Fre 101 Fre 102 Spa 101 Fre 102 Fre 102* Fre 102	P W NP F F W	Unsuccessful Student #1
Successful Student #2	Ger 101 Fre 101 Fre 102 Fre 203	D- C- D- D	Fre 101 Fre 102* Fre 102 Fre 203 Fre 203* Fre 204*	T F D- W T T	Unsuccessful Student #2
Total Courses		9		12	

	SPANISH				
	Course	Grade	Course	Grade	
Successful Student #1	Spa 102 Spa 203	C IP	Spa 101 Spa 102 Spa 102* Lat 101	P W W IP	Unsuccessful Student #1
Successful Student #2	Lat 101 Lat 101 Spa 101 Spa 102 Spa 203* Spa 204*	C- W T T T T	Spa 101 Spa 101 Spa 101 Spa 101* Spa 102* Spa 102 Spa 102	W W W D W W F	Unsuccessful Student #2
Total Courses		8		11	

	LATIN				
	Course	Grade	Course	Grade	
Successful Student #1	Lat 101	C	Lat 101 Lat 102 Lat 203	C- C- W	Unsuccessful Student #1
Successful Student #2	Spa 101* Spa 102* Spa 102 Spa 203 Lat 101	C W D W C-	Lat 101	W	Unsuccessful Student #2
Total Courses		6		4	

What can we tell from all of this? The assumption that Latin is easier for students who have auditory processing difficulties does not seem to hold up to the evidence. The discrepancy in course substitutions and the decisions of two students to take other action instead of continuing with Latin makes it impossible to analyze.

What can the students tell us about their experiences? All of the students mentioned that they resented the extra time that foreign language requires because it detracts from their other studies. A Biology/Chemistry dual major writes furiously about his discouragement on his post-interview questionnaire.

I feel let down by the system. I feel as though the people around me and even in the departments to help me are sympathetic [sympathetic] but that their hands are tied. It seems as though they are able to see and not help me as I fail. There is not enough time for me to prove my position of difficulty. The only thing that proves that I have difficulties with languages is the PHD psychologist [psychologist] that diagnosed me. I can't prove it any better than that. I fear that I will need to transfer to a different college in order to graduate.

This is a bright student who is very ambitious and wants to get his Ph.D. He spent a great deal of time during our interview discussing nuclear fusion and sonal luminescence. The point he was trying to make is that he is not afraid of working. "I embrace it actually. I don't mind taking the courses [Spanish and Latin], but I do mind it killing my GPA."

This student is not alone. One person has chosen to leave the institution because of the language requirement. He lost motivation when his second

appeal for a course substitution was denied. He had been asked to try Latin -- which he did for maybe two weeks. The pressure was too great for him. He explains:

I felt like the system was beating me and it wasn't fair and I was just getting really frustrated. I tried Latin and it was just not what I was into and it was so hard. The teacher was great. ...no complaints of her and maybe I didn't give it a chance but (sighs) you know. ...I kind of wish I stuck with it now, but it's all over and done with.

Perry's (1970) model of needing the right balance of support with a challenge is missing for this student. He is feeling totally overwhelmed and out of control. This is a key factor for a number of the students and will be explored further in Chapter VI.

Use of Support Services

All of the students interviewed were registered with Disabled Student Services (DSS). There were different patterns in the frequency and utilization of services. Three students worked independently and did not utilize any of the services. None of the three have been successful with foreign languages at this institution. One has subsequently completed his foreign language requirement at another institution during an intensive summer session.

Six of the nine of the students who have utilized the services of DSS could be described as comprehensive users. They receive priority registration, study skills assistance, counseling, alternative testing, and tutoring. Four of the six

have met the university foreign language requirement. The two remaining elected alternative avenues for dealing with the requirement. One changed a major, the other left the institution.

Three students receive a single service of either alternative testing or tutoring. Two have been successful with the language requirement, but one completed it at another institution.

Summary

There are twelve students with learning disabilities who have attempted 50 hours of classes in foreign language (21 in Spanish, 19 in French, 9 in Latin, and 1 in German). Five of the students had a prior diagnosis of a learning disability, while the other seven were diagnosed in college. All are registered with Disabled Student Services, but three choose to work independently. A number of the psycho-social issues raised by the literature are demonstrated in the lives of these students. There are clear examples of low self-esteem, high anxiety, depression, hypersensitivity, and frustration. Yet these students are resilient, creative, and persistent. They are becoming adults and choosing a career or life path. It is important to recognize how they integrate these psycho-social issues into the construction of their self.

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERIES

Introduction

Multiple readings of the twelve interviews by the researcher, left a feeling of similarities and contradictions among the students. No clear differences emerged between students who have been able to complete one more language course and those who have not. It is noticeable that most of the students are very frustrated and confused about their foreign language learning. It seems to represent the cumulative negative experiences that they have had throughout their education. How students vented or directed their anger and frustration varies. What remains constant is their desire for control over their lives. How do they begin to claim their power and move toward that goal?

A spider's web

There is no single road or intersection. How these students begin to take control of their lives is varied. There is an intricate weaving of various threads which leads to their center or core. A spider's web is a useful metaphor of the meaning of their lived experiences. Each student is at the center of his/her web -- an interconnected system with numerous options in many directions. Webs can be built in a myriad of ways. The most familiar

is the orbbed web, which permits more freedom, allowing a single silk thread to mark its path. Other webs are like subterranean tubes, building wide sheets, or constructing asymmetrical tangles. So there is freedom for each student to create her/his own unique style, but the threads or strands make the whole.

Material to make the threads

Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg's (1992) study of 71 successful adults with learning disabilities helps us understand what builds these strands or threads in the students' lives. It emphasizes the potential for significant achievement rather than focusing on the limitations of learning disabilities. A key set of themes or patterns, "alterable variables," increase the likelihood of vocational success. The driving factor underlying the success of their entire sample was an effort to gain control of their individual lives. They found that there is a set of internal as well as external decisions which shaped the degree of success that an individual could attain. The internal decisions include desire to succeed, goal-orientation, and an internal reframing of the learning disabilities experience. The external manifestations comprise ways of being adaptable typified by persistence, learned creativity, a goodness of fit between one's abilities and the work environment, and a social ecology of support systems (p.13).

Rennie and Brewer (1987) interviewed students who blocked or found themselves stymied in thesis writing and students who did not experience

blocks. The properties which they discovered to be important are: dependence-independence, structuring the task, project meaningfulness, political expertise, and time management. Could it be that some of the issues that keep students from writing a thesis or dissertation might also inform our understanding of why some students were blocking in their foreign language learning?

There is a silky substance which spiders secrete to make their webs. This silk is then the fundamental ingredient which allows the spider to spin its web. That silky substance for the student with a learning disability is his/her ability to "reframe" and internalize the learning disability.

The successful adults studied by Reiff et al. (1992) had to reframe or reinterpret the learning disabilities experience. In this process, they made a transition from focusing on disability to an emphasis on their abilities to confront and overcome challenges imposed by their learning styles. They moved from *reacting* to learning disabilities to a *proactive* stance where learning disabilities became just a part of who they are. Four stages characterize the reframing process: recognition, acceptance, understanding, and formulating a plan of action.

Reframing seems to be the overriding factor in assuming control of their lives and experiencing success in the classroom for the students in this study, as well. Claiming and integrating their specific learning style was THE issue which appears to make a difference in how they approach not only foreign

language classes, but life itself. For those students who have some understanding of their particular learning strengths and weaknesses and who are conversant about this information with their instructors, success is much more likely.

All six individuals who have been able to complete the foreign language requirement, recognize and accept their learning disability. Only half of the "unsuccessful" students do. The other three do not agree they have a real disability, nor do they consider the results of the learning disability testing valid. "I think she [the examiner] found a very slight short term memory deficit, but I think clinically, I'm not even sure it was a learning disability. I think that it was on the border." Another student claimed, "It's only tests. I was worn out after working all day." One student who has attempted French and Spanish for six semesters and only has accrued credit for French 101:

I'm stubborn. I don't like to admit that I have a problem. And I stomped it out and weeded it out and have arranged my life in such a way that I don't have a problem. And then, every once in a while I run into something like French. You know, just run straight into a wall.

He does not perceive himself as having a problem. Instead, he regards himself as an autonomous learner. Receiving tutorial help or asking for alternative testing is a sign of weakness. He is prepared to make any sacrifice rather than appear weak (dependent) by asking for help. His plan of action is to simply persevere. He'll stick with it but has no plan for what to do differently to succeed. Because he denies he *has* a problem, he cannot

understand it. Not understanding it, he cannot pick an effective strategy for coping with it. He lacks the connectors that allow him to spin the web of strategies and support.

In contrast, students who have been successful are able to articulate their learning strengths and weaknesses, understand their learning strengths and weaknesses, and create a plan of action to compensate for it. One student knew his learning disability focused on foreign languages and math.

It's centered around foreign language and math. I had a little dyslexia when I was a kid, but I think I've grown out of that. I reversed things all the time, not all the time, but telephone numbers once in a while, license plates and things like that. I had one semester of math and I just put the pedal to the metal on that. It was like I used a sledge hammer to kill a fly. I would study extensively for it and prepare for it like it was an exam or a quiz.

He recognizes the disability and accepts it. He understands that the parameters of it changes. When he deals with math, he knows that he has to pull out all the stops. His phrase was, "I used a sledge hammer to kill a fly." He over prepared for everything. He treated quizzes as if they were major exams. He received an A in Contemporary Topics of Mathematics. He goes on to talk about the ramifications of his disability in his future career as a broadcast journalist.

I could see myself reversing some numbers on a teleprompter that I came across, but I do that on the radio. I read here on the radio, and when I do that, I say excuse me, and that's not a big deal. I don't see any way that it would hinder me, not that it could not be compensated for. There is a spell check on the computer. I don't see it being a problem.

This young man is planning his future with his disability in mind. He does not feel restricted or resentful. It is rather matter of fact. He makes plans and does what he needs to do. It is quite a contrast to the student who says, " I stomped it out and arranged my life in such a way that I don't have a problem."

The silky substance which the successful students possess is the ability to reframe their learning disability. Once the individual accepts the fact of having a learning disability, an understanding of how to work with it can develop. This understanding encompasses realization that one has strengths as well as weaknesses, and that within this combination lies a uniqueness or a special gift. From this level of understanding blossom the special coping skills and strategies that individuals with learning disabilities find necessary to succeed. They can chart a course of action for coping with demands proactively. Reiff et al. (1992) believe that individuals who reach this point achieve a totality that supersedes the specific condition of having learning disabilities. The adult has learned to take the disabilities into account without losing sight of a larger identity.

Threads

All of the students in this inquiry, are in the process of moving along the continuum of reframing their disability. All of the students are making valiant efforts to succeed. Seven students have been successful in building a

web which allowed them to complete at least one more foreign language course. Five of the others are still in the process of constructing a web which can see them through the foreign language. Specific threads which emerge from their experiences are: **autonomy, self-efficacy, meaningfulness of the foreign language, persistence, turning points, creativity, and use of support network.**

Autonomy

Motivation, personal responsibility and commitment to becoming an independent learner are characteristics of successful college students with learning disabilities (Barbaro, 1982; McGuire & Shaw, 1987). The students in this inquiry who have been able to complete at least one more foreign language course are the ones who describe themselves as highly motivated, disciplined, and responsible for their own learning. Many reported that time management and effective study habits were critical strategies for their academic success. A junior honors student reported that he has developed the habit of going to the library to study in order to avoid distractions:

I got into a niche, I guess, or a cycle my freshman year, and that came out of living in the dorm. I had to study in the library because there was always something going on in the dorm, so I had to study in the library. I just started going to the library every day, or every evening after dinner. Then I could come home later to the dorm and do whatever I wanted to do. ...I think it was actually a blessing in disguise. I got a lot more done than I would have gotten done in the dorm. Now that I live in an apartment, I still go to the library. I don't have to. I could sit home easily, but I'm just so used to it and I work better there.

Learning to live independently and saying no to peers is a major transition for all students. This student learned early on that he needed to leave his room in order to study effectively. There were too many distractions in the dorm for him. He has become so comfortable with the library as his study place, that even now, when he lives off campus, he still uses the library as his study home.

Another student, who was not diagnosed as learning disabled until his fourth year of college, lived at home his first semester. He felt that "it kept me a little bit more strict on myself. I'd come to class and then go to work and then go home and study." But he knew he was missing out on some of college life, so he moved to campus. He definitely feels that "everybody needs to live in a dorm at least a semester. You learn a lot living in a dorm -- how to live with other people." This student reports that he didn't see a decline in his grades when he moved on campus because "I think I was broke in pretty good." He had a routine established and he knew what he needed to do to be successful.

Not all of the students tell the same story. A successful student described her learning as coming easily and that she wasn't used to having to work.

I get by. (Laughs) I catch on to things very quickly and I don't have to exert much effort at all. I've never been a real strong academic type. There's always been other things that are more important to me. I've always known exactly what I've had to do to keep myself out of trouble -- with my parents and my activities at school. And so I did that. And usually that was very minimal.

I could make C's and B's without even trying, going to class minimally and cracking a book rarely in most of my classes.

The glitch for her came with foreign language learning. She found that she needed to change study patterns when she took a semester of German and three semesters of French. It required pulling out all the stops.

I tried everything with foreign language. ...I had cards all over my room with names of things on them in the other language. And all these vocabulary lists that you fold in half and flash cards that you did five times each. You name it, I did it. I went to movies [in the target language] and I still had no idea in class.

She made a C- in French 101 and a D- in 102. She applied for a course substitution and was denied, leaving her angry about being made to complete French 203.

Originally, I made a D -in 102 and you're not supposed to be able to go on to 203, but they made the exception for me to go on to 203 but not the exception for me to be able to replace it with some other classes. I'm like "That's ridiculous. You're telling me that I have a disability and it's going to be hard for me to learn the language but you're giving me the exception of going on to the higher level when I shouldn't be in it in the first place -- you know if I was a normal student. What's the logic behind that?"

This student perceived that the French 203 was a ridiculous hoop for her to jump through rather than a meaningful educational experience.

This struggle to be independent and autonomous while attempting a stumbling block course can be very traumatic. Listen to the voice of a senior Biology/Chemistry dual major who is struggling with the language requirement:

I try to respect the courses that I take and I try to see them as great things that I can learn here. It helps me -- I like it. I really love college because I can learn all these things. I want to work in academia for a while because I think that I might be able to make a good teacher, a good professor. I've found that I'm good at helping friends in classes with their stuff. If I understand the material, I can convey my thoughts really well. I can word it in many different ways. I'm good with speech. It's really odd. I'm reasonably charismatic with the way I can word things, and also finding the ways to hit memories or the way that they experience things so that I can make it make sense for them.

This student perceives himself as a scholar and derives a great deal of satisfaction from being able to help others understand course material. At the same time, he writes on his post-interview questionnaire that, "My learning disability effects me in more ways than I can easily express. The difficulty with languages hurts more than just my scholastic [scholastic] skills; it hurts my pride."

It is how the individual student handles the struggle between her/his self perception and her/his actual performance that tells the real story. These students must clearly have the desire to complete the task. Some of the students are angry and just set out to prove that they are capable people. Others developed their desire from more positive experiences like systematic, routine study and academic support. Most of the successful ones simply recognize that their survival requires more determination for a person with learning disabilities. One student said it quite eloquently:

If I am really dedicated to something, I will stick with it. I like being surrounded by people like that, and that kind of works into

my life because I'm willing to spend the extra time that I have to on my work because of my learning disability and I just hate people who sell out and say, 'I can't do this.' People who don't have a learning disability say, 'I'm just so bogged down with work,' and I'm like, 'I have to spend twice as much time on the same thing to get the same result.' That's just not in my program, and I jump people about that -- especially my friends.

To have success in the foreign language classroom, students must have a strong desire to be independent and highly motivated learners. If that is not in her/his "program," success is highly unlikely.

Self-efficacy

A second thread deals with the role of achievement in improving the self-esteem of college students who have a learning disability. This idea has much in common with Bandura's (1991) concept of *self-efficacy*, which refers to the individual's belief that he or she can master a situation and produce positive outcomes. Bandura's (1986; 1989) cognitive social learning model states that there is a reciprocal influence of behavior, personal and cognitive factors, and environment. It is an interactive process. Behavior can influence cognition and vice versa, the person's cognitive activities can influence the environment, environmental influences can change the person's thought process, and so on.

This seems particularly poignant for these twelve students. There are students who are on the Dean's List yet struggle with the foreign language requirement. There are students who are kept out of their preferred major

because repeated foreign language attempts have depressed their GPA and they do not meet the major's entrance qualifications. They have study strategies which work for the majority of their classes, but not for foreign language. What is it about the foreign language classroom that makes learning more difficult for these students? This issue will be explored in Chapter VI.

Most of the student's profess that they love life as a college student even if it is difficult for them. This was true even for the student who decided to leave this institution because of the foreign language requirement.

*Oh, God. I really enjoyed it and I don't want to leave.
(Laughs) I mean, I want to get out and maybe get my
Master's sometimes. I love art. I am so curious and that's
why I love art. I don't know if I like the formality part of
it. I don't like the homework and the tests and the
whatever. But I love the knowledge. ..Even if I'd never
gone to school, I'd always pursue things. I have so many
different interests in so many different things.*

These students love learning and see themselves as life long learners, yet foreign language is a tremendous hurdle for them. The fear of failing almost paralyzes them. Several used words like "scared," "petrified," or "terrified" to describe their feelings about foreign language. One student, who has had seven attempts, described it as "an unpassable obstacle" and that foreign language was "obscure. I have no place to file it away." This same student has passed Calculus III and Matrix Theory. These students seem to have a constant struggle

with her/his self-confidence and sense of self worth when they are experiencing such defeat in the classroom. One student literally found himself hiding in the classroom because of his sense of embarrassment and intimidation.

I'd just come out of class literally sweating sometimes. It was just a scary feeling to think that some classes made you that upset and that frustrated that you're failing something. You lose a lot of self-confidence. But you just feel like "What's wrong with me?" And in that type of environment, it just makes it worse. Because ... you're embarrassed. The more you're failing a class and some of your peers are in front of you and that one professor, the less confidence you have and you get to where you're sneaking down and hiding behind the person in front of you. And then what does that do for your self-confidence? Here you are hiding in the classroom!

Foreign language teachers do know the impact that attitudinal variables play in second language acquisition. Krashen (1983) uses the concept of lowering the "affective filter" to illustrate this point. He states that having the right attitude may do two things for second language acquirers: it will encourage them to try to get more input, to interact with speakers of the target language with confidence, and also to be more receptive to the input they get (p. 38-39). The student quoted above certainly had a very high affective filter. It was almost impossible for him to hear the input, much less act with confidence in the target language.

This student is not alone. Here is an excerpt from an honor student who has been able to complete Spanish 203 with a C and remain on the Dean's List:

Spanish is an absolute nightmare. There's no other way to put it. No other way. I mean, it bears the official stamp of the learning disability. It's just a total nightmare. I don't understand it. I just can't learn it no matter how hard I work on it. ... There's no reasoning involved in Spanish. You either know it or you don't. ...I have discussed my learning disability with the teacher, and he said 'Okay, don't worry about it. We'll work through it.' I'm not really learning it, so I don't need to work through it. I need to be able to learn it, which I am not being able to do.

This is a student who has a good sense of himself and diligently applies himself. The fact that he perceives foreign language as a "nightmare" is very telling. In both his interview and questionnaire, he asks if there is anyone with a learning disability on the "review committee." He questions if anyone can truly understand what it feels like for him to work so hard in a content area which has so little payback for him.

Not all of the students could maintain a consistent sense of self. A student who has just recently graduated and did manage to pass one more course to satisfy the College of Arts & Sciences committee described his self-esteem as "not being on the same level as other people." He told of his experience in a high school literature class where it felt like everyone else was able to remember all the details and

he couldn't. "I had read it but it made me think something was wrong. You start putting these people up here and yourself below them because they can retain more." He then related this same feeling to his learning in Latin and Spanish.

I guess I could feel that way or I did feel that way in instances like Latin or Spanish. Somebody else sitting beside of me knew this vocabulary like the back of their hand and I'm sitting there struggling...Hey, is that right? or Hey, did I learn that today? Or did I see that with my flash cards? It kind of put them up above you, so to speak. And you have to gain your self-confidence back in other ways.

This graduate was savvy and knew he had to seek other avenues for building his self-esteem. One female student took four semesters of Spanish at other institutions rather than continue with the intermediate level of Latin. She was afraid to take any more languages here because it would bring her GPA down and put her graduation in jeopardy. Her self-esteem shot way up when she was able to accomplish this feat. She ended up getting A's and B's and now laments that now those grades don't get counted in her GPA.

No, unfortunately I don't [get credit] and I hate that. I hate it but it gave me self-esteem though to make those grades because those are grades that I don't always make. I'm very much a "C" student. And so I made those grades and I felt good about myself. But the self-esteem part, last semester I took 15 hours. I worked 20 hours a week. I volunteered towards the end of the semester for the Mental Health Association, and I had the best semester since I've been here. I made "B's" and "C's" and 1 "A."

Each of these students illustrates Bandura's (1986) schemata for how self-efficacy might effect a college student's achievement behavior. As the student studies and gets good grades, her/his behavior produces positive thoughts about her/his abilities. Conversely, when the grades don't reflect the personal and cognitive effort made by the student, s/he becomes resentful and learning becomes more difficult. It should be noted that ten out of the twelve students mentioned that the foreign language requirement undermined their self-esteem and pride. One student who had to complete the requirement at another school in summer exclaimed:

I think what you experience -- once you have one success in an area that you've had problems in, it makes all the difference. If you can get that first win, so to speak. If you can get that first passing paper or A paper, it makes a big difference. Passing French 203 and making the "C", I didn't think I could do it at all. I really did not think I was going to make it through this class. It made it much easier to deal with French 204 because I thought, 'Well, it's going to be a little bit harder but I made it through that one and I'm going to make it through this one.'

The question to educators becomes, can we provide the appropriate amount of support and lower the affective filter enough that students with learning disabilities can successfully meet the challenge of learning a second language? Repeated failures breed resentment. Success builds pride. Are we doing all that we can to actively help them succeed?

Meaningfulness of the Foreign Language Experience

The interviewees had basically two ways to make meaning of the foreign language requirement. Some simply saw it as an obstacle standing between them and graduation. They have trouble finding meaningfulness in the task. Two students saw it as a valuable course with which they were having difficulty. None of the students who were successful had the view that it was a reasonable expectation for graduation.

One successful graduate was most emphatic that she felt foreign language was a waste of her time.

Yeah, I had a hard time with my foreign languages and I tried them all. I took German and French in college, but I also took Spanish in high school. It's a lot of work and I don't feel that the foreign language minimum [requirement] of two years -- that you get anything out of it. I mean anything that is worth a damn to you any other time. If you take an English class and you have to read all this stuff and get familiar with it, that will carry over in conversations and understanding other stuff. But foreign language doesn't do a damn thing for you. That's what makes it frustrating too. I see no use of it! (Emphatic) So! (Laughs)

For the majority of the students interviewed, daily exposure to the language seemed to make a difference. Several commented that in high school, they at least had it everyday. "I had difficulties with Spanish in high school and the way I got through it was spending extra time with the teacher before and after school. I went during study hall -- every chance I had." Three of the students felt that summer school was a better opportunity for them to learn because it was concentrated and provided a daily exposure. The pace

was difficult but if they were not taking any other classes or working, they were able to be successful.

I needed to spend a lot of time studying so I never got a job. I mean there's no excuse not to do your homework and get extra help. I still struggled because I was behind. You'd fly through things in class and I just had to concentrate.

One graduate now works for a firm that has a plant in Mexico and reports that he sees Spanish frequently. He had given up on Spanish and finished his college requirement with Latin. Now that he has a goal or purpose, he is thinking of going to a community college to brush up on his Spanish.

I skipped Spanish for a year and it kind of lost a place in my mind. I guess overall I felt like Spanish was kind of unfair to some people. I wish now I would have learned it because through the job that I have now, we do some foreign stuff. We've got a plant in Mexico and I see Spanish pretty often now. I've even thought several times of maybe going back to maybe a community college or something and spending a little time and brushing up on it. I learned it in high school; I know I can learn it, but I think I would learn it better if I didn't have the pressure on me. ... I think that if I'm doing it because I want to do it, I would learn it a little bit better.

He identifies an important point. Motivation. Trying to learn because someone says you must do this is not nearly as powerful as seeing the relevance to your own life.

Many of the students who succeeded in passing the course felt that they were meeting a requirement but not actually learning the material. "I didn't

get the knowledge that the class was teaching. I got the knowledge to get the grade. I want out of there. It's useless to me because I don't have the foundation. I have tourist French vocabulary." The successful students became pragmatists. They did whatever it took to complete the course, but successful completion did not for them equate to learning.

Persistence

When building any structure, persistence usually pays off. For students with learning disabilities, it is a particularly important trait. Generally speaking, the majority of the students in this study are very persistent. They have discovered that they have to work longer and harder than others simply to keep up. Persistence and determination go hand in hand. A male student stated it as, "I would like people to understand that I will be there no matter what it takes. I'm just very dedicated." Obviously, if they have communally logged 50 course hours to complete the equivalent of 26, they do keep coming back for more.

One could also characterize these students as being resilient. No matter how difficult or discouraged that they get, most will continue. This student offered his advice to new students coming to school:

Don't give up. It may seem like you're coming to the end of the road everyday but there's always some goal that's going to come up tomorrow. Keep on digging and you'll find the end of it. It is not as bad as it may seem. You'll appreciate it a whole lot more when it's better.

Another recent graduate, who did take five years to graduate, said that the most important thing he would like people to understand about him is that he will always try to do his best.

I would like people to understand that, whatever it is, that I would try the hardest that I can try to do the best and be the best at whatever it is that I'm doing. I guess I would want my boss to feel like, "Hey, he's going to do a 110% of his capabilities and then some to try and do it right." That's kind of the way I want anybody to feel about me. ...I'll do it as many times as it takes to make sure it's complete and done right.

Another student echoed the same theme. He wants people to know that he is "100% reliable." He asks that people be explicit about what it is that they are asking of him, but if they tell him clearly what it is that they want, he will do his utmost to complete the task. Unfortunately, he feels that a lot of people are impatient with him.

I would want people to know that I am reliable, that I am 100%. I just use that acronym because I am 100% reliable with whatever it is -- whatever the job is, I am reliable. I need time and I need people to tell me what they need - very explicitly, because if they don't do that, that's when mistakes are going to happen because I won't completely know. ...Tell me something very clearly and give me time. That's asking a lot from most people. If I am going to get something done, I need the right time for preparation and training.

Turning Points

In *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, et al., 1986), the women almost always named out-of-school experiences as their most powerful learning

experiences. What made these experience so powerful was their connection to things that mattered to them. Often these experiences shifted their perception of themselves as knowers. The same is true for these college students. It should come as no surprise that in the course of the interviews, several of the students noted a significant event or occurrence that changed their mode of operating. Consequently, they emerge as more active agents in their own learning.

One young man targeted a summer camp experience as a turning point for him. He had spent three or four summers of his youth at this camp on the coast. Relatives had worked there and his grandfather was on the board. He worked at the camp during the summer of his sophomore year in college. "It was a real positive influence and I really enjoyed it. It helped get me back on track, so to speak." He transferred to this university and began to get "everything lined up as far as study habits -- when to study, how to study, just priorities again got straight."

For another student, the magic occurred when he figured out that he and the teachers were "on the same team." "I never built a relationship with my teachers. I was always spitting back to them the answers they wanted. It was always -- 'Do this for that grade.' This student has become such a convert to developing this relationship that he wants to make sure his brothers get the message earlier than he did.

I have two little brothers, one's in college now and I don't know how to communicate that understanding to them, that you and the teacher are a team. It's not like you're against them like it was in high school and it's not like they're like a dictator over you. It's like you're gaining knowledge through them and they are trying to help. But I never saw this relationship. I was just always spitting out the answers for the tests or for the grade. I never built a relationship with any of my teachers. It's like really really important.

Sometimes, the students had to be flexible and switch gears. One student, who used running to reduce his anxiety, had some problems with his knees and was told he needed to give up running. That put him into a tail spin. It took two years to put running into perspective.

I lost my running a couple of years ago. That was a big anxiety reliever, but it's taken me this long to realize that I can't do it and that's fine. I don't worry about it and I don't even think about it. It's something like an ex-husband or ex-wife ..you just kind of go on without it.

One student summed it up when he said, "Once you have one success in an area that you've had problems in, it makes all the difference. If you can get that first win, so to speak."

Creativity

Reiff et al. (1992) found that successful adults with learning disabilities learned and devised various strategies, techniques, and compensatory methods to enhance their ability to perform well. The students in this narrative inquiry have done likewise. Collectively, they are a bright and creative group of young adults who have been ingenious in their problem

solving abilities. Reiff et al. contend that learned creativity takes on numerous manifestations. Some adults learn to manipulate events in order not to expose learning difficulties. Others are forthright about having learning disabilities and learn to utilize devices and technological adaptations that allow them to meet the demands of a task.

Some of the interviewees in this inquiry are already in the workforce and shared some examples of how they adapt to their work environment. One fellow works in a bookstore and shares how his auditory processing difficulties affect his ordering books:

This guy came in first day I worked and this was after the election. He ...asked if we had any books on Newt Gingrich? And I was like, 'I don't know. I'll go to Books In Print.' and I said, 'Can you spell that?' He goes, 'Da da da da Gingrich.' I couldn't visualize how to spell that name to save my life...even phonetically. And he spelled it real fast and I'm like, "Can you please slow down? And he's like mad.

First day on the job and his auditory processing difficulty already has a customer mad at him. So his coping strategy is to always carry a pen and paper. He has the customer write the information down. It saves time and embarrassment when he can't keep up or "hear" what is being said to him.

A recent graduate is discovering that his short term memory problems do carry over into the workplace, but he feels confident that he is taking charge and being effective. He is a personnel manager with 350 employees and he is trying to remember their names. He is introduced to people and as soon as they walk away, he realizes that he has no idea what their name is.

He is very aware that calling people by name is very important and he doesn't want to slight anyone. He is now trying to do word associations with names and faces.

Many of the students feel that of course if they had their own personal secretary, that they would do just fine in school. Indeed, that is exactly what a recent woman graduate has created for herself. When her company asked her if she wanted to do her own correspondence or dictate it -- guess what her choice was?

The only problem that it really causes me is that I have to run everything through the spell check -- or double check everything. ...But it doesn't really affect me because the only time I really write anything is to a friend because I have a secretary at work that does all my business stuff. ... I'll go see the movie instead of reading the book.

How did students apply their creativity to foreign language? Some try to use the strategies that work in other classes. One described his coping strategy for visualizing sciences. He capitalizes on "a picture is worth a thousand words." He takes words and just make them a brush stroke in a nice picture. He only needs to look over it briefly and then can recreate it for a test. However, this strategy breaks down in foreign language. He can't put all the vocabulary he needs into a neat picture for his language learning.

Languages don't work that way, It's like trying to push them into a picture but they don't fit. It has a usefulness obviously -- that's how we communicate but all the vocabulary that you learn doesn't fit into the picture. It's really difficult to learn a word in that way.

His solution was to try another strategy, mnemonics, to learn his Latin vocabulary.

Oh that word looks like smell but it means wretched. You know this smell is wretched. ...I'm trying lots of memory toys to help me with Latin. You know Latin is very close to English .. so I either make a direct correlation to English. Sometimes I make a little sentence with it in my head.

He is trying to adapt his strong visual learning strengths to accommodate his elusive expressive language skills.

A student who started with Latin and then switched to Spanish found that group work made a difference for her. She described it as being an incentive to do well. There seems to be some healthy competition between the groups which facilitated her learning.

We wanted ours to be better than anybody's ..We would try to get as much dialogue in there, get more words in there we didn't know. And so lots of times we were looking up words and asking for help from the teacher. And that was helpful because I was learning more.

In general students report spending at least two hours a night doing foreign language homework. Flash cards, mind maps, repetitive writing, and working with a friend or tutor who could reinforce the grammatical patterns, were utilized by the successful students. Seeking help from the professor was not as universal. Some gave glowing accounts of how helpful it was, others did not find professors help as useful. Several students mentioned language clubs how they made foreign language learning more interesting. "It was play

for all of us. Having a good time. We generated skits off TV and did them in French.”

Some students prefer to learn the language in a native setting. One anthropology student went on a dig in Mexico and found a wealth of learning material at the newsstand.

This is going to sound silly but one of the things that helped me a lot in Mexico was I got bored and went out to the newsstand and there was a big stack of Spiderman comics in Spanish and they were like ten cents a piece. So I bought a big stack of El Hombre Ariana and I soaked it up. There were Electric Company Spiderman but they also had some Superman comics that had just been released in the States so I had two different reading levels. I could figure most of them out and the words I couldn't get, I'd look up in my pocket dictionary.

These students had a rich array of creative solutions. Variations of learned creativity are boundless. The exhilarating concept is that persons with learning disabilities can learn specialized and individual methods for coping and succeeding with the very circumstances previously deemed overtaxing.

Meditation is an avenue that another student is pursuing. He describes it as a type of positive energy. “I just like to clear my mind and be positive. I don't necessarily have to find something to feel positive about, but just feeling positive for a minute or however long I want to do it.” He believes that you can get positive energy from other people. “If someone has a negative attitude that you're working with, I absolutely believe that it brings

you and them down.” This student also lifts weights everyday and likes playing basketball. “You’ve got to be physically and mentally healthy. It could cause a lot of problems and you won’t know why you’re not doing well.”

Support Network

The final thread is discovering how these students utilize assistance through supportive and helpful people. This network runs the gamut from parents, siblings, and teachers to mentors, friends, and support staff. Almost all of the students reported that they had moral and psychological support from their families. Some students felt that their parents understood learning disabilities better than others. Through learning about their child’s learning disability, several parents felt that they too might have an undiagnosed learning disability.

These students seek help and guidance for specific situations, yet are cognizant of not wanting to be overly dependent upon their support system. They learn to accept help when it is necessary, seeing it not as dependency, but as an essential tool for achieving maximum control and autonomy.

Those students who choose to remain very private about disclosing their learning disability did not have access to the same network of support and most experienced more difficulty learning foreign language. The critical piece for the students who were successful was that they had the emotional

support of others. They tried to work on their own, but they knew when to seek help. Boyfriends or girlfriends were mentioned often.

I considered dropping out of school. I was dating this guy that was very dedicated to school and I think he played a big part in me finally deciding -- well, I got to stay in it and do it or just get out. But I think looking at him and how dedicated he was to what he was doing, I decided I wanted to do that too. I'm taking school seriously. I've worked very hard.

Tutors were next in line. "I couldn't have done it without [tutor's name]. I worked really hard with him." Another student exclaims that at least when he is "studying with my tutor that I'm studying it right. So that's a definite plus." Another student sadly laments that he waited too late to receive help.

I waited so late to get help..the end.. the middle of my senior year...I mean if I would have swallowed a little pride and gotten some help earlier, some of this could have been avoided.

The students who are not successful were not as flexible in asking for help. They perceive the class as an insurmountable obstacle and are so overwhelmed that they cannot seem to take steps to make a difference in their study patterns. They seem easily thwarted when they do act.

I did see a tutor once, but she wasn't going to help. She said, 'Where's your homework?' She helped me to through the problems in the book. 'See you!' I guess she wasn't a good one to work with.

Not surprisingly, the students who were able to successfully work with their instructors had a more positive experience. One student found Latin to be easier to learn because he spent more time with the instructor.

I took Latin and it was somewhat easier to me than Spanish but yet it was still kind of difficult. I think I enjoyed Latin much more than I did my Spanish. I spent more time with my professor - with my Latin professor than I did with my Spanish professors. I don't really know why I did that. I felt a whole lot more comfortable with the Latin because I was spending this time with the professor and working on it much more. I didn't feel like when the professor was talking that I was clueless. She wasn't really talking over my head. I could understand a whole lot more than when I went into Spanish class and I didn't understand a word the professor was saying.

The student freely admits that he felt more in charge when he could understand what was happening in the classroom.

Not all attempts to seek help from tutors or professors were successful. Some of the students felt discriminated against or rejected because of their learning disability. Some found the help counterproductive or boring. It didn't fit their particular needs.

Some of the students who have not been successful get stuck in the feelings of dependency and lack of control. They literally withdraw and appear to give up. Others could not ask for help because they felt they needed to just do it on their own. One student said, "I love instruction; I can't stand help." He has scheduled his entire semester around a specific French class in order to get a specific instructor but he does not plan to go to him or anyone else for help.

Student: No. I won't, although I could. He's fairly approachable. More so than some of the other professors I've had.

Me: What about a tutor?

Student: I could ...I need a tutor. But I don't want a tutor. ...I will do it if I have to, but I have a real big problem with tutors.

Me: Talk with me about that.

Student: That's .. I know that's me. I don't like getting help.

Me: What does it symbolize for you?

Student: I don't have a problem. I said that before. I don't have a problem.

Me: So, only people with disabilities have problems? Or need tutoring?

Student: No, no. This is a core marked personality generalization thing. I don't like help. I'm not stubborn. I'm persistent.There are oodles and oodles of examples from all various parts of my life. But I'm pretty much a 'I'll do it by my damned self' kind of guy. Which is not always a good thing.

This student was gifted in most academic areas and accustomed to learning coming fairly easily for him. He is really "bugged" when he can't get readily understand something. "It annoys me that I can't just soak up math and foreign languages. And that's part of the anxiety."

Perry's (1970) work in intellectual development suggests that these students may be in the process of discovering, resisting, claiming, and rejecting. They are weighing the personal consequences of doubt and hope, shame and self-respect, weakness and courage and becoming more active agents in their own learning. I think they are resisting "being taken care of" as students. It seems to rob them of their responsibility. However, Belenky et

al. (1986) wrote, taking care need not mean taking over. The students who have been able to build their support network, or web, have realized this and have met with success.

Summary

This chapter illustrates the interconnectedness of various threads which the students in this study have woven together with various levels of success. The successful students usual have incorporated the following elements into their web of success: autonomy, self-efficacy, meaningfulness of the foreign language experience, persistence, turning points, creativity, and support network. They have moved from reacting to learning disabilities to a proactive stance where learning disabilities becomes just a part of who they are. There is recognition, acceptance, understanding, and formulating a plan of action. For the students who have not yet been successful with the foreign language experience, there is a glitch in the construction of their web.

CHAPTER VI

CONJUGATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Introduction

This interpretive inquiry was undertaken to examine the psycho-social issues of college students with learning disabilities and how it affects their performance in the foreign language classroom. The students in this inquiry have differing strengths and weaknesses, as do all learners. Everyone in this undertaking attempted the foreign language requirement. Each felt as if he or she had reached an impasse in foreign language learning. Each applied to the College of Arts and Sciences for a course substitution for the foreign language requirement. All were denied.

This interviewer was interested in their individual responses as to how they dealt with this challenge. Seven of the students were able to at least complete one more foreign language course. The other five have not been able to complete this requirement. The students were never directly asked about their experience with the foreign language requirement. They were simply invited to "Tell me about your life as a college student." All of the information regarding foreign language experience that was disclosed was initiated by the student. Once the student mentioned their experience with foreign language learning, the interviewer was free to ask additional

questions about the individual's experience. The underlying premise was that if the foreign language experience was significant, the student would initiate information about language learning.

After all of the interviews were transcribed and returned to the students for comment and review, the interviewer invited the students to interview her about the study. Two students followed up that invitation and transcriptions were made of those interviews. Each student asked why they were picked for the study. Both then gave additional insights regarding their foreign language learning. That information has not been integrated into the previous chapters, but saved for this interpretation and recommendation chapter. A significant part of this study was to insure that students did not know that the researcher was particularly interested in their foreign language learning in an attempt not to bias what information would be forthcoming. However, once the interviews were complete and students were able to respond to or clarify their responses, the researcher wanted to hear their reactions to how she was processing and analyzing their lived experiences. This conversation enlightens the final chapter.

Research Questions

The following questions help shape this inquiry: What specific psycho-social interventions do students with learning disabilities perceive as important to success in an academic environment? What are the self-perceived psycho-social strengths and weaknesses of college students with

learning disabilities who have difficulty with foreign language learning? In addition, what types of counseling/teaching strategies are necessary to help students realize their potential in foreign language learning as perceived by the students? Implications for each question will be explored as “conjugations” of the research question. Conjugations are the mood, tense, and person of verb endings that join together different parts of the verb. The purpose here is to look at the mood and sense that can be made from the students’ narratives in relation to the research questions. To conclude this work, just as in the foreign language classroom, a translation of the text or metastory is a process which helps give some meaning to the experience.

First Conjugation

Let us begin with the psycho-social interventions the students perceive as important in their academic environment. One critical piece seems to be an instructor who is open and inviting. A student offers, “I look for teachers who are organized and speak clearly and like class discussions.” Professors who go off on tangents or are too global are difficult for the majority of these students to follow. One student comments that he had an English teacher this past fall who didn’t tell the class what she wanted and he laments, “I don’t think that James Joyce could have passed her class.” Another student describes a teacher who is open as someone who you can talk with but who will stay “out of your hair.” The teacher just doesn’t make a “big deal out of it.” This student says the following to his teachers:

I have a learning disability. I won't need alternative testing, if you won't take off for spelling. I am not illiterate. If you can, try to focus on my ideas and not on how it is presented.

The students say that the inviting teacher is someone who is engaging. The teacher will take time with the students, but by the same token will not "take care of" the student. The students want to be independent and responsible for their behavior and learning. Belenky et al. (1986) describe this kind of instruction as the "midwife-teacher" who assists the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it. Midwife-teachers support the students' thinking, but they do not do the students' thinking for them or expect the students to think as they do. Midwife-teachers assist in the emergence of ideas and consciousness. They encourage the students to speak in their own active voices. This woman's description of one of her teachers reflects the midwife model of teaching:

She would come into class and have the ball rolling the moment she walked in. There was a constant debate between students, especially me and another student about different philosophies and things that were going on in actual news of the day. I was always ready to come into that class and talk and be able to talk about this point and I would stop the teacher on the way out saying that was a good debate today or what are we going to talk about next time.

This woman was tremendously excited about having an active voice in this class. She gleefully tells others about this professor and encourages them to

take her class. "I'll tell anybody and everybody that I recommend... to take that course from her. She's from this area so that she has a down home affect which makes her feel more real. She's not distant or superior."

The midwife-teacher also fosters the learner's growth and wants to see the evolution of his or her thinking. Knowledge is perceived as a process and is constantly evolving or emerging. The mother of one student died when he was in tenth grade. Two high school teachers played a big role in his life. They took him aside and encouraged him to go to college. "You have to go to college just so you can see it's not all like this." He always goes back and visits with them to share his progress. And at his high school graduation, he remembers one teacher looking him in the eye and saying, "You're going to be a teacher. It's your fate. You can't avoid it. Just go ahead and get into it." He fought being a teacher selecting instead a dual major of sociology and archaeology with a minor in Asian History. His surprise came when he was offered a position to coach fencing. He was elated and fell in love with it. "I love explaining and demonstrating stuff, so that the students can pick it up quickly." Now he wants to go to graduate school for Sports Pedagogy and become a fencing instructor.

These teachers planted seeds and let them take root. The student wasn't sure what he would be doing, but the encouragement of his high school and college teachers kept him exploring career options. This student describes the academic climate here as being "chummy." "I know X over in anthropology

pretty well and I know Y very well. Dr. Z from my Asian history class (laughs) - my entire minor has been in his classes." He knows that he could have had a wider variety of academic opportunities at a larger institution, but he values the in-depth and personal experience that he has with professors at this institution. He does not feel that these teachers have told him what to do but have encouraged him and given him suggestions to try. All of this is an example of how midwife-teachers help students deliver their words to the world, and use their own knowledge to put the students into conversation with other voices--past and present--in the culture.

Meaningfulness of the course and the student's ability to relate to it, are extremely important. Three of the students remarked that their classes at the community college were more "user friendly." This student expresses a strong indictment against university professionals.

I think it drops back to the basic philosophy of a lot of college professors. They refuse to spoon feed students. They go up in their ivory towers and hide information from you and make you sorta search for it. But at the community college, they weren't that way. Here it is. Here's how you write a paper. This is what you did wrong. Try again. You'd get it back the next day and she'd tell you what you did wrong.

The idea of hiding information from students is haunting. This student feels that the teachers at the community college want to help you. "Where in a university, unless you make the teacher have a personal interest in you, they don't care." It is doubtful this student feels any affiliation with the university

and perceives it more as Paulo Freire's (1971) "banking" model of teaching.

In the "banking" model, the teacher's role is "to fill" the students by making deposits of information which the teacher considers to constitute "true knowledge." The student's job is merely to "store the deposits" (p.63). It

could be that this student has only experienced university teachers who hide their thinking processes and appear omnipotent, but this is doubtful.

Learning is a two way proposition or partnership that this student has not yet claimed. Remember the earlier account by another senior who discovered that he needed to build a relationship with his instructors rather than see it as a competition. Earlier he had thought of education as a game to see if you could match wits with a teacher to "get a grade." Now he views learning as a relationship to exchange ideas and mutually grow in understanding of a content area. Teaching needs to be more of a conversation in which teacher and students collaborate in constructing a new interpretation together.

All six students who did use tutors for their foreign language course felt that they would not have been able to pass the course without the tutor. The general description of the tutor is a person who is able to present the course content in numerous and non-threatening ways. One student described his French tutoring in this manner:

"It's like I took two classes. I took a class with my tutor who got me up to the level to take a class with the actual professor. The tutor went back and taught me the first three years of French."

This student's tutor was able to give a positive sense of self-regard to the student and meet him on the level that he needed to learn French. Tutoring is important for at least two reasons. It provides a safe environment to ask questions and to learn the course content, but it also helps to reinforce the student as a capable and intelligent person. It helps to feed their sense of well being and reduces stress and anxiety.

Another psycho-social trait that seems to impede learning for three of the students who have not been successful and one who has been successful is difficulty reading social clues or awareness of vocal tonality and the ability to interpret other people's moods. These students have difficulty anticipating the behavior of others or have very rigid behavior patterns themselves. There is a tendency not to be able to generalize from experiences and remain inflexible. They may make impulsive decisions. These students have a very difficult time predicting what may be on a test or judging what are the more important elements in the content material. One student explains it this way:

I'm afraid to ask because I don't know the questions to ask. A lot of times if I say, 'Well what should I expect to be on your test,' they say, 'Well, we don't give out a review sheet and you should know what's coming up if you've kept up with your readings.' I feel like that's a slammed door because I'm confused as to what to expect.

Even though this student records her classes and keeps ahead in her reading, she still is frustrated because she misreads what is important. She reports, "I'm intimidated a lot of times to even ask them because I don't want them to

give me special attention I want to be treated like the rest.” This is the conundrum in which many students with learning disabilities find themselves.

The psycho-social interventions that the students in this study feel are important to their general academic success are: an open and inviting teacher, an ability to make course content meaningful, effective tutors, and improved ability to predict and judge situations. This will help with self-confidence, modifying behaviors, overcoming helplessness, reducing stress and anxiety and lifting depression.

Second Conjugation

What is it specifically about foreign language learning at the collegiate level that these students perceive as making it so difficult? All but one of the students had at least two years of a foreign language in high school. The collective memory of second language learning in high school is that it goes at a slower rate, there is daily exposure to it, and they have fun with it. This is reflected when one student recalls French in high school as, “Vocabulary and I can do that. It was skits. It was play for all of us. Having a good time. It was probably one of my favorite classes.” Another student remembers Spanish as being primarily cultural. “Spanish was more of a cultural based thing even though we did learn some verbs and some definitions of words and how to conjugate some things. I felt like it was almost given to me.” Many times the students felt that grades were “given” to them when they neither knew or

understood the material. When they enroll in college level foreign language classes, most feel that everyone else in the classroom "knows" more or "has a better background" than they do. This may be true for many students, but for students with learning disabilities, foreign language seems to epitomize all of the negative experiences in school. The old feelings of frustration, insecurity, and vulnerability come to the forefront (Mangrum & Strichart, 1983; Philips, Ganschow, & Anderson, 1991; Block, 1992; Kavale, 1993).

The seven students who have been successful in this study were able to convert this frustration into determination and forge ahead. One student phrases it this way, "I completely had the attitude that I could do it but I still don't feel like I did it right. I didn't get the knowledge the class was teaching." The students who were in Latin gave most of the credit to their teacher. "My Latin teacher was the nicest one, the one who was the most helpful. I didn't dread going to her." The other successful Latin student said, "I felt a whole lot more comfortable with the Latin because I was spending time with the professor. She wasn't really talking over my head." Even one of the students who has not been successful with Latin says the teacher is "Great, no complaints of her. Maybe I just didn't give [Latin] a chance."

Determination and motivation can be a profitable outcome to academic challenges such as foreign language. Creativity and persistence can influence the feelings of competence and self-respect. However, there does not seem to be a way of predicting which student will feel good about his or her

accomplishments. Even though there are seven students in this study who completed their foreign language requirement, only one reports satisfaction and pride in her accomplishment. This student who completed four semesters of Spanish at other institutions admitted that as a "C" student, she was very gratified to get "A's" and "B's" for her foreign language classes. "It gave me self-esteem to make those grades. I feel good about myself."

Lingering resentment and anger seems to remain for the other six successful students. A successful student explains that "Everything just looks the same." He sees a whole page of Spanish and tries to answer one question and can't. He skips it and goes to a second and it "just starts to snowball." He ends up skipping an entire section and tries to go back to it later, but says it never works. "There's no reasoning involved in Spanish. You either know it or you don't." This student has persisted and passed Spanish 203. He is still frustrated that he needs to continue with 204 and is resentful of the time that Spanish is taking from his other studies. Two other students made similar comments, "Obviously, I've proven a point for them [College of Arts & Sciences' committee]. I did make it through." The feeling that these six students portrayed are that the institution did not meet their needs. Each feels that they have documentation from a psychometrician which documents a learning disability and that it affects their ability to learn a foreign language. The insistence on continuing with one more foreign language course was viewed as punitive to these students and does not seem

to be integrated as a positive experience for them, but something that they endured.

The narratives of these students reveal that foreign language seems to elicit inappropriate social behavior that may be characteristic of students with learning disabilities. Cronin and Gerber (1982) stated that adolescents and young adults have difficulty in generalizing from experience, rigid behavior patterns, inflexibility, and a tendency toward impulsive decisions. All of the students reported some difficulty in this area. One graduate described his study habits as, "erratic. Looking back, you hate to say that but if the class was not interesting, it's hard to put the time in." Another graduate offers this advice, "I think you need to learn how to study. I mean you need to learn **how to learn** the material before you can learn it." This student describes putting in a great amount of time studying, but, "Sometimes I felt like I didn't comprehend as much as other students. Yet I kept doing it the same way." A current student who is still struggling with his sixth attempt with a foreign language says this about his study pattern:

I know what I have to do for a language class. It's really hard for me to commit that much time to it since it is more or less useless. It's not easy for me. I don't want to do it. I don't want to be there. The teacher's don't want me to be there occasionally. So, it's really frustrating."

He goes on to say, "You have to interact with a language a lot more than you have to with another subject." He knows that his learning style is sequential

and chronological. He loves stories and has no problem with history and the social and behavioral sciences. In a follow up interview with the interviewer, he comments, "I love instruction; I can't stand help." After a lengthy discussion about why this student resists tutoring because he needs to see himself as totally competent to do everything by himself, he says:

I actually have tried to view [foreign language] as a challenge because I know that trick and I know that if I can view it as a challenge, I'll dig my heels in and try to get through it. But that's when the relevancy kicks in and I'm sitting there at two o'clock in the morning going over my verbs and it just suddenly dawns on me, 'What am I doing this for?' Then I go to sleep and I wake up the next morning, 'Because you've got to graduate. Damn!' I go muddle through the test.

This student is not overly dependent upon others, but is inflexible in how to approach foreign language. He perceives himself as being persistent and not stubborn. He views foreign language as decoding symbols and formulas rather than a narrative. He recognizes that this is not his strength, but is very resistant to changing patterns of behavior. Failing is the lesser of two evils because asking for help devastates his self-esteem.

Feelings of embarrassment and humiliation are also expressed in these narratives. Five of the students make mention that they are finished with trying to complete the foreign language requirement at this institution. Three have already taken classes at other schools. One student has left the institution and two are threatening to do likewise. One of these students tried to talk with the head of the department about his current language

teacher. He felt that the Department Chair had been avoiding him and realized that he put him on the defensive when he finally did get to meet with him. He says,

'I don't know who that guy is but he's not qualified to be teaching that class.' I saw the hair on the back of her neck stand up. I shouldn't have said it. She says, 'Well, maybe he wasn't a good teacher for you.' 'Well, I've had 102 enough that I know a good professor when I see one. He's not a good professor.' It went downhill from there. I'm done with languages here. I'll go through the Consortium.

Four students exclaimed that even the process of having to ask for a course substitution is humiliating. One student summarized it this way:

I don't like doing it [asking for a substitution]. A lot of the things I had to do were embarrassing. I had to write letters, get the interview with the psychologists and take tests for hours. I talked hours with my parents about game plans and what to do. There was a real level of frustration especially looking back over the wasted time.

Nine students remarked that in no way were they trying to "side-step" a requirement. Each of the ten felt that they had made a genuine attempt at meeting the requirement, but that the learning disability exacerbated the difficulty of learning the language in a traditional communicative approach. Two students did admit that they have not given 100% to studying their foreign language. The twelfth student in this study never spoke of her language requirement.

In conclusion, students are divided about foreign language learning. They either choose to accept the challenge of the foreign language requirement and do whatever it takes to complete it or continue along a known path that is comfortable, but not adequate to meet this challenge. Essentially, foreign language taps the psycho-social issues of negative self-concept, questionable socialization skills, various negative behaviors and feelings of depression and dependency.

Third Conjugation

What types of counseling/teaching strategies are necessary to help students realize their potential in foreign language learning as perceived by the students? All of the students were encouraged to share their specific study strategies for foreign language, and describe their ideal classroom setting for learning a foreign language. Students volunteered characteristics of enabling teachers and their pedagogy, some of which was shared in the first conjugation. For this conjugation, just the student reflections on foreign language teachers will be discussed.

Four students comment that actually living and studying in a country with the target language would be an ideal way of learning a language. One of the students went to Mexico for an anthropological dig. He enjoyed learning Spanish on the streets, in the markets, and on the buses. He picked up Super Man comics in Spanish and generally enjoyed his learning experience. Upon his return to the university, he excitedly enrolled in Spanish 101 and found it

"horrible." He said that he could understand the teacher and was often the only student in class who could understand her jokes in Spanish, but that he could not get the vocabulary or the grammar and "bombed the tests." This student has returned to studying French and has not been successful.

Another student volunteered that he would like to be in Mexico and learn Spanish with a teacher who could also speak English. The two students who have been successful in French do feel that they could get along in France with what they considered to be "tourist" vocabulary. Each of the students found that he/she needs to have a purpose to necessitate learning the target language.

Eight of the students are proponents of daily class meetings. Six of these students have taken a language course during summer school. Even though the pace is accelerated, they find that the daily exposure outweighs the negative aspects. Ideally, they would like daily class meetings during the regular academic term. All of them mentioned that they only made it through high school foreign language because they were able to meet everyday with their teacher, often before and after school. This student states:

The way I got through [Spanish] in high school was going every morning in early to school and spending extra time with the teacher before school, after school, during study hall. Every chance I had, that's what I was doing. That's how I got through it.

Students feel that besides the daily routine and exposure to the target language, the fact that they do not take any other courses and are freer of

distraction is very helpful. One student comments that he deliberately did not get a summer job.

It's really tough to do when you have it only two to three times a week during the semester and there are other classes. The professor has other classes and other students. In summer school, it's just totally different and I think the situation was key. I didn't have a job either so there were a combination of factors to help get me through it.

Summer school classes also tend to be smaller in size. Students commented that they could not hide in the smaller classes and were embarrassed if they did not have their homework completed. This student took French 101, 102, and 203 at a junior college during regular terms, but commented about the smaller class size. "There was a spot light on me everyday. There were nine people in my class. You had to know stuff or I was embarrassed."

Not all of the students in this study were as eager to go to another country or even attempt the language in summer school. One student is rather caustic in his reply:

Ideal way to learn Spanish? Just considering that I would have to -- like if I was in a prison camp somewhere? It would take years, and it would have to be broken down, because when everything gets mixed up, that's when everything goes crazy. So everything would have to be cordoned off, two weeks of this type of verb, and then I would study it. Then two weeks of this type of verb. [Etc.] Now you learn four types in one day.

Another student said, "The thought of registering for Spanish is just like sticking a knife in and twisting it around." These students are highlighting the necessity for addressing the psycho-social issues attached to foreign language learning. It's hard for someone to learn Spanish feeling like a knife is in his/her stomach or s/he is a prisoner. Neither of these students is a quitter. The one who feels like he "needs" to be in a prison in order to learn Spanish is considered successful for this study, but he does not feel that way psychologically. All of the students in this study say that if they could have the language taught in a different way, they are sure they could learn it.

What are some of their suggestions? There are four pedagogical components which the students mentioned. The first is a slower pace. Students need time to build their confidence. All of the students remarked at how fast everything goes in college language classes. The third or fourth week of the semester seems to be the point when the individual coping strategies break down. Their self-confidence is eroded and fear seems to set in. This student said he found it impossible to even listen to what the professor or other students were saying because he was so busy trying to figure out which question was going to be his.

I didn't care what the professor was saying. I was trying to figure out which questions was going to be mine. I wanted to have it done so it would be right and then she'd go on. It was extremely stressful and tense.

A slowed pace has two purposes for these students: 1) time to learn the basics, and 2) they have some time to acquire some success and build their self-confidence. In Krashen's terms, it helps to lower the affective filter. In addition, students should be learning some effective study strategies so that when the pace picks up later, they will have the skills and attitude to be successful.

The second component that these students need is structure and predictability. The student who said he needed to be in prison to really learn was actually laying the ground work for a methodical and slow pace of structuring the acquisition of information. He wanted to have two weeks to learn each verb and then wanted two weeks to experience two types of verbs together.

This would be a long process. After I was sure I knew those two kinds of verbs, I would want two weeks for the next type, and then two weeks to put them all together. I would have to have blinders on when I learned these things, and then I still don't know if I can put it together.

Hill and Downey (1992) talk about structure and predictability in their modified Latin sequence at The University of Colorado at Boulder. They claim that it is the most important requisite and yet the most difficult to provide. They are attempting to be very consistent in how they are presenting the Latin and to leave no gaps or omissions in the presentation of the material. Suggestions include using the same grids or types of exercises for

homework as for in-class quizzes and on test. Students need to have the consistency.

A woman student who completed her foreign language at a community college said, "At the first part of the class, the instructor would go over what we had learned the day before. He might give a quiz the first part of class, but we could ask questions first." She liked being able to depend on the review the first part of class. She also said the instructor changed his technique for Spanish 102.

We had a speech to give at the beginning of each class. Every person would give a 1-2 minute speech about whatever we wanted to talk about. And that was just to get us used to speaking the language so we could learn some new words. ...We also broke into a lot of groups.

Again, she liked the sameness of the routine. She did say she got tired of breaking into groups but that it was helpful because you could work together.

It was kind of helpful to break up into groups to do the dialogue because we wanted to do well. We wanted ours to be better than anybody's. We would get words in there we didn't know. A lot of times we were looking up words and asking for help from him. 'How do we say this? or How do we say this?' That was helpful because I was learning more.

An important addition to this idea of providing structure and predictability is to allow for differing learning styles. Not all of these students learn the same way. Even though there are some commonalities with their

learning disability diagnostic reports, they are individuals and have preferences in modes of learning. One female student expressed it this way, "There are different styles of teaching that may be better than just a lecture. I know it's traditional to stand up in front of the class and go over the material, ...but there are other ways than straight lecture." It is very evident that what works for one student with learning disabilities does not necessarily work for another. The safest lesson plan will include at least three different types of activities in order to accommodate for the different learning styles. Students may not be comfortable with dialogues, but they know in ten minutes, the strategy may change to writing on the board or listening to authentic conversation on tapes.

Repetition and review is the third integral part of learning for these students. Hill and Downey (1992) say that information has to be repeated and reviewed in every class, in office hours, and in a non-intimidating manner. It is imperative that students with learning disabilities have to know that no learners assimilate all new material without repetition. This successful student sums it up by saying:

I need repetition. I don't mean sitting there going over and over and over and over again. Go over it some and then put it aside and then come back to it. Need to do that several times. I think you need a little bit of time in between study times.

Alternative testing is the last requirement these students are requesting. The idea is to allow them the time they need to get the information organized and out on paper. Extended time or unlimited time is helpful. For the students who are poor spellers in English, they would also ask that teachers not take off for misspelling. That seems to be very tricky for the foreign language teacher. Again, the more opportunities that the students have for practicing and experiencing the kinds of tasks that will be tested, the better prepared the students will be. The idea is to reduce the anxiety and improve their ability to take tests. Hill and Downey (1992) report giving pre-tests and encouraging the students to use those for review purposes. A woman student soundly agrees with Hill and Downey. She says,

One thing instructors could do is just give a study guide. Dr. S's study guide was so helpful. You know he was just right on the mark and professors could help ten times more just by giving a study guide and sticking to it on the exam.

Alternative formats to meet the differing needs of the students are helpful. For the students who have auditory processing difficulties, taping the dictation part of the exam is helpful. They are able to play the tape back as many times as necessary rather than the traditional way of hearing it just three times in class. However, some students report that they do better with dictation when it is one on one with the teacher. The students need to watch the teacher's lips and body language in order to "hear" what is being said.

Alternative testing is not universal. Four of the students would rather do it in class with everyone else because the stigma of doing something out of the ordinary is too great. They need to be perceived as “normal” and not given special treatment. One student did report that extended time wouldn’t help him.

I think in Spanish I would just sit there for the extended time. Instead of the hour I have in class, I would sit there for three hours and do the exact same thing, unlike some people who could reason better that way. I tend to reason better under a little bit of pressure. There’s no reasoning involved in Spanish. You either know it or you don’t.

These students do have ideas on how they can better learn a foreign language. They ask for an open and flexible teacher in an inviting classroom with as little pressure as possible. Three students mentioned that sometime they would like to go to a community college where the classes are smaller and the teachers more caring. Some mention travel to the country where they could actually learn the language when they were free of “grades” and pressure from school. It is a sad state of affairs when the university is trying to open doors to students and the student’s perception is just the opposite.

Translation

What insights have been gained by these lived experiences? How can it inform the academy, particularly in the teaching of foreign languages? To begin the interpretation or translation of these narratives, it is paramount to

not make any assumptions. Each student with or without a learning disability is unique. How a learning disability affects any particular individual will vary from course to course. Block (1992) profoundly says that predetermining what an instructional outcome will be based on diagnostic tests is not only very difficult, it may, at times, be irresponsible. Our educational system has created a population of unprepared and underprepared college students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities are primarily mainstreamed in high school classrooms. The students' needs are met in resource rooms, if they are met at all.

More instructional alternatives are available to the college student with a learning disability. However, the critical issue is, How well do the students understand their learning disability? Do the students know their learning strengths and weaknesses in a variety of settings? Are they willing to seek help?

This study focuses on how these students cope with traditional foreign language classes. Block (1992) writes that many students with learning disabilities are unable to succeed in traditional foreign language classrooms because they are unable to process information as quickly as other students. The students therefore have trouble with having to focus on reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky (1992, 1993) believe that the difficulties may be caused by a Linguistic Coding Deficit. They

hypothesize that students with learning disabilities may have basic native language problems in the phonological, syntactic, and /or semantic codes.

This inquiry considers the impact that psycho-social skills may have on college students and how they learn a foreign language. The literature reports that the one consistent issue that repeatedly emerges regarding individuals with learning disabilities is the lack of positive self-concept (Gerber, 1991; Maag & Behrens, 1989; Mangrum & Strichart, 1988). The students with learning disabilities often see themselves negatively, despite numerous successes that they may have achieved throughout their lives. Gerber & Reiff's (1991) case studies of successful adults with learning disabilities, illustrate how hurdles of learning disabilities often leave adults angry, frustrated, and stressed out because they can't do certain tasks easily or efficiently. Many times these negative feelings are turned inward and reinforce feelings of low self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. In this particular study, the foreign language classroom is perceived as being such an obstacle for these individuals.

What makes sense is that the student, the foreign language teacher, the adviser, and the disability service provider work together to make the foreign language experience meaningful and reduce the anxiety. A goal would be to make the experience energizing rather than debilitating. "Connected teaching" as put forth by Belenky et al., (1986) would be an excellent model for accomplishing this feat. The connected classroom provides a culture for

growth. The connected (or midwife) teacher tries to create groups in which members can nurture each other's thoughts to maturity. Diversity is valued. Connected teachers try to discern the truth inside the students. This type of education facilitates the development of mind and spirit rather than retarding, arresting, or even reversing their growth. If more of our classrooms could engage in this connected style of teaching, all of the students -- including students with learning disabilities -- would find an increase in self-confidence, independence, release of creative energy, and genuine desire to learn. This style of teaching honors each individual and acknowledges that each person has inherent worth and is capable of thinking creatively and independently.

The narratives of these college students provide an excellent witness to how these psycho-social issues can be addressed in connected teaching and the learning of a foreign language.

Recommendations

1) Instructional alternatives are not a luxury, but a necessity. As long as institutions continue to require students to learn foreign language through the intermediate level, it is imperative that the academy provide alternatives to the traditional classroom which requires reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency. Course substitutions may be the only answer for those institutions which do not provide for modified foreign language instruction.

2) Grading options should be considered for students with learning disabilities. There needs to be some safety net to cushion the students when they are attempting a stumbling block course. A late course withdrawal without academic penalty or a Pass/Fail option may be considered. Another option might be an IP or "In Progress" grade so that the student could be making progress but may need to continue with the course a second semester.

3) Create methods to address the psycho-social issues involved in foreign language learning. Students with learning disabilities should be involved in the discussion with the service providers, instructors, and administrators. A support group may be needed or individual counseling sessions where fears and anxiety can be addressed in a safe environment.

Music or other relaxation techniques may help in the classroom.

Supplemental instruction where the leader has training in stress reduction as well as the target language.

4) Academic advising is crucial for this population. There should be a clearly defined system at each institution for advising these students on their foreign language learning. Early detection of problems makes it much more likely for success. It is very traumatic for juniors and seniors to deal with a new diagnosis and graduation requirements simultaneously.

5) Collaboration between administrators, foreign language teachers, and disability service providers is critical. There are many variables which need to be considered in setting policy and procedures for dealing with foreign

language requirements. Strong motivation and interest are not enough to compensate for serious learning problems. Ideally, students will be involved in the decision making process. There needs to be consistency and clear guidelines for procedures which maintain the dignity of the individual.

6) Decisions about a student's ability to pursue a second language should be made with as much information as possible. This should include a comprehensive interview, academic history including elementary and secondary education, test results, information about cognitive style and learning preferences, the student's interests and past experiences with foreign languages (Block, 1992). Attention also needs to be given to how the student performs in mathematics and if there are other contributing factors like speech or hearing impairments.

Recommendations for Further Research

1) Just as these students have lived experiences, so do the foreign language teachers. It would be very helpful to hear the stories from teachers who have had students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Hill, who is the Director of Classics at The University of Colorado at Boulder, states that the benefits of teaching a modified foreign language class is not as clear to the instructor.

Teaching LD students is emotionally draining. The task can consume you, particularly if you are accustomed to quicker success and less iteration. The instructor can begin to doubt his or her efficacy. But, if an instructor does take on the challenge of an LD class successfully, he or she will emerge as a changed

educator. The instructor will know a great more about how students learn, what works and what does not. There cannot help but be carryover into the regular classroom (Hill & Downey, 1992, p.7).

2) It would be beneficial to design a modified foreign language course to see if psycho-social issues could be addressed in the classroom setting. It would be important to have this be in a mainstream class because students with learning disabilities do not like to be singled out and do learn from working with other students.

3) There were some comparisons between campus settings in this study, but collecting additional narratives from a variety of students in different settings would be helpful. What is it about the system of teaching at community and technical colleges that enables students with learning disabilities to be successful learners?

4) There seems to be a need for some specific language skills training that may help the communication flow between the students and the instructor. A study which addresses learning and teaching strategies would be of benefit to instructors and students alike.

5) A study which gives three semesters to learn the first two semesters of a language needs to be explored. The instructor may be involved in the laboratory session as well as with tutorial assistance.

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APPENDIX

August 22, 1994

Dear :

As a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, I am currently working on my dissertation. I am interested in learning more from students with learning disabilities who are enrolled in a college program. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The study consists of an hour to an hour and a half interview with me and later completing a questionnaire. Interviews will be tape-recorded and scheduled at a time and place that is convenient to you. I realize the demands on your time during the academic year; however, the results of this study could contribute to the much needed research in this area and may allow more students with learning disabilities the opportunity to successfully experience postsecondary schooling. The results of the study will be shared with you and all other participants.

Those agreeing to participate in this study will be asked to:

1. Participate in an interview session to be conducted by the researcher. Interview sessions will be conducted at a time and location which are convenient to you. All interviews will be tape-recorded to aid in transcription. All interview responses will be considered STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.
2. Respond to a written questionnaire. Your identity and responses will be considered STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.
3. Review information obtained through questionnaires and interviews to verify for accuracy.

If this is an opportunity you would like to pursue, please contact me at 334-5440 (Office) or 292-7857 (Home). I look forward to working together in this personal project!

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Bailey
Researcher

Script for Interviews

Thanks for agreeing to meet with me. As you may or may not know, I have completed all my coursework for my doctoral degree and am now working on my dissertation study. Since much of my work involves working with college students who have a specific learning disability, I am particularly interested in their lives as students. I see you as the expert and would like to hear about your life while you are in higher education. I need to have your consent before I can interview you and would also like your permission to audio-tape our session. Your name will never be used and all information will be kept confidential. At the end of the interview, I would like to give you a questionnaire which I would like you to complete sometime within the next week. I don't want to give it to you now as it might influence what you have to say but I would like to know your reflections on the questionnaire after the interview.

After my study is complete, I would be happy to share my work with you and add any additional insights that you might have. Any questions?
(Have consent form signed.)

**Great. Now tell me about your life as a college student?
How did it all start? Describe yourself as a student. What would you most like people to understand about you? How do you cope with difficult situations?**

Post Interview Questionnaire

GENERAL INFORMATION

(Please feel free to write on the back of any page if you need more space.)

Name: _____ Student ID # _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Year in College: 1 2 3 4 5 6 Month Day Year

Major: _____ Current GPA: _____ High School GPA: _____

Current Courses: _____

How long have you been a student at UNCG? _____

Did you have an entrance deficiency? Yes No

If yes, what subject(s): _____

Did you ever request a course substitution? Yes No

If yes, please describe the circumstances _____

LEARNING DISABILITY BACKGROUND

What is your learning disability?

When were you identified as having a learning disability?

What kind of accommodation do you use?

How does your learning disability affect you?

Did you ever think that you were 'smart' in certain areas?

FAMILY HISTORY

Parental Status:

Mother: _____ Father: _____

Occupation: _____ Occupation: _____

Education Level: _____ Education Level: _____

Home Composition:

Primary Care: _____

Number of Siblings: _____ Birth Order: ____ of _____

Are you a twin? Yes No

Do other siblings exhibit learning disabilities? Yes No

Is there a history of learning problems in the family? _____

How would you describe your family's understanding of LD? _____

HEALTH HISTORY

Current medications: _____

Past medications for ADD/ADHD? _____

Termination of medications: _____

Allergies: _____ To what? _____

Injuries: _____ Type? _____

Asthma: _____ Epilepsy: _____ High Fever: _____ When? _____

Rheumatic fever: _____ Diabetes: _____ Heart Disease: _____

Describe any problems at your birth: _____

How is your health in general? _____

How would you describe your emotional health? _____

January 12, 1995

Dear ,

I am very pleased that you have returned the post-interview questionnaire and that I have completed transcribing your interview. I am enclosing a copy for your information and comments. Do not worry about how it sounds grammatically, I am most interested in the accuracy of what I heard. Please feel free to add comments or clarify any of your conversation. If I do not hear back from you, I will assume that you are satisfied with the copy as it stands. Remember, these transcripts will remain confidential and your name will never appear in print.

I am most grateful for your cooperation and time. It is my hope that this study will help other students who follow you.

Cordially,

Patricia L. Bailey
Researcher

encls. Interview Transcript

January 21, 1995

MEMORANDUM:

To: Co-researchers
From: Pat
Re: New idea to follow up on your interviews

As each of you know, I have completed doing your interviews and have returned your transcripts to you for review. I am now doing the interpretation and trying to write a collective narrative (group story) that encompasses your individual experiences. As I am reading and writing, I realize that I am caught up in your experiences and have thoughts and reactions to your stories. I realize that I may make some assumptions and draw some conclusions that may or may not be on target.

It dawned upon me that maybe there are some questions, issues, reflections that you might like to ask me -- especially after reading your transcript. You may be curious about what I'm thinking. Soooo, I would like to give you an opportunity to come "interview" me. I know that you lead very busy lives and that you may not have the time, but I wanted to give you the invitation. I have reserved EUC's Room 17 from 5-7 PM on Tuesday, January 31st for us to meet. It's fine if all twelve of you come or only one person comes. (Hopefully, at least one of you will come. If you let me know ahead of time, I will be glad to have Pieworks pizza ready for you.) I'll be there and be glad to have you take the lead in asking me questions about what I am going to do with all of this information. Come for all or part of the time. I do not pretend to be the authority on this. I just want to get your collective experiences heard so that changes can be made to make it better for other students with learning differences. I truly am awed by the power of what you have collectively shared with me and am very grateful to you.

Thanks again for helping me out. Hope this new year finds you with lots of energy and exciting possibilities.

P.S. To those of you who are long distance..... please call me collect if you would like to talk. My home phone number is 910-292-7857. It's best to reach me between 8-10 PM. Sorry that I can't provide pizza long distance.