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Strategies for Improving Postsecondary Achievement Rates in Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

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by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Children with disabilities often struggle with academics throughout their school years. Many children find themselves falling behind their same aged peers and placed into intervention programs such as targeted services, summer school, or other educational programs. Many of these students qualify for special education services through an evaluation looking into the student's classroom performance, academic history, prereferral interventions, intellectual functioning, health, adaptive behavior, and many more areas. Once a student qualifies for special education services an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed. This plan gives students access to a variety of different options for each student's unique needs in their least restrictive environment. Some options include explicit instruction within the special education setting, classroom accommodations and modifications, and access to assistive technology which helps the student become successful in the education setting (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

High school students with specific learning disabilities demonstrate difficulty in maintaining the academic level of their same aged peers (Weis et al., 2017). Although the majority of high school students plan and prepare themselves to be college and career ready, many students with disabilities do not attend college or in any way further their education after high school (Joshi & Bouck, 2017). "The population with LD drops out of high school two to three times more often than their peers, enrolls in college and postsecondary training at one-tenth the rate of the general population, constitutes 20% to 60% of persons accessing welfare programs, and serves time in correctional institutions at significantly elevated rates" (Gregg, 2012, p. 47). This review looks at information on this small group of students with learning

disabilities and the academic success rates at the collegiate level. I conducted this research by gathering information on students with specific learning disabilities and the variety of accommodations that seem to improve their success in postsecondary education. This review examines the performance of students with learning disabilities in postsecondary settings and investigates strategies and accommodations that may increase their academic success.

Background of Topic

"Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (2006) ensured the civil rights of people with disabilities" (Connor, 2012, p. 18). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), "districts are required to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities" (Connor, 2012, p. 18). "The cornerstone of the IDEA is the entitlement of each eligible child with a disability to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the child's unique needs and that prepare the child for further education, employment, and independent living" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

IDEA was revised in 2006, and the revised statute requires discussions and plans for transition services for all individuals with an IEP when they reach the age of 16 years (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Transition services include but are not limited to postsecondary education, vocational education, employment, independent living, and community participation (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). As addressed in the 2006 revision of IDEA, public colleges are responsible for providing available programming and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (Connor, 2012).

Historical Overview

When IDEA revisions mandated transition services for special education students, educational and vocational training options expanded. Secondary school staff were charged with discussing these options with special education students and with developing programs that led to successful experiences. The prerequisites for successful postsecondary experiences and factors that increased the likelihood of success required investigation.

Murray (2003) studied academic predictors such as grade point average to improve postsecondary educational success in students with learning disabilities. Trainin (2005) researched the use of metacognitive strategies and their efficient ways to improve performance in academic and work environments. Balduf (2009) researched underachievement rates at the collegiate level and narrowed the field to three key factors: lack of preparation, poor time management, and issues with self-discipline and motivation.

The postsecondary educational success of students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities has been investigated widely. Perhaps the first thing we need to look at is what are the difficulties students with disabilities experience and what accommodations could be offered to increase their success. Cawthon and Cole (2010) studied the obstacles that students with specific learning disabilities encounter as they transition to postsecondary educational settings and identified accommodations that make this transition easier. Weis et al. (2016) identified clinically recommended accommodations and academic supports to improve student success in postsecondary. The top three recommended accommodations were additional time on exams, use of technology during exams, and modified assignments. Joshi and Bouck (2017) identified

experiences and factors that can be used to predict the likelihood of success for students who have specific learning disabilities. This paper examines the underrepresentation of students who have learning disabilities in postsecondary education and addresses factors for enhancing student success during their postsecondary transition.

Definitions

Specific Learning Disability (SLD). "Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Learning Disability (LD). "Learning disabilities are serious, neurodevelopmental disorders that emerge in childhood, interfere with the acquisition and expression of academic skills, and substantially limit educational or occupational functioning" (Weis et al., 2017, p. 684).

IEP (Individualized Education Program). Under the IDEA Act, students who qualify for special education services will obtain an individual educational plan. This document describes their present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, annual goals and progress monitoring, transition services, amount of time spent in the general education and special education programs, and any classroom accommodations and modifications the student needs to be successful (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Secondary Transition. As addressed in the IEP, students with disabilities will work on the following areas of postsecondary educational training, independent living skills, community engagement, and employment to improve their functional performance (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Problem Statement

Barriers to academic success of students with specific learning disabilities in postsecondary settings and the importance of academic supports, accommodations, and adaptations at the postsecondary level have been widely investigated. Many vocational schools, 2- and 4- year institutions offer a vast selection of academic supports and student help centers. In this document, I examine the effectiveness of accommodations and supports offered by postsecondary institutions.

Research Question

The research question I address in this paper is:

1. What are the best strategies for improving postsecondary education in adult learners with specific learning disabilities?

Focus of the Paper

This paper examines best practice strategies for improving postsecondary educational success in individuals with specific learning disabilities. The research studies for this paper were primarily located from the St. Cloud State University premier library services, also known as LibSearch. I conducted six searches on the St. Cloud State University library using the following

combinations: 1) learning disability, 2) learning disability and college, 3) learning disability and adult educators, 4) specific learning disability, 5) specific learning disability and college, 6) specific learning disability and college and achievement. The first search revealed over 76,000 peer reviewed articles and journals. As I narrowed down the fields and became more selective in the type of articles and journals needed for this research, the final search revealed just over 1,000 articles. Many of the articles used for this comprehensive paper were published in the Journal of Learning Disabilities.

Rationale

IDEA guarantees all individuals with disabilities the right to transition services which help assist high school students in becoming successful in their postsecondary education. As a special educator at the secondary level, who works with many individuals diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, I want to know the likelihood of success in their postsecondary endeavors. “Although individuals with LD are as likely as students without disabilities to enroll in postsecondary education, the former are half as likely to enroll in 4-year institutions with only 21.2% of students with an LD enrolling in such institutions” (DuPaul et al., 2017b, pp. 238-239). “Only 28% of these students manage to graduate, which is approximately half of the graduation rate for students without disabilities” (Connor, 2012, p. 17). As addressed in IDEA, revision of 2006, colleges are responsible for providing available programming and providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (Connor, 2012). Individuals with specific learning disabilities who seek postsecondary educational options and colleges find these institutions offer a variety of accommodations and student services that contribute to their increase in enrollment.

(Sparks & Lovett, 2009). “The four categories of accommodations most frequently afforded by professionals in both secondary and postsecondary settings include presentation, response, scheduling or timing, and setting” (Gregg, 2012, p. 49). A plethora of academic supports and student help centers exist at vocational schools, 2-year institutions, and 4-year institutions for students with disabilities. For this document, I investigated the various accommodations and supports throughout different collegiate institutions that offer the highest success rates for students with specific learning disabilities.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

In the late 1990s, approximately 72% of students with disabilities attended postsecondary colleges and universities with at least one accommodation provided to them by the institution (Newman & Madaus, 2015b). Academic success of students with specific learning disabilities in postsecondary settings and the importance of academic supports, accommodations, and adaptations at the postsecondary level have been widely investigated. Many vocational schools, 2-year institutions, and 4-year institutions offer an array of academic supports and help centers for students who have disabilities. This literature review examines best practices for improving postsecondary educational success in individuals with specific learning disabilities. Three themes emerged and organized this chapter. First, obstacles that interfere with the progress of college students who have disabilities are examined. Second, factors that contribute to strategies for success are addressed. Finally, modifications and accommodations offered at the collegiate level are reviewed.

Obstacles Preventing Students with Learning Disabilities from Progressing

Obstacles preventing progress in students with specific learning disabilities in postsecondary settings have been extensively examined. Numerous researchers explored the prevalent factors that contribute to students' underachievement in college. This list was extensive and has been narrowed down into the following sections: low academic achievement, lack of preparation for future educational growth and the transition process from high school to college.

Low academic achievement. Most high school students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities have extensive histories of low academic achievement commonly developed during early childhood or early adolescent years (Weis et al., 2017). Low academic achievement in high school students with specific learning disabilities is often contributed to deficits in reading comprehension, processing speed, and working memory (DuPaul et al., 2017a). “The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) found that about 50% of all adults performed in the two lowest levels of functional literacy” (Hock, 2012, p. 64). “When we take this into consideration, we find adults with learning disabilities facing even greater literacy challenges than nondisabled adults'” (Hock, 2012, p. 64). These major deficits contribute to students' poor academic performance which may be significantly below their same aged peers.

Students with disabilities, who qualify for special education services, are placed on an individualized education plan (IEP) which often includes academic performance, functional performance, goal areas, classroom accommodations and testing modifications (Connor, 2012). Highly qualified high school personnel provide direct instruction to students on IEPs related to their skill deficits. This direct instruction is offered and provided in the special education setting as most general education curriculums do not provide students who have learning disabilities with the curriculum needed for their intense skill development. Explicit instruction is commonly used to assist students with disabilities in improving their skills in reading comprehension, mathematical computations, written expression, and executive functioning skills.

Underachievers exhibit lower motivation and experience greater difficulties dealing with stressful situations and challenges (Balduf, 2009). Underachievement is described as diminished

academic performance as compared to peers without disabilities. High school learners with lower academic performance may lack the necessary skills to apply thinking strategies, gathering context clues, making inferences, analyzing the text, and prioritizing their assignments. Students displaying low academic achievement frequently struggle and do not request help to reverse their underachievement.

Lack of preparation. "At the college level, underachievement stems from either underprepared students or students who do not perform to expected standards" (Balduf, 2009, p. 277). Balduf identified nearly 50% of adult learners diagnosed with specific learning disabilities are academically unprepared for their postsecondary education. Multiple adolescents, especially those with a learning deficit, arrive at postsecondary institutions unprepared for the fast-paced academic content and are not equipped with the necessary skills needed to find appropriate resources for support (Reed et al., 2011). High school students frequently exhibit insufficient skill development in the areas of executive functioning and self-advocacy. Students with executive functioning needs show regression in time-management, working memory, self-monitoring, problem-solving, inhibition, and initiation (DuPaul et al., 2017a).

Adult learners in the postsecondary setting enjoy the freedom and self-efficacy to make decisions for themselves. However, if students with disabilities struggle with self-monitoring and time-management skills, they may find themselves skipping class, attending classes without the proper preparation, and deciding studying for an exam is not important. Adult learners who skip class frequently find their academic achievement is adversely affected by their behavior. "Roughly 70% of first-year college students require some sort of remediation" (Reed, et al.,

2011, p. 134). Academic probation is a consequence of students' repetitive behavior and low academic performance. Many college students reported they did not self-advocate for support services when entering into their postsecondary institution which adversely affected their grades (Newman & Madaus, 2015a).

Lack of preparation may also be due to underdeveloped skills in the areas of self-management and self-advocacy. Newman and Madaus (2015a) described three characteristics of students with specific learning disabilities that hindered their success: a) lack of problem-solving skills, b) lack of knowledge regarding their disability, and c) lack of self-management. Students who lack problem solving skills tend to have an increase in academic procrastination, low motivation to complete tasks, and a decreased effort in maintaining focus. Generally, learners with disabilities develop an unawareness of their strengths and weaknesses regarding its effects on their learning. Self-management skills involve developing self-esteem, becoming assertive, building confidence, and managing change. Students with specific learning disabilities demonstrate low levels of self-management skills and regularly need guided instruction to improve these skills. To resolve this issue, most colleges offer online resources for getting started, time-management skills, planning for success, study skills training, and other entry level programs. Attendance to these programs is encouraged to improve student success rates in the postsecondary education setting.

“High school students need to adapt and to adjust to the demands of higher education, to learn to deal with a lack of adequate academic skills or appropriate social skills, and to organize their time in order to meet academic deadlines” (Heiman & Precel, 2003, p. 248). Students

should gain exposure to college level material by taking an advanced placement course or a college preparatory class. The more experience students have with advanced placement courses prior to their postsecondary education the higher probability for a successful transition (Gil, 2007). College credit courses taken at the high school allow students to see the unique differences between course load requirements and expectations as they become more advanced and rigorous (Connor, 2012). Learners who completed a college preparatory class found the class increased their attention skills and they were able to find academic success (Reed et al., 2011). College students who monitor their academic success and learning styles are consistent in planning and prioritizing, regularly attending study sessions, and adjusting their strategies and supports (Trainin, 2005). The majority of students with specific learning disabilities who attend postsecondary educational institutions graduate within five years of their initial enrollment (Heiman & Precel, 2003).

The transition process. The process of transitioning from high school to college can be overwhelming for students and families. Some professionals find it difficult to gather all parties involved for these extensive transition meetings. Others found the planning meetings to be problematic in that personnel felt they were unable to intervene if they disagreed (Abbott & Heslop, 2009). Successful transition meetings involve high school personnel working in collaboration with social workers, coordinating with disability service office faculty, and planning with special education teachers and families to prepare a smooth transition for postsecondary education. Collaboration is a key component of a student's successful transition into college (Gil, 2007).

At the transition meeting, special education teachers often discuss the differences between high school and college expectations (Appendix A). This can closely relate to a shift in responsibilities from guardians, teachers, and support staff to the sole responsibility of the student. Students who lack proper self-advocacy skills will need explicit instruction before graduating high school in order for them to be successful at the collegiate level. Adult learners will need to communicate with disability services and faculty members to ensure their educational needs are being met through accommodations provided by their professors. Accommodations and other services offered at the postsecondary level will also be discussed along with the process needed in order to start these services after enrollment (Gil, 2007).

Strategies for Success

Adult learners with specific learning disabilities have the ability to learn, expand their skill sets, and become gainfully employed citizens. In order to achieve this high status, young learners need to attend postsecondary educational programs to become successful in their potential career field. Research studies have found a wide range of strategies that work best for improving postsecondary educational success. In this section I discuss instructional strategies and the importance of building rapport between teachers and students.

Instruction strategies. "Explicit instruction involves teachers providing students with clear statements of process, modeling target behaviors, guided practice, independent practice, corrective feedback, and post testing" (Hock, 2012, p. 67). Generally, students with specific learning disabilities are exposed to explicit instruction after their qualification for an individualized education plan (IEP). Special education teachers receive intense training on

explicit instructional techniques as this is the best method providing evidence-based research to be successful in teaching students with disabilities. Explicit instruction in high school can provide a stable and constant support in building fundamental skills such as work completion, time-management, and organization to students with disabilities (Connor, 2012). Effective methods involve “I do, we do, you do” strategies that offer students guided instruction, peer practice, and frequent feedback when learning new content. This method has been effective in the areas of mathematics and science in which formulas are used to problem-solve.

Teachers who break students up into small-groups or station learning have made improvements in the learning process. Small groups allow students to stay engaged in the material and dive deeper into the content through peer conversations. Some teachers call these “pair shares” or “think alouds.” They help students make connections to their understanding by listening to others and contributing to their own similarities or differences. “One-to-one or small-group instruction that is intensive, engaging, and explicit in nature has been found to result in significantly larger gains than other types of less intensive or independent learning” (Hock, 2012, p. 74). “Thus, instructional arrangements that support explicit instruction and provide intensive, ongoing instruction seem likely to result in learning gains for adult learners with LD” (Hock, 2012, p. 71).

Tutoring is another instructional strategy that has shown promise with students with disabilities. Tutoring services often provide one-on-one intense instruction as arranged through student services (Hock, 2012). "Tutoring, in some form, is the service most often provided to college students and adults” (Hock, 2012, p. 71). Tutoring services are also offered at the high

school level, generally from a peer who has completed an advanced placement (AP) course. Successful tutoring services develop strategic methods for teaching students the correct application of these strategies for the student to be successful independently. Tutoring services who provide explicit instruction, model learning strategies, and encourage student engagement reinforce student independence and academic achievement (Hock, 2012). Students receiving just one hour of tutoring services have statistically increased their grade point average (GPA) (DuPaul et al., 2017a).

Another effective teaching strategy is the use of the universal design for learning. This idea first emerged in education from the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) in 2004 (Orr & Hammig, 2009). The universal design for learning consists of three main topics: representation, action and expression, and engagement. This method of teaching encompasses inclusive teaching, enhancements for academic growth, and recommendations for all diverse learners (Orr & Hammig, 2009).

The universal design for learning has developed the "backwards design" method. This allows teachers to think in terms of standards students need to meet, objectives and learning goals in order to reach those standards and design their teaching methods to best implement this design (Orr & Hammig, 2009). When using the backwards design, many teachers focus on the essential parts of core content the students should understand, apply, and teach another peer. Teachers identify the procedure for reaching targeted standards based on the four essential questions: 1) What do we want students to learn? 2) How will we know they have learned it?

3) How will we respond if they do not learn it? 4) How will we enrich their learning if they already know it? To answer these four essential questions, staff will often incorporate formative and summative assessments to assess how students are progressing with each standard before moving on to the next. Formative assessments can be completed in the form of warmups, asking essential yes/no questions, exit tickets, and guided reviews. Student learning can also be determined through summative assessments in the form of quizzes, test, and essay questions.

Another form of the universal design is the representation of material. The universal design suggests the implementation of teaching methods should take multiple forms to address kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learners (Orr & Hammig, 2009). Representation of content instructed by faculty should consist of warmups, lecture, student discussions, guided practice, and independent application of required skills. Many professors utilize technology within their teaching styles. Technology can take many forms within the classroom such as powerpoints, instructional videos, kahoot quizzes, online simulations, and informational websites (Orr & Hammig, 2009). With the growing technology advancements students can have access to instructional information at any time with online learning platforms such as Desire2Learn (D2L), Canvas Instructure, and Khan Academy. Digital access gives students the freedom to access the instructional material from anywhere at any given time, allowing learning to be continuous. Digital copies of textbooks allow students to take digital notes, highlight, and adjust the format for each individual user (Orr & Hammig, 2009). Some online textbooks come equipped with their own built in assistive technology programs such as dictionaries and narration programs.

Furthermore, the universal design for learning also consists of inclusive teaching strategies. Successful teachers use a variety of different methods to assist student learning in order to reach a magnitude of students. Some of these strategies include discussing key points, providing extensive examples, and supporting diverse learners through modeling, guided practice, and corrective feedback (Orr & Hammig, 2009). Offering students accommodations in the form of peer notes, audio recordings, text-to-speech programs, and alternative formats for summative assessments address the barriers frequently experienced by adult learners with specific learning disabilities. Teachers who incorporate a multitude of methods and strategies for enhancing all learning types tend to build a greater bond with their students.

Teacher rapport. Establishing a strong foundation of trust, respect, responsibility, and engagement allows students and teachers to create lasting bonds that aid in successful transitions to postsecondary institutions (Burke-Smalley, 2018). Instructors who set high expectations and hold students accountable for their own responsibilities show higher gains in academic progress among students in their class. Far too often young adults with specific learning disabilities feel a disconnect within the classroom setting (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). This may be due to the environment, expectations of the classroom, and /or the community atmosphere. Adolescents and young adults with disabilities report teachers presume them as incompetent, helpless, and unqualified to participate in the course. All students, even those with disabilities, want to feel accepted amongst their peers (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Instructors need to establish a welcoming environment to encompass all students from diverse backgrounds. Professors who create a comfortable environment, incorporate small group activities, and get to know students on a

personal level are able to merge student interests into their teachings to increase engagement (Orr & Hammig, 2009). Creating a safe and welcoming environment opens the doors for students to be themselves and learn knowing their community of teachers and peers are there to support each other.

College students need to converse with their teachers, establish rapport, gain knowledge about college accommodations and access academic support systems. Students who believe their teachers are approachable, helpful, and embrace students' good intentions are more willing to work with students outside of the classroom. Adult learners with a specific learning disability who sought out assistance and communicated with teachers were more successful than those who did not use self-advocacy skills (DuPaul et al., 2017b). "Students who were able to set realistic and attainable goals, to successfully manage stress, to consciously use strategies, and to be flexible in social settings had more academic success in college" (Balduf, 2009, p. 288).

Community college. "An estimated 23% of students with specific learning disabilities enroll in 2-year college programs compared to only 11% attending a 4- year university" (Connor, 2012, p. 17). The majority of those diagnosed with specific learning disabilities come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Likewise, many young adults seeking community college enrollment do not have parents or grandparents who attended college (Rosenbaum, 2018). Community college or career and technical education (CTE) programs allow students to be close to home, work in the community, and participate in night school or school on the weekends. Many students may choose a community college or CTE program due to its low cost, rural locations, and smaller class sizes (Weis et al., 2014).

Most high school students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities have extensive histories of low academic achievement commonly developed during early childhood or early adolescent years (Weis et al., 2017). Community colleges also have lower academic standards for enrollment into their educational programs which may be beneficial to young adults with specific learning disabilities (Weis et al., 2012). Students with specific learning disabilities, poor academic performance, and low income have a great opportunity of gaining access to postsecondary education training through a technical college or community college. A great number of students with disabilities attending community college either complete their general electives before transferring to a 4-year college, complete a certificate program or complete a career pathway CTE course for advanced job placement in the community.

The research conducted for this section is limited among college students who report having a specific learning diagnosis. Many studies and data provided through research is developed from 4-year university enrollment and disability disclosure (Weis et al., 2014). Adult learners with specific learning disabilities "often" have different deficits and difficulties than compared to others with the same disability. Therefore, it is possible students with disabilities who have higher academic achievement, realize their weaknesses and strengths, and possess strong self-advocacy skills enroll in 4-year colleges and universities (Weis et al., 2012). Furthermore, students with disabilities who have low academic performance, diminished abilities in executive functioning skills, and neglect to ask for assistance are more likely to enroll in a community college. For struggling learners especially those students with specific learning

disabilities accommodations are offered in order to bridge the gap between nondisabled peers within the postsecondary setting (Weis et al., 2017).

Accommodations and Modifications at the Collegiate Level

"To address the academic, organizational, and emotional challenges typically experienced by college students with specific learning disabilities, universities provide a variety of support services to students meeting disability eligibility requirements" (DuPaul et al., 2017a, p. 247). Newman and Madaus (2015b) described an accommodation, "as a device, practice, intervention, or procedure provided to a student with a disability that affords equal access to instruction or assessment. Its purpose is to reduce or eliminate the impact of the student's disability so that he or she can achieve a standard" (p. 176). A plethora of educational accommodations are offered to support student academic performance at the collegiate level. This section will address classroom accommodations, assistive technology, and other resources offered to students with specific learning disabilities to improve success in postsecondary education.

Classroom accommodations and modifications. Classroom accommodations are generally broken down into a vast selection of supports addressing students specific and unique needs in the areas of scheduling, time, assignments, and grading accommodations. As students with specific learning disabilities transition from high school to college some accommodations may change or shift in what the college can provide. At the high school level some students might experience scheduling accommodations such as coming in early to start an exam, offering frequent movement breaks during instruction, or providing a change in their daily schedule. At

the college level, students have the ability to make their own schedule using their self-efficacy skills. Adult learners may schedule their classes during their best academic learning times such as early mornings or mid-afternoons.

Professors that have students with disabilities in their classroom offer multiple time accommodations such as extended deadlines on assignments, projects, and tests. This accommodation may be similar to those offered at the secondary level; however, most students have to arrange a test taking time before the deadline when at the collegiate level. At the secondary level, teachers typically extend deadlines past the due date rather than being proactive and providing a student with a disability advanced notification.

College students have access to a testing center which provides the accommodation of a quiet working environment while taking exams. “Most students with specific learning disabilities believe special test conditions including providing extra time during examinations, using copies of notes and outlines, providing alternative types of exams, ignoring spelling mistakes, using a computer, or being allowed to take more breaks during exams could assist them during the examination” (Heiman & Precel, 2003, p. 254). Other testing accommodations include adaptive technology, tests read aloud, use of rubrics, and written aids such as a dictionary (Weis et al., 2016). According to Cawthon and Cole (2010), “88% of colleges and universities offer extended time to students with disabilities” (p. 115).

Difficulties with reading comprehension and listening comprehension are also present. Students with specific learning disabilities report challenges linked to extended written assignments, reading longer texts, and mastering a foreign language (Heiman & Precel, 2003).

Students with specific learning disabilities preferred visual aids: graphic organizers, anchor charts, concept maps, flow charts or oral materials, audio recordings, audiobooks than their peers who do not have a disability (Heiman & Precel, 2003). Students who suffer from dysgraphia: difficulties in writing, may have another student scribe for them. This scriber is usually recommended from the professor as a good note taker.

Newman and Madaus (2015b) described a modification as "a device, practice, intervention, or procedure. However, in this case a teacher is changing the core content standard or the performance expectation" (p.176). Modified assignments may consist of shortening paper requirements and/or breaking down larger projects into smaller, more manageable parts (Weis et al., 2016). Modified exams may include alternative exam format (all multiple choice, all essay, half multiple choice/half essay, access to word banks), access to notes during exams, and providing modified exams to fit individual student needs (Weis et al., 2016). Modified grading often pertains to the following: the ability to retest on exams, to redo essays, and to use alternative grading scales (Weis et al., 2016).

Assistive technology. According to Cawthon and Cole (2010), 58% of colleges and universities offer adaptive technology to students with disabilities. With the advancements in technology along with online learning systems, the unlimited amounts of assistive technology suggestions for students are widely available and affordable (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). According to Newman and Madaus (2015b), adaptive equipment and technology has increased its presence in colleges and universities to 70% offered to students with disabilities.

Adult learners with specific learning disabilities frequently encounter literacy delays and tend to perform below standards in the areas of reading comprehension, speech, and written expression (Hock, 2012). Assistive technology assists students in the areas of reading, writing, and working memory. Text-to-speech software, scanners, and web readers can be installed onto students' computers for students who express difficulty in reading small font, express greater listening comprehension skills, or express a deficit in the grade level of the textbook or article (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). College students can use assistive technology in the form of taped books, audiobooks, and proofreading programs (Sparks & Lovett, 2009).

College students have found assistive technology helpful in providing note taking software, lecture recording devices, text-to-speech software, word-recognition software, and grammar check programs (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). These programs can be installed onto students' computers or accessed through the college and/or university portal. Assistive technology can also support students with their working memory deficiencies. Technology can provide these students with personal data organizers, outline calendars and planners, graphic organizers, and electronic calendars to keep track of classes and recording cues (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). However, one study found assistive technology to be expensive (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). Some students reported challenges with assistive technology due to the multitude of funding applications required by institutions. Assistive technology can involve frequent and difficult steps before the device works in the manner needed for the student. Extensive training on how to use the program properly should be conducted before the student attends college (Mull & Sitlington, 2003).

Other disability resources. Other accommodations addressing students specific and unique needs may consist of environment changes, teaching strategies, and learning styles. As well as peer tutoring, psychotherapy, counseling, and student engagement services (Sparks & Lovett, 2009). “The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) found that about 50% of all adults performed in the two lowest levels of functional literacy” (Hock, 2012, p. 64). “When we take this into consideration, we find adults with learning disabilities facing even greater literacy challenges than nondisabled adults" (Hock, 2012, p. 64). Adult learners who show regression in the areas of proofreading, rewriting, and summarization can seek guidance and direction from writing centers and workshops offered on campus. These centers assist with brainstorming, grammarization, writing mechanics, and summarizing articles to check for understanding.

Instructional and learning strategies may benefit students who have specific learning disabilities. “By organizing, asking questions, or thoroughly preparing in classes where they might struggle with content, students can hone their abilities to self-assess, self-strategize, and problem solve—allowing them to self-manage” (Connor, 2012, p. 18). Professors can improve student success through their instructional delivery. One way is to deliver clear expectations of skills, establish classroom rituals and routines, and present multiple teaching strategies to reach all diverse learners (Hock, 2012). Another way to improve student success in the classroom is to keep students engaged in activities that promote practice, collaboration, and provide guided feedback on students’ performance (Hock, 2012).

Postsecondary students who receive direct instruction regarding a specific skill or content area show gains over time (DuPaul et al., 2017a). This direction instruction often takes place in

the form of peer tutoring, tutoring services, and/or study groups. According to Cawthon and Cole (2010), 77% of colleges and universities offer tutoring services to students with disabilities. Some colleges and universities also offer training on skill development such as time management, prioritization, planning and preparation for tests, and notetaking (DuPaul et al., 2017a). Postsecondary institutions may offer support in the area of counseling or coaching services. Psychologists or other mental health professionals will assist students in skilled practice, implement strategies for new skill development and create recurring habits for successful application within the classroom (DuPaul et al., 2017a).

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

The post-secondary educational success of students who have disabilities has been widely investigated. This paper reviewed the effects of disabilities on educational achievement in colleges and in vocational schools. Approaches for improving the educational outcomes of such students were examined. In this chapter, the principal findings are reviewed, and the implications of the findings are reported.

Conclusions

Students with disabilities encounter an array of academic and social challenges in post-secondary educational settings. Among college students, the most commonly reported disabilities are attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and specific learning disabilities (LD) (DuPaul et al., 2017b). According to the report, the academic achievement of over 86% of college students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities was adversely affected by their condition (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Balduf (2009) reported that nearly 50% of adult learners believed they were unprepared for the rigorous academic challenges in their postsecondary endeavours. Students with specific learning disabilities often suffer from low academic achievement. This may be caused by hindered development of skills in the areas of self-determination and self-advocacy (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Additionally, college students with disabilities commonly have underdeveloped time-management skills, are less likely to complete assignments, and have inadequate communication skills (DuPaul et al., 2017b).

"To address the academic, organizational, and emotional challenges typically experienced by college students with specific learning disabilities, universities provide a variety

of support services to students meeting disability eligibility requirements" (DuPaul et al., 2017a, p. 247). Almost all colleges and universities enroll at least one student with a disability each year and provide at least one accommodation or adaptation (Cawthon & Cole, 2010, p. 115). "Most students with specific learning disabilities believe special test conditions including providing extra time during examinations, using copies of notes and outlines, providing alternative types of exams, ignoring spelling mistakes, using a computer, or being allowed to take more breaks during exams could assist them during the examination" (Heiman & Precel, 2003, p. 254). Extended time for test taking and assignments is an almost universal adjustment. According to Cawthon and Cole (2010), "88% of colleges and universities offer extended time to students with disabilities" (p.115).

Despite these patterns, postsecondary students who have disabilities report receiving more accommodations and other disability resources at the secondary level than at their postsecondary institution (Newman & Madaus, 2015b). Even though colleges and universities provide accommodations to students with disabilities there still appears to be a gap between their rate of success in a postsecondary setting. Only 28% of adult learners with specific learning disabilities graduate from their postsecondary educational program (Connor, 2012). Students with disabilities graduate at half the rate of those adult learners who are not disabled.

A wide range of strategies that improve postsecondary educational success of students who have disabilities have been identified. Some of these strategies include changes in the delivery of instruction, building stronger relationships between students and instructors, attending community college or a career and technical education program and utilizing the

accommodations offered at the collegiate level. Professors who use explicit instruction, offer corrective feedback, incorporate technology, provide alternative testing, and present all classroom course content in a digital manner improve the success of the students in their classes (Hock, 2012). Students with disabilities appreciate a welcoming environment, an approachable instructor, and access to materials outside of the classroom times. A safe and organized classroom decreases anxiety, stress, and self-conscious behavior. Teachers who are enthusiastic, engage student interests, promote small group activities, and are approachable are more effective in instructing course content (Orr & Hammig, 2009). Access to the course materials through an online learning system allows students with disabilities the flexibility to review course content.

Students with disabilities often benefit from beginning at 2-year institutions rather than a 4-year institution. Two-year institutions may be more successful in alleviating institutional barriers that interfere with the academic progress of students with disabilities. According to Connor (2012), more students with specific learning disabilities enroll in 2-year institutions, the data shows "... 23% of students with specific learning disabilities enroll in a 2-year college program compared to only 11% attending a 4-year university" (p. 17). Many students may choose a community college or CTE program due to its low cost, rural locations, and smaller class sizes (Weis et al., 2014); these conditions may contribute to the academic success of students with disabilities. Community colleges also have lower academic standards for enrollment into their educational programs which may be beneficial to young adults with specific learning disabilities (Weis et al., (2012). Community college or career and technical education (CTE) programs allow students to be close to home, work in the community, and participate in

night school or school on the weekends. Students with disabilities in the postsecondary setting typically graduate 1 year past their nondisabled same aged peers. “Individuals who complete postsecondary education tend to be more confident, experience better career opportunities, and demonstrate better problem-solving and interpersonal skills as compared to their peers who did not graduate” (Joshi & Bouck, 2017, p. 3).

Recommendations for Future Research

The review of the collected research showed the need for further investigations in three areas. First, a deeper dive into required criteria for diagnosing students with specific learning disability (SLD). Second, gathering extensive research in the prevalence of students who have disabilities in postsecondary institutions. Third, increasing awareness for faculty along with extensive training for improved success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

Criteria for Determining Disability Eligibility

College students who have learning disabilities may have deficits that adversely affect their academic success. Differences in diagnostic procedures and inconsistent criteria across professionals is alarming (DuPaul et al., 2017a). Uniform criteria and common assessment procedures would allow postsecondary institutions to provide more appropriate adaptations and accommodations to those with disabilities. Future medical professionals should attempt to identify assessments that lead to more individualized accommodations. Differences in the criteria used in 4-year and in 2-year colleges need to be compared and contrasted (Weis et al., 2016).

Prevalence of Students Who Have Disabilities in Postsecondary Institutions

Many adult learners with a disability do not self-disclose their condition. Consequently, the survey of this population of students may lead to the underrepresentation in postsecondary institutions (DuPaul et al., 2017a). Although many college students with disabilities received special education services in high school, Newman and Madaus (2015a) found 50% of high school special education students no longer identified themselves as having an impairment in postsecondary settings. Incoming students with disabilities entering college may believe their current skills are sufficient for the increased demands at the collegiate level. However, students should be encouraged to "... take full advantage of the academic support services provided by their postsecondary institutions" (Yu et al., 2018 p. 242). Another study recommended colleges and universities should provide academic support to all students who encounter academic conflict (Weis et al., 2017).

Teacher Training

Many students who attend postsecondary institutions are academically unprepared for the heavy workloads and for the higher academic demands. Balduf (2009) suggested postsecondary faculty should be informed of the underachievement trends of the incoming students. Faculty should also be informed of the number of students with disabilities who attend college with skill deficits compared to other students (DuPaul et al., 2017b). Even though special education students are taught in an inclusive environment, not all educational teachers are mindful of their requirements to increase success among diverse learners (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). This includes differences among college level teaching. "Instructors in college tend to rely on lectures

to impact more information and abstract concepts in a limited amount of time" (Yu et al., 2018, p. 242).

Lock and Layton (2001) suggested there are many concerns regarding teaching students with disabilities (Appendix B). Far too often many teachers are apprehensive to work with students with specific learning disabilities as they feel unqualified to provide the instruction they need (Orr & Hammig, 2009). Teacher workshops, conferences, and professional development days allow some teachers to gain knowledge and training in teaching diverse learners. The majority of teachers stated conferences were their initial source of instruction for teaching students with disabilities (Banerjee et al., 2015). Other trainings in effective practices for increasing success among unique learners are co-teaching in the inclusive setting with a general education teacher and special education teacher collaborating together. According to Byrd and Alexander (2020), "special education teachers are experts at analyzing data and knowing how to adjust their instruction to accommodate and reach out to all learners" (p. 76).

Another effective professional development training suggests an incorporation of data collection and adaptive teaching strategies to general education staff. Special education teachers are also experienced in showing compassion and understanding with students with disabilities. According to Byrd and Alexander (2020), "the teacher needs to be willing to meet their students where they are at, not where they should be" (p. 76). All teachers need to discover each student's individual strengths to develop stronger skills in asking for assistance, encourage collaboration between peers, and improve weaknesses through knowledge of their disability and how it hinders their learning. According to Byrd and Alexander (2020), "special education teachers are experts

in program modifications, adaptation, and teaching to individual needs which is much different than general education teaching" (p. 77). Professors who deliver clear expectations, establish classroom rituals and routines, and present multiple teaching strategies to reach all diverse learners have greater increases in achievement (Hock, 2012). Another way to improve student success in the classroom is to keep students engaged in activities that promote practice, collaboration, and provide guided feedback on students' performance (Hock, 2012). All of these elements should be included in training sessions for faculty.

Implications for Practice

High schools and secondary teachers have roles in improving the postsecondary educational outcomes for students with disabilities. First, procedures for improving the transition process from high school to college must be developed. Second, a college preparation course available in high school should become a requirement. Finally, academic and social skills of students who have disabilities must be improved at the secondary level.

Improving the Transition Process

The process of transitioning from high school to college can be overwhelming for students and families (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Successful transition meetings involve high school personnel working in collaboration with social workers, coordinating with disability service office faculty, and planning with special education teachers and families to prepare a smooth transition for postsecondary education. Collaboration is a key component of a student's successful transition into college (Gil, 2007). One way to improve the postsecondary transition process is by involving students in their individualized educational plan (IEP) meetings at a

young age (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). The IEP team meets annually to discuss the students current academic and functional performance. By having the student involved in their IEP meeting, students can start to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. Students who regularly participate in these meetings gain knowledge about the deficits they face, why certain accommodations are recommended, and gain knowledge in how to build upon their strengths to access assistance (Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

Another way to improve the transition process is discussing the need for students to self-disclose their disability in order to gain accommodations and other disability resources at the collegiate level (Newman & Madaus, 2015b). This requires increased instruction at the secondary level in developing self-advocacy skills for students preparing for college. At the secondary level, high school students who possess strong self-advocacy, self-efficacy, and time-management skills are more likely to succeed in their future endeavours (Reed et al., 2011). One study recommended a strategy for success seminar discussing time-management skills and increased motivation be incorporated into college orientation for incoming freshman (Balduf, 2009). Another study suggested completion of a college preparatory course should be recommended at the transition meeting when meeting with all parties involved.

College Preparation in High School

Students should gain exposure to college level material by taking an advanced placement course or a college preparatory class. The more experience students have with advanced placement courses prior to their postsecondary education the higher probability for a successful transition (Gil, 2007). College credit courses taken at the high school allow students to see the

unique differences between course load requirements and expectations as they become more advanced and rigorous (Connor, 2012). Learners who completed a college preparatory class found the class increased their attention skills and they were able to find greater academic success (Reed et al., 2011). College students who monitor their academic success and learning styles are consistent in planning and prioritizing, regularly attending study sessions, and adjusting their strategies and supports (Trainin, 2005).

College preparatory classes ensure the transition to postsecondary institutions is smooth and less stressful for students. High school requirements to earn a high school diploma have increased in rigor but not to the extent of preparing students for their future (McConnell et al., 2015). Secondary schools should enforce a mandatory advanced placement or college preparation course for all those students contemplating postsecondary education. College students who have completed a college preparatory course tend to transition better into their postsecondary education (Reed et al., 2011). According to Yu et al. (2018), "Students with LD are more likely to complete a postsecondary education program, if they develop the knowledge and skills in high school needed to successfully complete rigorous academic courses" (pp. 234-235).

Improving Skill Development

Students with disabilities who have deficits in self-advocacy and time-management often struggle in their postsecondary education. College professors report new college students have a lack of self-advocacy skills, are unprepared for larger class sizes, are unable to effectively ask for accommodations, and are incapable of functioning independently (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Staff

at the secondary level need to increase specific skill development in students with disabilities, especially in self-advocacy and time-management, to improve their postsecondary success. Explicit instruction is one method used to improve skill development in students with specific learning disabilities.

"Explicit instruction involves teachers providing students with clear statements of process, modeling target behaviors, guided practice, independent practice, corrective feedback, and post testing" (Hock, 2012, p. 67). Explicit instruction for high school students with learning disabilities can assist students in organizational strategies, time-management skills, and work completion to build a strong skill set before entering college (Connor, 2012). When students are provided instruction in learning prioritizing and planning techniques, study strategies, and test taking skills they develop an arsenal of skills they can use to increase their academic success (Connor, 2012). According to Gil (2017), self-determination and self-advocacy skills should be developed in middle school and high school for students to be able to use these skills effectively. Students who possess strong self-advocacy skills have a high advantage in receiving college accommodations compared to students who do not advocate for themselves.

Summary

Research studies have found a wide range of strategies that work best for improving postsecondary educational success. Some of these strategies include changes in the delivery of instruction, building teacher/student relationships, attending community college or a career and technical education program and accommodations offered at the collegiate level. Professors who applied explicit instruction, offer corrective feedback, incorporate technology, provide

alternative testing, and present all classroom course content in a digital manner have improved success among college students in their classes (Hock, 2012). “To address the academic, organizational, and emotional challenges typically experienced by college students with specific learning disabilities, universities provide a variety of support services to students meeting disability eligibility requirements” (DuPaul et al., 2017a, p. 247). “Most students with specific learning disabilities believe special test conditions including providing extra time during examinations, using copies of notes and outlines, providing alternative types of exams, ignoring spelling mistakes, using a computer, or being allowed to take more breaks during exams could assist them during the examination” (Heiman & Precel, 2003, p. 254).

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Appendix A: Differences in Student Responsibilities from High School to College

Table 1

High School	College
➢ School district is responsible for identification and evaluation of disability	➢ Student must self-identify and provide documentation of disability at his or her own cost
➢ Public schools make modification which may alter a program or curriculum if determined necessary for success	➢ Postsecondary institutions provide accommodations which do not alter the essential program or course requirements
➢ IEP or 504 plans are required and prepared by the school with input from parents, teachers, and the students	➢ Upon student's request, disability service provider prepares letters notifying professors of approved accommodations
➢ Parents or guardians are the primary advocates for a student's needs	➢ Student must be his or her own advocate for academic needs
➢ Public schools must provide personal services when deemed necessary for success by the IEP team, including transportation, personal attendants, and assistive technology	➢ Postsecondary institutions are not responsible for providing any services that are not available to all students, including personal services and devices

Notes: This table describes the vast differences in student responsibilities between High School and College (Gil, 2007, pg. 13).

Appendix B: Professor Concerns

Table 2

➢ Providing accommodations means “watering down” the course.
➢ Students use learning disabilities as an excuse to get out of work.
➢ Accommodations for disabilities give students an unfair advantage.
➢ Accommodations don’t have to be provided if the professor does not want or know how to make the accommodation work in his or her course.
➢ Students receiving accommodations are not responsible for the required course assignments.
➢ Students with learning disabilities have lower intellectual abilities than those without learning disabilities.
➢ Students with learning disabilities have attitude problems and have no responsibility for meeting their own needs in the classroom.

Note: This table describes the multitude of professor concerns in working with students with disabilities at the collegiate level (Lock & Layton, 2001, pg. 68).