THE SECONDARY TO POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION COLLEGE EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY

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By

Jolene Fumi Suda

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Erin Kahunawaika`ala Wright, Chairperson
Dr. Rhonda Black
Dr. Sara Cook
Dr. Roderick N. Labrador
Dr. Nicole Alia Salis Reyes

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the lived experience of students with LD who successfully made the transition from secondary education to post-secondary education and graduated with either a certificate of completion or an associate's degree from a local community college. Unlike previous transition experience research of students with a learning disability that focused on student's barriers and deficits, this research was designed to focus on highlighting the achievements of students while also identifying approaches, practices, and supports facilitating student success.

The methodology of hermeneutical phenomenology approach was selected to reveal the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. A total of four students were interviewed about their secondary to postsecondary transition experience. An analysis of the data revealed in harmony to Schlossberg's 4 S (taking stock of coping resources) and Wehmeyer's definition of Self Determination (2004). With Schlossberg's approach to transition in mind, three major transition phases were identified, Pre-Flight, Venture, and Departure. Within the three significant phases of transition, a synthesis of the participant's lived experience of transition from secondary to postsecondary education resulted in four essential themes:

1. Interaction with peers and teachers/educators can hinder or aid one's self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition;

2. Secondary teacher/educator attitudes, knowledge and abilities about Individual Transition Planning can affect student outcomes;

3. Support teams matter;

4. Academic and self-determination skills are essential to learning at the high school level.

DEDICATION

To my parents,

Barry and Amy Suda

To my service dog/furbaby,

Lil Miss Brindie Suda

To all,

First-Generation College Students

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First and foremost, I would like to thank all the individuals who agreed to be part of this study. There are no words that can express how grateful I am to have had you share your lived experiences with me and, now, the rest of the academic arena. Thank you for allowing me to bring your story to the forefront and inspiring me to continue work towards educating and supporting the success of all students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As far as I can remember, I have always had to assist my twin brother with his academics. My first experience having to assist my brother goes back to when we were in kindergarten. I recall my teacher having me go over to the classroom my brother was in to help him with learning the letters of the alphabet. As a morning ritual, the teacher had the children sit in a circle to recite the alphabet with each child stating a letter and then going to the next. I was directed by my brother's teacher to help him if he got stuck. I recall sitting next to him while the students went about reciting the letters. When it came to my brother's turn, I sat and waited for him to verbalize his letter. Instead of saying anything, he sat and then turned to me with a blank look on his face. I will never forget the look he had. I could see his eyes welling as he fought back his tears of shame. I prompted him with the correct letter, and then the circle continued. I remember having to do this every morning until he could recite the letters of the alphabet without support.

From what my mother could recall, she requested from the school to have my brother tested to see if he had a learning disability. The school informed my parents that Kindergarten was too young to test him, and they would have to wait until he was at least the age of seven. Subsequently, at the age of seven my brother was officially diagnosed with having a learning disability and the label of a "slow learner." Additionally, he was diagnosed as having a hyperactivity disorder, which required him to take medication daily. Throughout his academic years, my brother was placed in special education classes, and I recall always having to help him with his homework and school projects. Over the years, I realized that my brother's ability to learn was not through traditional class lectures and reading. I found that he excelled when

lessons were taught incorporating kinesthetic activities. An example of this was when we were enrolled in the same health class together. I had a difficult time remembering and implementing the procedures for cardiac pulmonary resuscitation, but not my brother. He picked it up quickly and helped me through the process.

Fast forward to graduating from high school. My brother enrolled at Kapiʻolani Community College, and for the first time in his academic career, I was not going to be around to help him with his homework as I was away attending college at Colorado State University. His college career lasted a mere two semesters as he got suspended due to failing grades. Subsequently, my brother found employment, but even then, he struggled. I believe he did not have the necessary cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge and skills to be successful at the postsecondary level.

Learning through my experience as a professional working with students with disabilities, and knowledge gained from being enrolled in special education classes, prompted me to ask my parents if my brother had any formal education plan in place with his high school. From what my parents could recall, they responded with, "No." I remember asking them, "Are you sure?" and they replied, "Yes, we just had a lot of meetings with the teacher about your brother." Although my brother had a learning disability, and according to what my parents could recall, at no point in his primary, or middle, and secondary education career was there ever an education plan or transition plan in place. Alternatively, maybe there was a plan, but my parents were uneducated about the terminology or formalities of it.

Their answers then prompted me to wonder, if my parents were aware and knowledgeable about these mandates, would this knowledge have made a difference in where my brother is today? Unfortunately, although my brother has always had a circle of support, his life

choices, coupled with not being prepared for postsecondary education or adulthood led him down a road with low-wage employment that has affected his overall esteem and morale as he sees his peers excel personally and financially.   How do I know this? Because he has commented to me on several occasions how his disability has made him the way he is. So as much as I have tried over the years to understand where he is coming from, I concluded that regardless of him being my twin brother, I will never be able to identify with his struggles, his experiences and how he feels as he continues to find his rightful place in society.

According to Getzel and Thoma (2008), transition is a form of change which has both benefits and challenges for students with disabilities. The transition from secondary to postsecondary education may require changes in residence, social relationships, financial demands, and uncertainty of career objectives (Wehman, 2013). Like my brother, individuals with disabilities are leaving secondary education in search of their rightful place in society through postsecondary educational opportunities both at two-year and four-year colleges (Wehman, 2013). Therefore, it is vital for education providers to help better prepare and provide a more seamless support system for students with disabilities.

The number of students with disabilities attending postsecondary institutions over the years has significantly increased (Durlack, Rose, & Bursack, 1994; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001; Nelson & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1989; Skinner, 2007; Troiano, 2010). The percentage of students who entered the postsecondary arena quadrupled between the years of 1978 and 1991, increasing from 2.2% to 8.8% (Heiman & Precel, 2003). In June 2011, the United States Department of Education (U.S DOE), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in a document titled Students with Disabilities at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, First Look (Raue & Lewis, 2011) that during the 2008-2009

academic year, 88% of two-year and four-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions reported having enrolled approximately 707,000 students with disabilities. Of the 707,000 students, 31% identified as having a specific learning disability, which, according to the American Youth Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy (2002), is the most prevalent disability reported by postsecondary students in the United States. Most recent statistics show that only a mere 2,266,000 students with disabilities enrolled in college out of 20,928,000 college students (U.S Census Bureau, 2018).

Literature suggests that the increase of students with LD enrolling in postsecondary education could be due to several factors. The most apparent factor may be the inclusion of transition mandates in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The focus of postsecondary education is one of the critical transition outcomes for students with disabilities in IDEA (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). Another factor is that postsecondary education has become increasingly crucial for all individuals because a college degree will significantly influence their educational and career outcomes (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005; Durlack, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994). Although there has been an increase of students with LD enrolling in postsecondary education, they are still considered a marginalized and underrepresented group (Connor, 2012). Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) compared the NLTS and the NLTS -2 enrollment of LD students in postsecondary institutions. Results from the comparison revealed that 48% of LD students enrolled in postsecondary education, whereas their non-disabled peers enrolled at 63%. Furthermore, with regards to the post high school outcomes in Hawai`i, during the 2011-2012 school year, only 37% of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education after leaving high school (https://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbspap/2013/hi-acc-stateprofile-11-12.pdf).

As evidenced in Mull et al. (2001), students with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary institutions have difficulty attaining a degree in their intended program of study. Despite support, the educational attainment of adults with learning disabilities (LD) remains lower than the general population (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). Statistics from the National Organization on Disability in 2001 reported that students with disabilities earning a college degree between the years of 1986 to 2001 dropped from 19% to 12% (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). The most recent data from the National Center for Learning Disabilities, The State of Learning Disabilities: Facts, Trends and Emerging Issues (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014), continue to report that the college completion rate of students with LD is 41%, compared to 52% of the general population.

Given that completing postsecondary education is an essential part of self-sufficiency for individuals with LD, understanding the effectiveness of their transition experiences may serve as a basis for understanding how their successful participation in higher education can be better supported.

Purpose of the Research and Research Question

The purpose of this research was to investigate the lived experience of students with LD who successfully made the transition from secondary education to post-secondary education and graduated with either a certificate of completion or an associate's degree from Metro Community College (MCC) (pseudonym used). The rationale for focusing on the experiences of students who successfully transitioned is to take an assets-based perspective by highlighting the achievements of students while also identifying approaches, practices, and supports facilitating student success. Focusing on successful students did not preclude identifying barriers. In fact, participants mentioned the barriers they faced and how they successfully negotiated and overcame those barriers.

This research project was designed to understand the transition experiences of successful graduates with LD, and have identified the following research question and subquestion that guided this study:

What was the lived experience of transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education for college graduates with LD?

1. What experiences promoted their transition into and progress towards their degree attainment?

Significance for the Research

This research topic is significant and worth investigating as the number of individuals with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education has increased. More importantly, because individuals with disabilities have the right to pursue and achieve their postsecondary educational goal as stated in the federal laws of the United States. Federal laws such as the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in higher education settings. According to the U.S Department of Justice website (https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm) A Guide to Disability Rights Laws (2009), the legal definition of a person with a disability is "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment." Additionally, Title II of the American with Disabilities Act prohibits all state and local governmental entities which include public colleges and universities from discriminating against individuals with disabilities.

According to Cortiella and Horowitz (2014), between the years of 1990 and 2005, the rate of postsecondary education enrollment of individuals with LD increased significantly over

the years by nine percent. According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 in 2011,

67% of young adults with LD report enrolling in some form post-secondary education setting

within eight years of leaving high school; 50% of students with LD enrolled in two-year or

community colleges versus 21% of the general population; 36% of students with LD enrolled in

a vocational, business or technical school versus 20% of the general population; and 21% of LD

student enrolled in a four-year institution versus 40% of the general population (Newman,

Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, & Wei, 2011)

Students with LD are capable of functioning in the postsecondary education realm.

However, they are often not equipped with the necessary skill set to navigate their educational

journey. From a structural perspective, the educational institution is also not equipped to support

students with LD adequately. The literature states that many students with LD can achieve

college success provided with the appropriate support and knowledge (Connor, 2012; Getzel &

Thoma, 2008; Skinner 2004; Troiano. 2003) and, if this is the case, what were their personal

experiences and contributing factors that made them successful? By highlighting the

achievements of students, finding out why they were successful, and discovering what made

them successful will help education practitioners, administrators, and policymakers identify,

consider, and possibly implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter discusses literature relevant to this study and it provides the background and framing for this research. Chapter Two consists of four major sections. The first section will touch upon the federal legislation regarding students with learning disabilities (LD) and includes a subsection of how federal legislation pertains to transition and education. The second section will examine the literature on the secondary to postsecondary transition experiences of students with learning disabilities. The third section will review literature focused on best practices and provide a review of current strategies utilized in closing the achievement gaps both at the secondary and postsecondary education levels. Finally, the fourth section will provide cohesion through a comprehensive review of the theoretical framework and focus of this research.

Federal Legislation Regarding Students with Learning Disabilities and Transition

Prior to the enactment of Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) of 1975, individuals with disabilities were excluded from public schools and denied educational opportunities. The landmark legal case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's drew attention to the racial discrimination and social injustice in the U.S. that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. This case became one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movement which helped to establish the precedent that "separate-but-equal" education and other services were in fact, not equal at all (History.com Editors, 2009). The civil rights movement was a catalyst for almost all special education litigation and subsequent laws (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, parents and advocacy groups concerned with access to public

schooling for children with disabilities began to take action (Yell, Katsiyannis, & Bradley, 2011).

In the 1970s, two significant U.S. Supreme Court decisions shaped rights to education. The first major case was the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972), which prohibited the state from denying educational opportunities for mentally challenged students. The second significant case, *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972), stated that students with an array of disabilities, including behavioral issues, had the right to public education. This case served as a foundation for subsequent developments in special education federal laws. Most significantly, these two cases firmly established that public schools could not exclude or prohibit children with disabilities from accessing public education, thus mandating U.S. school districts to provide students with disabilities access to public education (Yell et al., 2011).

Court cases following the *PARC* and *Mills* decisions led to the creation of federal laws providing access to public education for all children. The first significant federal legislation created as a result of these court decisions was *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA). The U.S Congress enacted the EAHCA, Public Law (P.L) 94-142 in 1975. EAHCA ensured that every student with a disability was entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. According to the U.S Department of Education website (https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/issues/dis-issue03.html), FAPE is defined as "*public schools to provide appropriate education and modifications, aids and related services free of charge to students with disabilities and their parents or guardians. The 'appropriate' component means that this education must be designed to meet the individual educational needs of the student as determined through appropriate*

evaluation and placement procedures. However, students with disabilities must be educated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate.” (with an emphasis in the original).

In the early 1980s, the transition for youth with disabilities became a national priority that was spearheaded in 1984 by the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Madeline Will. During the inaugural stages of transition, Assistant Secretary Will proposed a school to work a conceptual model (Cobb & Alwell, 2009). This model was later revised and expanded by a scholar, Andrew Halpern as he felt transition should also include adjusting to the community. Consequently, this model included residential, employment, and social, interpersonal components. Halpern (1994) published a comprehensive and frequently cited definition of secondary transition for youth with disabilities that the Division of Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) later adopted. CEC is a national non-profit association comprised of professional educators dedicated to improving the success of children with exceptionalities through advocacy, standards, and professional development (https://www.cec.sped.org/About-Us/Mission). Halpern also provided a theoretical and practical framework for the transition language of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments of 1997 and 2004 (Cobb & Alwell, 2009).

Over the years, amendments on federal mandates comprised of financial incentives for states to provide special education programming occurred. In 1990, the EAHCA was amended to include revisions to the language of the law and, consequently, was renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to the U.S Department of Education website (https://idea.ed.gov), IDEA is a law created to ensure that eligible children with disabilities

throughout the nation are provided with a free appropriate public education, special education, and other related services. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide these services to more than 6.5 million eligible individuals with disabilities that include infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

The scope of special education services in public schools was expanded to require that each student at age 16 have an individual transition plan (ITP) as part of their IEP. In 1997, the reauthorization of IDEA addressed transition issues that impacted how schools were to assist students in achieving their postsecondary goals. ITPs must be individualized based on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests, and must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon appropriate transition assessments related to training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation (Schlossberg & Gunter, 2011). IDEA was also subsequently amended in 2004 to increase the quality of special education programs for students by increasing accountability as the success of IDEA had been hindered with low expectations and insufficient efforts on applying evidence-based research on methods that have been proven to be to be effective Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011).

Educational Transitions for Students with Learning Disabilities

A search utilizing the University of Hawaiʻi's OneSearch Mānoa was conducted to identify existing literature about the secondary to postsecondary transition experience of students with LD. OneSeach Mānoa is a tool that locates literature from various library collections, electronic journal/ebooks. Hundreds of online library databases, research guides, and online public access catalogs. The first search of the literature specific to students with learning disabilities' perceptions of their secondary to postsecondary transition experiences yielded zero

articles. Therefore, the search was expanded to include research that pertained to secondary transition planning, transition experience, and higher education experience of students with LD. Keywords utilized either individually or in combination including college, postsecondary education, higher education, transition, planning, learning disability, perceptions, experience, and secondary education.

Additionally, to locate the most appropriate or relevant resources, a search to include publishing dates of 1986-2014 was conducted. Results of OneSearch yielded 142 resources related to the overall research topic of interest. The search option was then refined by "material type" and yielded 88 articles. Forty-two of which were accessible. Of the 42 articles, 12 of them provided literature related to the secondary transition planning of LD students and the postsecondary experience of LD students. All 12 articles were then reviewed thoroughly, analyzed, and categorized into three groups: secondary to postsecondary transition, postsecondary disability support services, and postsecondary education experience.

Transition Themes

The transition process is critical to assuring the success of students (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). The purpose of transition planning at the secondary level is to provide the individual with a pathway to follow as they matriculate through high school and transition to postsecondary education. As a whole, the transition process can be very daunting for individuals with LD as they navigate various academic, social, emotional, and personal realms. Thus, the individual's ability to cope with this change depends on how well the individual is prepared and may have severe consequences on student's socialization, integration, academics, self-esteem, and participation in education (Connor, 2012).

Secondary to postsecondary transition. For decades, researchers and policymakers have recognized that self-determination is an educational practice that promotes positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001). Self-determination skills such as goal setting, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and making choices and decisions allow individuals to take control of their future (Wehmeyer, 2001). One place where self-determination can be learned and practiced in secondary education is during the student IEP meetings (Wehmeyer, 2004).

According to *A Guide to the Individualized Education Program* (https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html), the student must be invited to attend their IEP meetings. This medium allows students an opportunity to voice their educational wants and needs, as well as teaching them a great deal about self-advocacy and self-determination. A qualitative study by Ankeny and Lehmann (2001) conducted a study on four LD students enrolled in a secondary transition program at a local community college. The purpose of their research was to gain a better understanding of the participants' journey toward self-determination via a transition program. Findings from their research revealed that IEP meetings were significant for building skills and learning self-determination. Moreover, at the secondary level, the promotion of self-determination programming for students with LD is needed.

Similar results were reported in Trainor's (2007) qualitative study examining the self-determination transition perceptions of seven racially and ethnically diverse 16-year-old adolescent girls who were receiving special education services at a large urban school district in the southwestern regions of the United States (U.S.). Researchers found that the majority of participants were not playing a central role in their individualized transition process. Findings

from this research indicated that despite the participant's perception of themselves as self-determined young women, the need for the development of self-determination skills is critical at the secondary level.   For example, none of the participants were able to define the term "transition plan" and admitted that they were unsure about the formal transition planning process. Many participants thought that IEPs were conducted primarily to select their courses, and did not know that it was also an opportunity for them to self-advocate about their postsecondary education and career goals. Meaningful participation by students is vital because it requires the student to take an active role in their transition planning (Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

The issue of students not being a central part of their individualized transition planning process echoes in another qualitative research by Trainor (2005). Trainor examined the behaviors and perceptions of 17 adolescent males with LD between the ages of 16-19 during their transition planning process. Findings from this research indicated that participants felt their efforts to be actively involved in their individualized transition process were made so on the periphery. Thus, the identified males felt a disconnect between their individualized transition process and their postsecondary goals. Furthermore, although the participants learned self-determination skills, active practice and participation remained minimal as they relied heavily on their parents to make their transition planning decisions.

To assess students' knowledge and perceptions of the current transition planning process, Williams-Diehm and Lynch (2007) researched 103 students in a large Texas high school who were receiving special education services. This research was not limited to students with LD and included other students such as those with developmental disabilities (e.g., autism spectrum) and speech impairments. Although the researchers stated that the transition process is critical to assuring the success of students, 83% of the participants reported not knowing the date of their

last transition planning meeting; only 10.7% of the participants knew the purpose of their transition planning. Approximately fifty-five percent of the transition plans had a description of student career goals. Although 61.1% of the participants mentioned they spoke during their transition planning meeting, only 1.9% actually led their transition planning meeting while 35.9% reported never speaking at all during their transition planning meeting. Approximately eighty-two percent of the participants' parents were present at their transition planning meeting however, 98% reported that no parents received communication from the school prior to the meeting to discuss transition planning. Sixty-eight percent of participants could not name adult service providers; 75% of the participants felt they were making progress with regards to their transition goals; and 60% of the participants felt their high school helped minimally with postsecondary education goals. Furthermore, results from this study indicated that the transition process was in need of dire improvements including, providing teachers with education and training on the transition process; to actively include more self-determination and student choice-making opportunities on the classroom; and have administration allow teachers more time to work with students and families with their transition planning.

Overall, research related to transition planning revealed the importance for students with LD to be equipped with and given the ability to practice self-determination at the secondary level as it enhances post-school outcomes (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Trainor, 2005). However, participants reported receiving minimal opportunities to implement meaningful practice within their IEP's and classroom settings (actively include more self-determination, student choice making, decision making, and goal setting opportunities in the classroom). Another challenge shared by the participants across studies suggests that better education and training for teachers on the topic of transition was in dire need of improvements

(providing teachers with education and training on the transition process; have administration

allow teachers more time to work with students and families with their transition planning).

Perhaps more productive and meaningful opportunities to learn and practice self-determination

before leaving secondary education would address these challenges.

   Postsecondary educational experiences. It is essential to recognize that the experiences

of LD students do not fit into any single perceived trajectory of transition into college life, as

identified and acknowledged in research by Connor (2012). To better understand the personal

transition experience of students with LD, Connor (2012) conducted a qualitative study of the

three individuals with LD who were enrolled in an urban university in the northeastern part of

the U.S. as they navigated their academic, social, emotional, and personal realms.   Results from

this study indicated that students must learn how to negotiate the social demands of college to

persist successfully. Specifically, students need to have self-knowledge about how their

disability is a functional component of and impacts their identity. Students must also be

proactive in obtaining accommodations, utilizing services, and notifying professors about

approved accommodations. Furthermore, because many students enter the realm of college with

limited or poor social skills and fewer friends, it is pertinent that students with LD learn how to

self-initiate their actions in order to cope and deal with the social and emotional/personal realms

of transition, and change.

   Change is inevitable in the college transition process. Change is also not a linear process.

Thus, students with disabilities have different and unique experiences that require them to

persevere and work a bit harder and longer than their peers without disabilities as they navigate

their academic journey (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Getzel and Thoma (2008), conducted a

qualitative research study of 34 postsecondary level students with disabilities to identify what

self-determination skills were needed for students to remain and persist in college; and identify

skills that effective self-advocates utilized to ensure that students with LD stay in college and

obtain the supports they need. Participants were from six postsecondary institutions across the

state of Virginia that included three community colleges and three universities, two of which

were Historically Black Universities (HBCUs). Results from this research indicated that

students must be competent self-advocates in order to remain in college and get the support they

need to persist. Participants also expressed that self-advocacy and or self-determination skills

are essential for students to advocate for various campus services, form relationships with

professors and instructors, and develop support systems on campus to secure needed supports

and services.

As students transition into college, they must possess the skills to critically think/problem

solve, set goals, self-manage, and be knowledgeable about themselves. To understand the

college experience of students with LD and to explore the meaning students make of their

college experience and their disability, Troiano (2003) conducted a qualitative study of nine

undergraduate students with LD who were enrolled full time at a large public university on the

east coast. Troiano reported that the responsibility for student success is not only in the hands of

the students themselves but also in the hands of postsecondary educational institutions. This

statement is significant because literature reviewed thus far on the secondary to postsecondary

education transition experience focused primarily on student self-determination skills as a factor

to the transition success of students with LD.   Data gathered from this study indicated that

student affairs professionals must understand and have knowledge about the (a) unique identity

issues students with LD, experience and (b) student development and how students with LD

develop at different rates than their non-disabled peers. Given this, there is a need for increased

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support services at the postsecondary level, and college personnel should assess the current ways

services for students with LD are delivered and organized, and how these services can be

improved.

Additionally, postsecondary education personnel should be knowledgeable when

assisting LD students in determining if the college is a good fit for the student, their field of

study, and whether the institution can provide the level of service the student may require.

Research also indicated that students with LD, who are thinking about attending college, should

research the various supports on campus that would be available to them. Also, LD students

need lessons on how to advocate for their own needs, disclose their disability when necessary,

and think independently and creatively.

To further identify variables that facilitate the academic success of college students with

LD, Skinner (2004) conducted a qualitative research study of 20 students attending a mid-sized

liberal arts college located in the southeastern part of the U.S who graduated between 1996-2001.

Participants selected to be part of this research were formally identified as LD and had received

assistance through the institution's disability services office. Results from this research,

combined with previously reviewed literature, clearly outlined similar factors that are predictive

of success in postsecondary education for LD students. Those factors are (a) reliable support

systems at the secondary and postsecondary realms, (b) the ability for the individual to set goals

and persevere, (c) knowledge of disability laws and learning strategies, and (d) access to

curriculum on self-determination, and self-advocacy skills needed to prepare students with LD

for postsecondary education.

A synthesis of the literature revealed that students with LD are leaving or being "pushed

out" by institutions due to lack of support. "Push out" comes from K-12 literature to describe

uncaring environments (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Students with LD are leaving secondary education without the necessary knowledge, skills, and supports to achieve their goals of attaining a postsecondary education (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Marshak et al., 2010; Skinner 2004; Trainor, 2005; Trainor, 2007; Troiano, 2003; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). A common factor that emerged related to the transition success of students was self-determination. Literature by Trainor stressed the importance of self-determination skills and the need for its development at the secondary level (2005) while Ankey and Lehmann (2001) reported that self-determination skills could be taught and practiced by students by being present and involved in IEP meetings. The ability for one to self-advocate requires social skills and or self-determination skills that are essential for students to advocate for various campus services, form relationships with professors and instructors, and develop support systems on campus (Skinner, 2004).

Based on the literature, students with LD will be more successful in terms of transition, persistence, retention, and graduation in their secondary to postsecondary experience when they are: (a) actively involved in their IEP meetings; (b) knowledgeable about their disability; (c) knowledgeable about the differences in disability laws; (d) taught and given the opportunity to actively practice self-determination skills (goal setting, decision, choice, self-advocacy); and (e) gain awareness of the services and supports they are available/entitled to (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Connor, 2012; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Kurth & Mellard; Marshak et al., 2010; Skinner, 2004; Trainor, 2005; Trainor, 2007; Wehmeyer, 2001; Wehmeyer, 2004; Williams-Diehm and Lynch, 2007.

Although the review of the literature yielded research related to components of secondary transition planning, transition experience, and higher education experience of students with LD,

the search yielded zero studies that captured the asset-based qualitative experience of the entire

secondary to postsecondary transition experience of LD. There was one related study by Skinner

(2004) conducted to identify variables facilitating the academic success of LD college students.

However, none of the literature I reviewed identified factors that indicated having a transition in

place at the secondary level helped or contributed to the students' persistence and matriculation

in postsecondary education.

My research seeks to find answers to questions that relate to the successful transition of

students with LD into higher education from an asset-based perspective. By highlighting the

achievements of students, and identifying the components impacting success, including those

supports from the institution, it will allow education practitioners administrators and practitioners

to identify and implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success for LD students.

Although results from current research state predictors that enhance college success and

factors that hinder college success, students with LD are still attaining postsecondary success at a

significantly lower rate than their non-disabled peers (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Getzel &

Thoma, 2008). Utilizing an assets-based perspective may allow LD students to thrive as

successful and fully capable of navigating the rigors of postsecondary education.

As a researcher, I believe it is essential to research the entire secondary to postsecondary

transition experience and to see how student development and best/promising practices impact

the success of students as the literature states. Understanding the lived experience of students

with LD provides an opportunity to uncover information that could serve as a baseline for

developing and implementing a transition framework specific to this population by identifying

the nature or essence of their experiences. The results of this research could equip educational

professionals both at the secondary and postsecondary levels with the knowledge to better

support this population of students and streamline the transition process. Most importantly, this research could reduce the inequity and divergence of success rates of LD students and their non-disabled peers.

Literature by Gale and Parker (2014) states that the current view of transition as it relates to higher education policy, research, and practice are, by and large, system-driven, and system serving. Students are expected to conform to the institution versus the institution making the necessary structural changes to meet the changing needs of the diverse population that we see transitioning into higher education today.

Another example of how institutions of higher education play a crucial role in the success of students is highlighted in an article by Wilson, Getzel, and Brown (2000), where they conducted a four-phase external review of Virginia Commonwealth University's Services for Students with Disabilities. The first phase consisted of an on-site visit to the university's Office for Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD). The second phase consisted of a direct mail survey of all currently enrolled students who were receiving or had received services from OSSD. The third phase consisted of personal interviews with 49 key informants that were identified by the OSSD coordinator. Key informants consisted of 38 administrators, faculty, and support staff from a variety of divisions within the institution who served in student support roles and 11 students with an array of disabilities. The fourth phase consisted of a systematic review of OSSD programs nationwide.

The Wilson et al. 2000 study resulted in several significant findings, needs, and recommendations for enhancing the post-secondary campus climate for students with disabilities. Data from their student survey indicated that out of all the institutional entities, instructional faculty impacted students' academic success the most; a need for institutions to focus on

"service-oriented" or programmatic and instructional barriers versus architectural barriers; that coordination of on and off-campus services is vital to students; and students were willing to assist institutions in developing and implementing university policies, program planning, and activities. Additionally, findings from informant interviews indicated that faculty and staff felt the institution addressed students' needs and that maximum effort was put forth in creating a supportive, including and encouraging campus environment while promoting academic success. Despite these efforts, students felt that the institution lacked qualified staff dedicated to providing services, the facilities where the services occurred were inadequate, and the number of long term support to meet the changing needs of students with disabilities as they matriculated was insufficient.

The researchers strongly recommended the following: (a) more collaboration is needed between institutions OSSD offices and faculty to ensure academic accommodations and modifications are implemented appropriately; (b) that institutions should make more considerable efforts in offering opportunities to gain the knowledge and tools to foster a more supportive and successful environment for students with disabilities; (c) and student activities personnel should take into consideration the needs of students with disabilities when planning activities as providing some structured adaptation would promote more participation from students with disabilities.

Additionally, it was recommended that administrative management and personnel establish an advisory council made up of students, faculty, and administration to assist in the strategic planning and management of OSSD programming and include more students with disabilities on student affairs related program planning and policy boards as they would be able to bring their unique perspectives, needs, and interests. Furthermore, they recommended that

evaluation and training OSSD programs should design and implement a comprehensive data collection and evaluation plan to discover what professional development/training is needed so that the institution is better equipped to work with students with disabilities.

Based on literature specific to institutions of higher education, it has become apparent that many postsecondary institutions are not equipped to meet the unique and varied needs of students with disabilities. Although there has been a considerable increase of students with disabilities entering college, institutions may not be consistently providing a welcoming, supportive climate, and access to programming and services that will facilitate academic success (Wilson, et al., 2000). Therefore, additional research is needed on these students' lived experiences as it will support the needs of institutions to be more responsive and flexible to the needs of students as this study will also investigate the institution's role in student's success.

Postsecondary disability support services. Students with disabilities who are transitioning to postsecondary education face changes in their legal rights and responsibilities (Madaus, 2006). As individuals with disabilities exits the secondary education realm, they are no longer entitled to IDEA and instead may be eligible for protection under federal legislation mandates: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008 (ADAAA). Both Section 504 and ADAAA are civil rights laws that require the students to demonstrate that they are an "otherwise qualified" person who possesses a substantial limitation to a primary life function (Madaus, Banerjee, & Merchant, 2011).

Although federal legislation mandates that reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities are in place at the postsecondary level, many students are not utilizing them, making regular use of them, are unaware of them, or do not seek out the various resources that may be available to them (Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss & Dugan, 2010). For students with

disabilities in postsecondary education, the ability to self-advocate and disclose their disability is critical in obtaining accommodations (Lynch & Gussel, 1996). Moreover, for students with LD to be academically successful, they must be able to identify with their disability as knowing their disability enables the individual to self-advocate for disability support services (Connor, 2012).

To understand the perceptions of students with LD about the use of accommodations and the obstacles they face in gaining access to the services, Cawthon and Cole (2010) conducted a mixed methods study of 110 undergraduate students who were enrolled in a highly competitive four-year research-intensive university. Results from this study reported that regarding college preparation, 82% of the participants did not have a final IEP meeting. Additionally, 48% reported that they did not know what accommodations they would need, whom to contact for accommodations, or what type of documentation they needed for the college. Participants also admitted to not utilizing the various campus resources to the extent they were available as they either had a negative interaction with uncooperative faculty with regards to their accommodations or were not aware of it.

Similarly, results from the Marshak et al. (2010) qualitative study to review institutional and personal barriers that may be preventing college students with disabilities from seeking or making regular use of the disability services and accommodations that are available to them on college campuses, indicated that participants had issues about their identity. Participants who did not avail themselves to services refused to engage to avoid adverse and social reactions as they encountered negative experiences with faculty and professors. Furthermore, the perceived quality and usefulness of services by the participants were negative as they had insufficient knowledge about their disability, and differences in laws related to eligibility and accommodations.

It is essential for students with LD to understand themselves as it is integral to the way they can cope socially and psychologically (Connor, 2012). Knowledge of one's disability allows individuals to see how it affects their ability to learn and meet the academic demands and rigor. However, a thorough review and explanation of their psycho-educational evaluation is vital as students who lack this information are less likely to develop the ability to advocate for themselves and more likely to experience failure (Skinner, 2004).

To understand the accommodation process and its possible effects on the participation of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, Kurth and Mellard (2006) conducted a mixed methods study of 15 LD students who were enrolled in 15 community and technical colleges in the states of Kansas, Minnesota, and California. Due to their geographic diversity, the number of community and technical colleges, racial and ethnic diversity, eligibility for disability serves, and state administrative organizations, these three states were selected. Results from this research reported that ineffective and inappropriate accommodations resulted from accommodation processes that focused on disabilities rather than students' contextual and functional needs. Moreover, the following needs identified were: a sense of belonging, access to academic information supports for independence, disability labels as they relate to discrimination, and student expressions of their willingness to work through the difficulties they encountered.

On the one hand, the mandates of IDEA address individualized educational entitlements. While on the other hand, the civil rights laws of Section 504 and ADAAA addresses access to disability support services. In other words, students with disabilities need to qualify for services in postsecondary institutions, thus requiring them to know about their disability, differences in the laws, and their rights and responsibilities. Therefore, it is imperative for individual transition

teams and educators to include a focus to allow students to engage and gain a clear understanding of their potential challenges before graduating from high school.

Effective Transition Practices

This section presents a review of supported transition practices identified in the literature as having a positive impact on student outcomes both in the secondary and postsecondary arenas.

Secondary education. Due to legislation such as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and IDEA 2004, there was a movement in special education to bridge the research to practice gap. Best practices or practices that were valued or useful and supported by empirical evidence were identified. Prior to the legislation, many teachers were implementing practices that had little effect on student outcomes while avoiding the use of evidence-based practices (Cook, Tankersley, & Landrum, 2009).

Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) conducted a review of best transition practices for students with LD in secondary education. Review of the documents was conducted per the criteria, utilizing the existence of empirical evidence as identified by Kohler (1993). The criterion consisted of the following (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010):

1. Participants in the study were individuals in secondary school who had disabilities.

2. The outcome variables included at least one of the following: postsecondary employment, postsecondary education, or postsecondary independent living.

3. The dependent variables were variables that educators could affect during the transition period. Variables such as gender, disability category, or ethnicity were excluded as relevant dependent variables as they are not moldable by educators.

4. The study used quantitative and qualitative analysis to link the dependent and outcome variables.

From these criteria, the researchers reviewed a total of 29 documents. Results from the most-to-least substantiated practices that pertained to best transition practices consisted of: paid or unpaid work experience; employment preparation program participation; general education inclusion; family involvement; social skills training; daily living skills training; self-determination training; and community or agency collaboration.

Moreover, Cobb and Alwell's (2009) systematic review of 31 studies that focused on the relationship between transition planning/coordinating interventions and transition outcomes for secondary-aged youth with disabilities over the last 20 years. The results from their review identified student-focused planning, student development, collaborative service delivery, family involvement, and program structure as evidence-based practices as they pertain to transition planning:

Test, Fowler, Richter, White, Mazzotti, Walker, Kohler, and Kortering (2009) conducted a systematic review to identify evidence-based practices in secondary transition. Through the utilization of a quality indicator check-list for experimental research, the researchers identified 32 secondary transition evidence-based, or practices that were valued or effective backed by evidence to support their practices. Of the 32 identified practices, two had a healthy level of evidence, 28 had a moderate level of evidence, and two had a potential level of evidence. Results from this review categorized the following as promising transition practices: student-focused planning (student participation in the educational process, IEP, promoting student involvement in IEP through self-advocacy), student development (life skills, employment skills, functional academics), family involvement (family training on transition issues), program structure (flexible programming, outcome-based curriculum and programs, using community-referenced curriculum), and interagency collaboration (no evidence-based practices identified).

The Kohler (1993), Cobb and Alwell (2009), and Test, et al. (2009) reviews are essential to consider as an education practitioner, particularly in light of the Council for Exceptional Children emphasizes the importance of using practices that are supported by scientifically-based research (Test, et al., 2009). The most frequently suggested practices that lead to positive outcomes include the following: student-focused planning and involvement, family involvement, program structure, and self-determination.

Reviews in which researchers systematically identify practices supported by methodologically sound research provide a base for understanding what works for students with LD as it pertains to them successfully transitioning to postsecondary education. However, what is missing are the students' lived experiences, including the process of how the transition is supposed to happen, the institution's roles, and the psychosocial impact transition can have on a student with LD.

Student-focused planning and involvement. Much of the literature states that for students with LD to transition successfully into postsecondary education, they must be involved in their IEP and the transition planning and decision-making process (active participation, meaningful participation, self-determination, self-advocacy, goal setting). Research states, overall, that students with LD are not meaningfully involved in this process (Trainor, 2005; Trainor (2007; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). The promotion of decision-making skills allows students to take appropriate actions to achieve their desired quality of life. The expanded scope of IDEA provides an opportunity for educators to identify postsecondary transition planning needs of students with disabilities better. Standard IEP practices primarily focused on academic achievements rather than preparing youths for postsecondary transition, which may not be in the best interest of individuals with disabilities.

Although IDEA amendments have encouraged students to be involved in their IEP and transition planning process, most decisions regarding responsibility and authority lay in the hands of the school. Students are typically not prepared to self-advocate once they leave the realms of high school (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). Moreover, for those planning to enroll in postsecondary education, success in college requires students to be equipped with "more diligence, self-control, self-evaluation, decision making, and goal setting" (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003, p.339). The teaching self-determination can be implemented through practice and application at the secondary level to develop and enhance the success of students with LD

Self-Determination. Historically, self-determination referred to the right to self-governance. Over the last two decades, the terminology, as appropriated by disability rights advocates, has defined self-determination as the right to make choices and decisions pertaining to their life (Wehmeyer, 1997). For individuals with disabilities, they define self-determination as having the opportunity to exercise the same given civil rights as their non-disabled peers (Wehmeyer, 1997). Self-determination has been present extensively throughout special education literature advocating that self-determination is an essential skill for students enrolling in postsecondary education. (Durlack, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994; Trainor, 2005; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001). That direct and systematic teaching of self-determination skills needs to occur at the secondary level to increase student's chances of success.

Program structure. Program structure refers to personalized learning as it provides a foundation for implementing transition-focused education. It is essential to review programs that prepares students for transition at the secondary level. Wehman (2013) describes several programs that promote and prepare students for transition at the secondary level, including The *ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Transition Curriculum and Program*, *Who's Future is it*

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Anyway? A Student-Directed Transition Planning Program, and *Self-Advocacy Strategy for Education and Transition Planning Program.*

The ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Transition Curriculum and Program (Martin & Marshall, 1955) consists of three sections: choosing goals, expressing goals, and taking action. The *choosing goals* section teaches students how to articulate their skills, interest, limitations, and goals on self-selected transition areas. By expressing their goals, students can learn leadership skills to manage their IEP meetings. The *taking action* section enables students to manage their overall arching goals by breaking them into smaller goals. Each section consists of two to four teaching goals and an array of teaching objectives that address six transition areas where students learn necessary skills and personal information to communicate and lead their IEP's Wehman (2013).

Choice making skills in the classroom can be implemented by getting students involved with class discussions and deciding on activities. Decision-making skills can be learned and practiced by having students define an issue in where a decision needs to occur; have students collect information specific to their situation; have students identify several options they may select from; have students understand the outcomes of their decisions; and finally, have students decide. Educational efforts to teach goal setting and attainment skills should commence by having students identify and clarify their specific goals, followed by having them develop their objectives and task towards achieving their goals. Lessons on independence can occur for students with disabilities by allowing them access to the same opportunities in life as their non-disabled peers and allowing them the ability to participate in those activities in the same capacity as their non-disabled peers. Risk-taking and safety skills can be taught by teaching individuals about the various levels of risks, choices, and consequences. Educational efforts to teach this

skill can begin by teaching the basics of first aid, nutrition, and job safety. Self-observation, evaluation, and reinforcement skills can be utilized in the classroom while working on improving one's work habits. Educational efforts consist of teaching students how to assess, observe, and take note of their behaviors. Self-instruction skills can be taught by teaching students the skills of self-promoting to solve academic or social concerns. Self-advocacy and leadership skills can be implemented by having students become actively involved with their IEP's and transition plans. Internal locus of control, positive self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, and self-awareness and self-knowledge start with the individuals learning about their abilities, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, which is crucial as they develop and learn about their identity. Infusion and promotion of self-determination instruction can occur in the general education curriculum (Wehman, 2013).

There are two examples of transition programs geared towards helping students with LD acquire the necessary skills to support their successful transition to postsecondary education. *Who's Future is it Anyway? A Student-Directed Transition Planning Program* (Wehmeyer et al., 2004) consists of 36 sessions that are student-directed and introduces students to the ideas of transition and transition planning. The sessions include instruction related to self-and disability awareness, making a decision about transition-related outcomes, identifying and securing community resources to support transition services, writing, and evaluating transition goals and objectives.

Self-advocacy strategy for education and transition planning was developed by Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, and Deshler (1987, 1994) to promote self-advocacy and increase student motivation. The program consists of seven stages. Stage one introduces students to how they can actively be involved in their education and transition planning process. Stage two

defines what education and transition planning involves while stating how their involvement can be advantageous to the student. Stage three consists of the teacher modeling the action of planning so that the student can see the steps involved. In stage four, students are encouraged to ask for clarification of the process to ensure they understand the planning processes, and then each step is verbally rehearsed. Stage five consists of audio or videotaping the simulated group meeting, with feedback to students. In this stage, the student also conducts a self-evaluation upon viewing the taped session. Stage six allows the student to meet individually with the teacher to rehearse and gain feedback so that the student can better address any identified needs. Stage seven is where the created plan is generalized to the actual meeting (Wehman, 2013).

Family involvement and supports. Research shows that the involvement of parents and students is critical in transition planning as they are consistent support to the student (Trainor, 2005). Parent involvement allows them the opportunity to be actively involved with their child's transition planning while advocating for services that will benefit their child. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) stated that family involvement leads to better school attendance, increased postsecondary outcomes, higher assessment scores, improved student self-esteem, and a reduction in dropout rates. Furthermore, Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) found that when students were present at their IEP meetings, there was an increase in parental involvement and discussion of student's strengths and weaknesses.

Literature included in a text by Wehman (2013) that provides recommended and promising practices to increase or support parent involvement are: positive communication between parents and the education team; preparation for transition as an earlier age; providing parents with information on school-based transition planning; utilizing parents as advocates; providing emotional support for parents; and having flexible meeting formats.

The inclusion of formal and informal supports is essential to transition planning as they can assist in student's achieving desired outcomes. Informal supports are individuals who are part of the family's social network. These supports could include relatives, neighbors, or friends. Formal supports are individuals from community organizations or agencies that provide support or service to the family. These could include service providers, case managers, or physicians.

Community resources such as continuing education opportunities, employment-based education, and participation in early contact with service providers are essential indicators of participation in postsecondary education (Miller, Snider, & Rzonca, 1990). Upon reviewing the literature, transition teams should include community participation and resources as part of the child's transition plan. It is particularly important as parents, educators, students, and family members are unaware that most adult services are eligibility driven (Wehmen, 2013). Unlike IDEA at the secondary level, students with LD transitioning to higher education leave a realm of being entitled to services, to a realm of being eligible for services.

Although all community resources are significant, it is pertinent for transition teams to emphasize their efforts on the following two community supports for students who are planning to enroll in postsecondary education: social security benefits and vocational rehabilitation agencies. Students enrolled in higher education may qualify for student earned income through social security, and individuals who qualify for vocational rehabilitation services may receive financial support to finance the individual's postsecondary education (Wehman, 2013).

Preparation for students as they transition into the realm of higher education must occur as they will face another phase of transition and must be. As Schlossberg (2011) stated, individuals transitioning to higher education are significantly impacted by the transition in many aspects as they manage new environments, experiences, relationships, routines, learning, and

responsibilities. Current research in the field of transition also suggests that transition can be managed and supported (Gale & Parker, 2014). Therefore, student-focused planning, involvement, and collaboration between the student, high school, and their supports are essential for the student's transition to then be successful.

Postsecondary education. The review of the postsecondary and transition literature revealed no theories or frameworks specifically related to individuals with LD transitioning into and matriculating through higher education. However, there is literature about practices and support aiding in the transition process as student's transition into higher education: student engagement and involvement; first-year experience; bridge programs; learning communities; self-determination; academic advising; early alert system; institutional support, and faculty mentoring program. As a result of the understood connection between practice and supports that aid in the transition process of students, there is a need to work towards improving the secondary to postsecondary transition experience for students with LD.

Student involvement and engagement. Astin (1975) summarizes student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p.518). Participation in clubs and organizations is one form of involvement associated with an array of learning and developmental gains (Case, 2011). Taking part in these often gives a student a sense of belonging, a club with individuals who have similar interests. Developing a sense of belonging is a critical component to their success, particularly those who are at risk as "students with disabilities, students experiencing mental health challenges, and students from ethnic backgrounds are at risk for non-completion" (O'Keefe, 2013, p.612).

The student involvement theory has its origins in a longitudinal study that researched the topic of college dropouts (Astin, 1984). The purpose of Astin's research was to identify factors

in the college environment that significantly affected the persistence of college students. Results from this research found that involvement factors contributed to students staying and persisting in college. Astin (1977) conducted a more in-depth investigation of involvement in which longitudinal data of more than 200,000 students were examined to view the effects of different types of involvement and how it affected student persistence. Results from the research concluded that nearly all forms of student involvement were associated with more significant than average changes in entering freshman characteristics (Astin, 1985).

The examination of transition best practices at the secondary and postsecondary realms demonstrated the importance of the transition process for students with LD. Student participation at the forefront of their IEP's is highly encouraged as it reinforces meaningful participation where students become a central part of their transition planning and IEPs (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Institutions of higher education also have a responsibility to meet the needs of disabled students with regards to student affairs personnel, faculty and staff being educated about the LD population so that they can be provided with appropriate counseling, advising, and programming (Skinner, 2007)

Engagement is essential as too many students who enroll in college leave before completing degrees. Student engagement, as defined by Kuh (2009), "represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 68). A study by Hughes and Pace (2003) explored a random sample of freshmen and senior students and their responses to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at Humboldt State University in the Spring of 2002. The samples of students were of the general population, and the article did not mention any cohorts. Results showed that of the 169 students in the Spring of 2003, 30

students had withdrawn from the institution. Furthermore, the results from the NSSE showed that students who withdrew from school were less engaged than their counterparts who persisted. What the research did not indicate is why the students were not as engaged?

Moreover, whose responsibility is it to be engaged? The student or the institution? Kuh (2009) states that institutional policies and practices promote higher levels of engagement through the implementation of various purposeful educational in-class and out of class educationally activities. Additionally, the effects of engagement are generally positive for all students, including those who are underrepresented ethnically and those who are less prepared for college.

First-year experience. As mentioned by Gale and Parker (2014), transition as an induction involves pathways and refers to the individual's sequential defined phases of adjustments. Induction is dynamically progressive and usually occurs once students enter the realms of higher education and typically referred to as the first-year experience (FYE). The first year is usually seen as a critical year for the success or failure of students as it is the most complex and trying period for students, especially for individuals coming from diverse backgrounds (Gale & Parker, 2014). During this period of transition, students become introduced and exposed to various supports the institution has to offer to help them navigate their academic journey. Best practices to support the induction stage are FYE programs.

There is a large body of literature that indicates that FYE programs have a positive impact on student achievement and student integration. The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has conducted numerous national research on including a first-year seminar in American higher education (http://sc.edu/fye/research/index.html) since 1988.   In rethinking the first year of college, Tinto

(1999) stated that shared learning should be the norm of the student experience. No student should be allowed to go through their first year of college alone or disconnected from other learners. Therefore, freshmen seminars should be integrated into the students in the first year of the college experience in some shared learning environment.

Over the last few decades, FYE programs (like a freshman or first-year orientation), and student success courses have served as crucial retention tools that have been designed to assist students transition experience into college, encourage success, and foster relationships to assist in their educational journey (Derby & Smith, 2004). The design of FYE programs varies depending on the institution with regards to frequency and duration of the class time, content structure, credit hours, and grading. However, the most consistent element of FYE programs are the regularly scheduled meetings with their instructor. FYE programs allow students to assimilate to college, become active learners, engage in meaningful conversations, and critically think (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

The goals for orientations are typically to acquaint new students with the institutions, review expected student outcomes, review student roles and responsibilities, introduce students to the various academic and student support programs and services, introduce students to the various clubs and organizations, while allowing the opportunity for students to meet and interact with various faculty, staff, and students (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986). The interaction students have with other students, faculty, and staff can influence a student's intention and commitment to stay or depart from an institution (O'Keefe, 2013). Student orientations vary between institutions; however, the underlying purpose of college orientation programs is to facilitate student integration and involvement in their new environment. Porter & Swing's (2006) research efforts were designed to provide participating campuses with aggregated

learning outcomes that were self-reported by students who participated in a one-term first-year seminar. Results indicated that the choice of the content included in the curriculum of first-year seminars makes a difference. Concerning this specific study, the content of study skills and health matters had a higher probability rate of student persistence.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) conducted a synthesis of over 2,500 studies. Evidence from their research acknowledged that freshmen year seminars are linked positively to both first-year persistence and degree completion. Schnell and Doetkott (2003) found that the retention rate of students who enrolled in the first year (freshman) seminar courses was far greater than those who did not. Similarly, research by Boudreau and Kromrey (1994) acknowledges a positive relationship between student retention and academic performance by students who completed an FYE course. Furthermore, O'Gara and Hughes (2009), revealed that students found the success course to be beneficial in a variety of ways and overall had a positive impact on the students.

Research evidence suggests that first-year programs have positive effects on student retention and persistence (Porter & Swing, 2006). Additionally, students who participate in first-year programs experienced more frequent and meaningful interactions with both faculty and students; were involved with more extracurricular activities; and more positive perception of themselves as learners regardless of their sex, gender, age, major, ethnicity, and ability (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).   Another type of programming that has proven to be successful in supporting transition are bridge programs.

Summer bridge programs. To support the ease of transition into higher education, many institutions offer summer bridge programs. The design of summer bridge programs is to assist the new student in making the transition into college more seamlessly. Although the content of

the bridge program varies, the focus was to provide students with the necessary academic and non-cognitive skills they would need to succeed in the college environment. Programming may include but are not limited to a student success course, introduction to college series, orientation to college resources, opportunities to enroll in pre-college level courses, provision of supplemental instruction, academic and financial aid advising, and career exploration. Historically, summer bridge programs were created and implemented to support the underrepresented (first-generation, low-income, ethnic minorities, disabled) populations in higher education. Bridge programs have since expanded to encompass all students, including students with disabilities.

The HEATH Resource Center (n.d) provides a compilation of colleges that provided a pre-college summer program for high school students who were planning to attend college. The literature mentioned that campus disability support providers reported that students who took part in summer pre-college programs were able to manage their first year of college with fewer problems (https://www.heath.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2346/f/downloads/summer_pre_college_programs_for_students_with_disabilities.pdf).

A review of summer bridge programs by the U.S Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2016) identified 31 eligible studies that investigated the effects of summer bridge programs on postsecondary outcomes of college students. Upon reviewing the studies, WWC found that there are positive effects on postsecondary attainment by students who participated in summer bridge programs.

Santa Rita and Bacote (1996), researched the effects of a summer bridge program and how it impacted the academic, personal, and social development of 52 low-income students

during their first year at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. The

program consisted of a six-week program with a curricular component that involved intensive

English composition, Reading, and Math courses. Additionally, the students became exposed to

orientation and career development seminars that addressed study skills and career guidance.

Data from the research suggested that the participants persisted to the following year of college,

remained in good academic standing, and were socially prepared to utilize campus services and

participate in classroom discussions. Although this research is a bit outdated, it is essential to

recognize that early research like this one has helped to mold and transform currently practiced

bridge programs.

Kallison and Stader (2012) reported on the effectiveness of bridge programs on seven

public community colleges and seven public universities in the state of Texas. Paired together

was an institution of higher education and an independent public school district. In total, 782

eleventh and twelfth graders participated in this study. The duration of the bridge programs

ranged from four to six-week programs. The curriculum included a range of developmental

courses, college placement exams, and college entrance exams to actual college credit courses to

provide students with a real college experience. The bridge program also incorporated

enrichment programs, mentors, career planning, academic counseling, college campus tours, and

study skills courses. Data from the research suggested that the student scores significantly

increased in both reading and writing, however no significant gains for math. In all, school and

college attitudes, findings indicated that the summer bridge program was a positive learning

experience, with 90% of the students intending on enrolling in some form of postsecondary

education.

The literature on bridge programs suggests that this type of programming is successful and that all students benefit from taking part in it. Studies that reviewed the effectiveness of bridge programs as it pertains to the transition success and degree attainment of students with LD specifically was absent. This finding prompted the inclusion of questions that ask research participants about bridge opportunities and if it facilitated their success.

Learning communities. Learning communities that have been around for over fifty years have become a significant force in higher education is another practice implemented to support first-year students and beyond. Students who participate in learning communities can form support groups that go beyond the classroom. This impact is enhanced further than that of students enrolled in standalone classes; student's eagerness to learn more extend beyond class hours; enhancement to student's overall quality of learning; and students seen themselves more actively and socially engaged (Smith, 1991).

Learning communities also change the way students are taught and experience the curriculum. In learning communities, there is more of an emphasis on collaborative learning versus traditional lecturing by faculty. This approach allows students to actively engage with their educational journey while being accountable for their learning. Students who participate in a learning community are required to enroll in a series of courses that are centered mostly around a unifying theme (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). The requirement of having students take courses together is done purposely as learning communities seek to create a shared experience with higher levels of cognitive complexity, something that cannot be obtained as easily if the enrolled in unrelated courses. Moreover, requiring students to be enrolled in the same courses, give students the ability to create relationships with their peers quickly, both intellectually and socially (Tinto, 1999).

Tinto and Russo (1994) conducted a mixed-methods study on the effects of student involvement at Seattle Central Community College. The research sought to answer two questions: do learning communities make a difference? Moreover, if they do, how do they make a difference? Data from the research concluded that learning communities do work, and they work for the following reasons: they provided students with a supportive network of peers which assisted in the transition to college; students became more involved in both in class and out of class activities; students became more actively involved and took responsibility for their learning; students spent more time and effort on academic and academic-related activities.

Zhao and Kuh (2004) conducted a quantitative study that examined whether participating in a learning community was linked to student success utilizing data from the National Survey of Student Engagement. Data from the research concluded that learning communities were both positively and uniformly linked with student academic performance, student engagement in educational activities, college attendance, and overall satisfaction with the college. Huerta (2004) stated that learning communities at Texas A& M University-Corpus Christi have been a regular part of their curriculum since 1994 and include large lecture courses of 150 or more students.

Once students enter college, they begin to experience transitioning and change. Transition is viewed more as a trajectory, a way of signaling a series of distinct developmental stages. During this transition, individuals transform and develop their identity. For example, they are developing their identity as a college student and identity within their field of study (i.e., teacher, nurse, doctor, etc.). It is also with the understanding that transition occurs not so much in periods, but in distinct linear, cumulative, and non-reversible qualitative stages. Activities to support the development concept are mentoring programs (i.e., peer mentors, career mentors),

creating service-learning and field placement programs, cultural and educational programming (Gale & Parker, 2014).

As students acclimate to the college environment and being a college student, students are highly encouraged to seek out, inquire, and engage in the various academic support services and programs the institution has to offer. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) support this statement as their findings point to student engagement as a means of fostering purposeful educational activities that are positively related to academic achievement and persistence for first-year students. Support programs differ between institutions, but among constant supports that students can inquire about and utilize are tutoring services, as most college campuses offer free tutoring that all students can utilize. To support the academic journey of students, they are encouraged to utilize the various academic, financial aid, career (Wilmer, 2008).

The first support students with LD should inquire about is accommodations. Self-advocacy for accommodation and the ability for one to disclose their disability are essential for student's success in postsecondary education (Lynch & Gussel, 1996). To encourage students to obtain accommodations, institutions can begin deconstructing barriers by educating professionals in higher education about the accommodation process, laws, and practices (Bolt, Decker, Lloyd, & Morlock, 2011). Although faculty may understand the legalities and have the willingness to provide academic accommodations, research by Skinner (2007) reported that faculty were less willing to provide an alternative format which could be detrimental to the student and problematic to the institution as they may face litigation. Moreover, for students with LD to accomplish seeking out services, advocating for services, and engaging in campus supports, self-

determination again has been identified as an essential skill for students with disabilities to possess.

Self-determination. Getzel and Thoma (2008) conducted a qualitative study to better understand the experience of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. Findings from their research indicated that self-determination was an essential skill in higher education. Cawthon and Cole (2010) support self-determination theory in another article. Together, they explored the possible effects of crucial variables that could influence students with learning disabilities access services in a university setting. Results from the study suggested that students would have utilized more services and benefitted from campus support programs if given information about accommodations, self-advocacy, and their disability before their enrollment in postsecondary education. Further results suggested that it would be in the best interest of higher education institutions to educate their personnel about the accommodation process, laws, and practices. These results prompted me to wonder if timing does matter? If students with LD are more likely to experience success if education is provided systematically early in a student's college experience.

As the postsecondary level, it is imperative for LD students to connect with their institution's disability services office. This office not only provides students with necessary disabilities academic accommodations, it also serves to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to college facilities, programs, activities, and services. Accommodations are made based on an individual's disability, and as it pertains to LD students, academic accommodations can range from the use of a note-taker, use of tape recorder, extended test-taking, use of a reader, and testing room accommodations. There are other accommodations available, tailored explicitly to LD student needs. As a common practice, it is also highly recommended that

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students complete the accommodation process before the first day of classes to ensure that academic accommodations are in place. This practice better positions an LD student to be prepared and ready for the rigor and challenge of a post-secondary classroom. With early connection, sustained and strategic interventions may be more likely to lead to increased student persistence, retention, and student success.

Academic advising. Proper academic advising from induction and throughout the student's college career is one of essential services institutions of higher education can provide to increase student retention (Wilmer, 2008), Academic counselors can assist with the selection of courses, and provide possible degree selections as desired by the students. The financial aid counselor can assist the student with the financial aid process, educating the student about the cost of attendance, available scholarships, and provide financial literacy. Career counselors can provide students with possible career pathways according to their majors, as well as insight into the job market. Career counselors can also provide education on preparing for an interview, writing a resume, and career exploratory inventories for undecided majors.

Early alert system. The implementation of early alert systems has also been adopted by institutions of higher education to aid in the retention of students. Early alert systems extend contact between academic counselors, retention counselors, support programs, and instructors. Early alert systems raise warnings for class attendance, subpar or failing grades, personal concerns, and other academic concerns. This system allows the institution to alert students about their deficiencies before they become unmanageable while providing a robust system of communication and support (Wilmer, 2008). Because the early alert system is relatively a new approach to higher education, there is very minimal empirically research to support the validity of this practice. However, Rudmann (1992) conducted a two-year study at Irvine Valley College

on the effectiveness of mid-semester, early alert-follow up procedure that was designed to help first-semester freshmen who were having difficulties in their course work. The study found that the students who received early alert letters had earned the highest end of the year retention (81.3%) for full-time students.

Instructional supports. In an effort to retain students, colleges, and universities have implemented a variety of support programs (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). One type of support is instructional support centers, which may include writing labs, math labs, and tutoring services staffed by both peer and professional tutors. Support centers allow students the opportunity to get academic help and ask questions that they may not have asked in class as they may have felt intimidated. Support centers are also helpful as tutors can differentiate their tutoring style to meet the learning needs of the student (Wilmer 2008).

Troiano, Leifled, and Trachtenberg (2010) studied 262 students with LD who were enrolled in a small, private northeastern college that utilized the institutions learning resource center. The purpose of the research was to investigate the connection between college success and the use of the institutions learning resource center. The authors found that students who frequented the center for academic tutoring consistently had higher rates of success that those who did not attend or who did not attend consistently. Additionally, students who frequented the center for academic tutoring consistently also had higher grade point averages and persisted to graduation.

Faculty mentor program. Faculty members are encouraged to serve as mentors by providing guidance and support to undergraduate students (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Campbell and Campbell (1997) evaluated the effects of mentoring on the academic performance and retention of 339 undergraduate students. The study looked at students assigned to a mentor

versus students not assigned to a mentor. Results from this research showed that students who

assigned to a mentor had higher grade point averages (GPA) and lower dropout rates.

Furthermore, the amount of contact the students had with their mentor correlated to their GPA.

Summary

This chapter touched upon how federal legislation pertains to students with learning

disabilities and their relation to transition and education. Also, a review of literature on the

secondary to postsecondary transition experiences and higher education experiences of students

with LD. Finally, a review of best practices on transition that are being implemented both at the

secondary and postsecondary arenas.

The literature states that many students with LD can achieve college success if they are

provided with the appropriate support and knowledge (Connor, 2012; Getzel & Thoma, 2008;

Skinner 2004; Troiano, 2003). And as much as we would like to believe that students enter the

territory of higher education prepared, research literature included in this chapter has indicated

otherwise (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Literature on best practices shows the efforts have and are

being made to bridge the gap so that students are successful. And although results from current

research tells us predictors that enhance college success and factors that hinder college success,

students with LD are still attaining postsecondary success at a significantly lower rate than their

non-disabled peers (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

The fact remains that knowledge of the laws, understanding of the transition process,

understanding of oneself, proper transition planning, awareness of support, and interventions are

pertinent to the transition success of LD students. My research seeks to find answers to

questions that relate to the successful transition of students with LD into higher education from

an asset-based perspective. By highlighting the achievements of students, and identifying the

components impacting success, including those supports from the institution, it will allow

education practitioners administrators and practitioners to identify and implement approaches or

practices that facilitate student success for LD students.

Utilizing an assets-based perspective may allow LD students to thrive as successful and

fully capable of navigating the rigors of postsecondary education. As a researcher, I believe it is

essential to research the entire secondary to postsecondary transition experience and to see how

student development and best/promising practices impact the success of students as the literature

states. Understanding the lived experience of students with LD provides an opportunity to

uncover information that could serve as a baseline for developing and implementing a transition

framework specific to this population by identifying the nature or essence of their experiences.

Additionally, by highlighting the achievements of students, finding out why they were

successful, and what made them successful will help education practitioners, administrators, and

policymakers identify, consider, and possibly implement approaches or practices that facilitate

student success both at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Moreover, the knowledge can

be used to better support this population of students and streamline the transition process. More

importantly, this research could reduce the inequity and divergence of success rates of LD

students and their non-disabled peers.

Theoretical Framing

Upon reviewing the literature pertaining to secondary to postsecondary transition

experiences, the overarching factor that the studies recommended at the secondary realm

highlighted self-determination as a key factor to a student's transition success (Ankeny &

Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Trainor, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2001; Williams-Diehm &

Lynch, 2007).

Self-determination definition. As theorized by Wehmeyer (2004), self-determination consists of a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable individuals to engage in goal-oriented activities, to self-regulate, and to take charge of one's life. Self-determination allows individuals to make things happen for themselves versus having someone advocating on their behalf. Individuals who are self-determined "act as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life, free from undue external influence or interference" (Wehmeyer, 1997, p.177). Causal agency is critical to self-determination as it refers to the individual who holds power or authority. However, this is not to say that self-determination is about doing everything or making all decisions for oneself. Being self-determined is also about utilizing one's resources to be informed on the side of caution as ultimately, the individual will be the causal agent, the one to make the final decision (Wehmeyer 2004).

Self-determination is a multi-faceted concept that includes but not limited to goal setting, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and decision making. Students who develop self-determination skills are more likely to take action to achieve the quality of life they desire (Wehmeyer, Shogren, Palmer, Williams-Diehm, Little & Boulton, 2012). Researchers have pointed out that promoting teaching, learning, and practice of self-determination skills leads to positive post-school outcomes. However, there is an insufficient number of students with LD who achieve the ability to be self-sufficient adults, and one of the reasons for this lack of ability is that the educational process has failed to prepare students with LD to be self-determined individuals (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001).

It is inevitable that when students with LD transition into postsecondary education, there will be new educational and social environments that will impact the individual's psychosocial

ability to adapt and navigate their academic journey. Factors that pertain to student development, the process of change and transition, the individual psychosocial competence to cope with change, psychosocial competence to engage, the structural characteristics of higher education institutions, academics abilities, and financial demands are factors that lead to student departure (Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Tinto, 1975). Understanding the assets of what made the transition experience for students with LD successful has been overlooked by previous research.

Upon reviewing the literature on higher education transition frameworks, it is safe to conclude that there is no higher education framework specific to students with LD. For these reasons, I have chosen to utilize Schlossberg's Transition Theory as it pertains to students in higher education. This framework will also allow me to understand better the various psychosocial situations and circumstances that impact LD students as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education and matriculate towards their degree attainment.

Schlossberg transition theory. Schlossberg defines transition as "an event, or non-event results in a change of assumption about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Individuals transitioning to higher education are significantly impacted by the transition in many aspects as they manage new environments, experiences, relationships, routines, learning, and responsibilities. According to Schlossberg (2011), it is not the transition that is critical. Instead, it is how transition can alter and impact one's roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions.

The Schlossberg transition model provides structure to understanding the transition process, which consists of three major parts: approaching transitions, transition identification and

transition process, taking stock of coping resources: the 4 S system, and taking charge (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Approaching transition. Approaching transition refers to the identification and understanding of the transition process, whether it is "an event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p.33). Transition Identification refers to identifying what the change is hindering while the transition process places where the individual is in the transition (i.e., moving into the transition, moving through the transition or moving out of the transition). With regards to approaching transition, it is crucial first to identify the type of transition that is occurring or has occurred; if the transition was anticipated or unanticipated; and if the transition was a non-event.

Anticipated transition refers to an expected or scheduled event, while expected events are events that individuals can prepare and rehearse for. The individual knows the event will occur thus can better prepare and anticipate the transition occurring (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For example, students an anticipated event would be the student preparing to transition into college, prepare to move away from home, or prepare to live in the resident's hall.

Unanticipated transition refers to the unexpected or non-scheduled event. Non-scheduled events occur unexpectedly and can be disruptive and cause chaos in one's life (Schlossberg et al., 1995). An example of an unexpected or non-scheduled event could be the student becoming ill with the flu during midterm exams, causing the student to miss class, important review sessions, and possibly perform poorly. Another example of an unanticipated event could be a campus tragedy, such as the Virginia Tech shooting. It is critical to note that not all unanticipated events are adverse. For example, the student winning a $10,000 scholarship

by taking part in the college's basketball half-court shoot out or a student being selected to receive a notebook as part of a school giveaway.

Non-event transition refers to events that one expected to occur; however, the event failed to occur (Schlossberg et al., 1995). An example of a non-event would be the student who studied for an exam and was expected an "A" grade but received a "D" instead. An example of a non-event could be a student who expected to make a lot of new friends in college, instead found it more difficult than ever to build meaningful friendships. On the other hand, the student could expect not to make many friends, and instead was able to make many meaningful friendships.

Although students with LD can prepare for and anticipate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education, they remain underprepared for the many non-scheduled social and emotional events, as well as non-event situations they may expect to encounter in the transition process where the outcome may not be what they expected (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Goodman et al. (2006) further suggested that individuals experiencing the same event will have different meanings and outcomes. Furthermore, it is not the transition that determines meaning for the individual. Instead, it is whether the transition is expected, unexpected, or non-event and what the individual interprets it to be (positive, negative, or neutral).

Goodman et al. (2006) stated that identifying transition also requires defining the context and impact. Context refers to the individual's relationship to the transition (personal to oneself or someone else's) and the setting where the transition takes place (work, family, friends, etc.). Together context and setting impact transition. Depending on where an event takes place can determine the aspect of how transition could affect one's life by, and as the individuals involved. For example, if the transition occurs to the individual, such as failing an exam, the individual can take control of the situation, possibly study more, seek assistance from the professor, or access to

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supplemental tutoring. However, if someone else is experiencing the failing grade, the individual can only sit and offer support. It is imperative also to note that although the event is happening to someone else, the individual is also experiencing the tragedies and excitements as if it was happening to them as well. In all, the context in which transition occurs affects how the individual reacts.

Goodman et al. (2006) stated that for an individual experiencing transition, the impact or to what degree the transition alters one's daily life is the most important, not the event or non-event.   Impact refers to the degree to which transition alters the individual's daily life. The greater the impact, the higher the need for sophisticated methods of coping and adjusting to the situation as it can transform an individual's perception of relationships, routines, roles, and outlook on oneself. For example, students with LD have the choice to seek academic accommodations from institutional disability support services if there is an awareness of these services. However, one also has the choice to not participate or advocate for those services. Students need to deliberate the impact of advocating for accommodations and its effect and impact on their academic success.

In summary, Approaching Transition is a phase where transitions must be identified by type, context, and impact. It is essential to keep in mind that transition is a process, it takes time, and leaving one's set of roles, routines, relationships, and assumptions to establish new ones takes time. There is no clear-cut pathway for transition, and individuals will experience the transition continuum and assimilate differently. The impact of students with LD and their transition from secondary to postsecondary education are also influenced by Scholssberg's taking stock of coping resources.

Taking stock of coping resources. Taking stock of coping resources refers to the 4 S system or factors that influence one's ability to cope during the transition. The 4 S system consists of four points, which are: self, situation, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006).

Situation refers to the individual's situation at the time the individual is experiencing transition and how the individual perceives the transition. It is vital for the individual to have a clear understanding of what is happening or what has happened, why it is happening or why it has happened, and what it means. Factors that fall into this S are: knowing the trigger or what precipitated the transition; timing of the transition (was it a good time, wrong time, right time, or on time); does the individual have control of the situation or not; is the event a role changer with regard to gains or losses; has the individual experienced an event similar to the current situation or what has occurred; are there any existing concurrent stresses present; and assessment, determining responsibility, and the impact of one's behavior regarding the transition Schlossberg et al. (1995).

Self refers to the individual's inner strength and ability to cope with the situation. In other words, does the individual have the inner coping resources to maintain a sense of control, be resilient, or possess the gumption to cope with the situation? Self includes the individual's personal and demographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, health, and ethnicity, as well as psychological resources such as outlook, values, commitment, and ego development (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Research indicated that for a student with LD, it is vital to know themselves as it is integral to the way they can cope socially and psychological (Connor, 2012). Trainor (20007) indicated that students relied heavily on their parents to make their transition planning decision and thus were not a central part of their transition planning.

As students with LD transition into postsecondary education, transition in the individual themselves needs to take place. By having the knowledge of their disability and being self-reliant allows the students not only to see how their disability affects their ability to learn. It also allows the students to meet the academic demands and rigor. Thus, a thorough review and explanation of their psycho-educational evaluation is essential as students who lack this information are less likely to develop the ability to advocate for themselves and more likely to experience failure (Skinner, 2004).

Support refers to assets available to the individual. Support could be one's social circle, family members, organizations, or institutions. It is important to note that during the time an individual experiences transition, their support can either provide the individual with a sense of well-being or be a hindrance to them Goodman et al. (2006). Schlossberg et al. (1995) identified that support is a significant resource when managing stress and transition.

Research by Getzel and Thoma (2008) indicated that it is essential for students to advocate for various campus services, form relationships with professors and instructors, and develop support systems on campus to secure needed supports and services. Students with LD who are thinking about attending college should research the various supports on campus that would be of avail to them, be taught how to advocate for their own needs, and learn how to and think independently and creatively. Additionally, institutions of higher education also have the responsibility to meet the needs of LD students by assessing the current ways services for students LD organized and how the delivery of the services can be improved Troiano (2003). Keep in mind that although research has indicated the need for students to seek and advocate for support. College can be an intimidating environment as they attempt to navigate a new and foreign environment (Connor, 2012). Research by Cawthon and Cole (2010) indicated that

students admitted to not utilizing the various campus resources to the extent they were available

as they experienced negative interaction with uncooperative faculty. Similarly, results from

Marshak et al. (2010) indicated that students did not avail themselves to services to avoid

harmful and social reactions as they encountered negative experiences with faculty and

professors.

Strategies pertains to approaches that an individual can utilize when coping with a

situation. Basically, how does the individual cope? Does the individual have the ability to cope,

modify the situation, change their perceptions of the situation, manage their emotions and

respond flexibly to the transition, seek out information, or take direct action Goodman et al.

(2006). The ability for one to self-advocate requires social skills and or self-determination skills

are essential for students to advocate for various campus services, form relationships with

professors and instructors, and develop support systems on campus (Skinner, 2004).

The overarching system of the 4 S is a factor that generates a difference in how

individuals cope with change. These 4 S factors are also viewed as assets and liabilities, or more

commonly known as resources and deficits. Everyone has "both assets and liabilities and

resources and deficits, as they experience transitions" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson,

p.56). Due to the variance in degrees of one's resources and deficits, individuals may act

differently to the same types of transitions, and the same individual may act differently to the

same situation occurring at a different time Goodman et al. (2006).

Taking charge. Taking charge refers to the individual who is experiencing the transition.

Taking charge is a time where the individual has begun to understand the situation and begin

taking charge by managing the outcome using one's known strategies and utilizing the support of

one's assets and liabilities. Because transition can, at times, be out of one's control, one is

encouraged to tap in and utilize one's resources to provide support so that the situation can be

better managed and coped. It is also important to recognize that individual resources are not

always permanent and may change over time Goodman et al. (2006).

When reviewing Schlossberg's transition theory, it is essential to note that transition is

only afforded significance if the individual who is experiencing the transition sees the experience

as meaningful. Not everyone will respond to transition the same way as everyone has different

assets and liabilities. Also, the way individuals manage and cope with a situation will differ

depending on the individual's perceptions of the event, as well as the resources available to the

individual. Therefore, the individual's ability to cope with transition is dependent on changing

the interaction and having a balance of his or her assets and liabilities. Figure 1 provides a visual

representation of Schlossberg's transition framework.

THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSITION
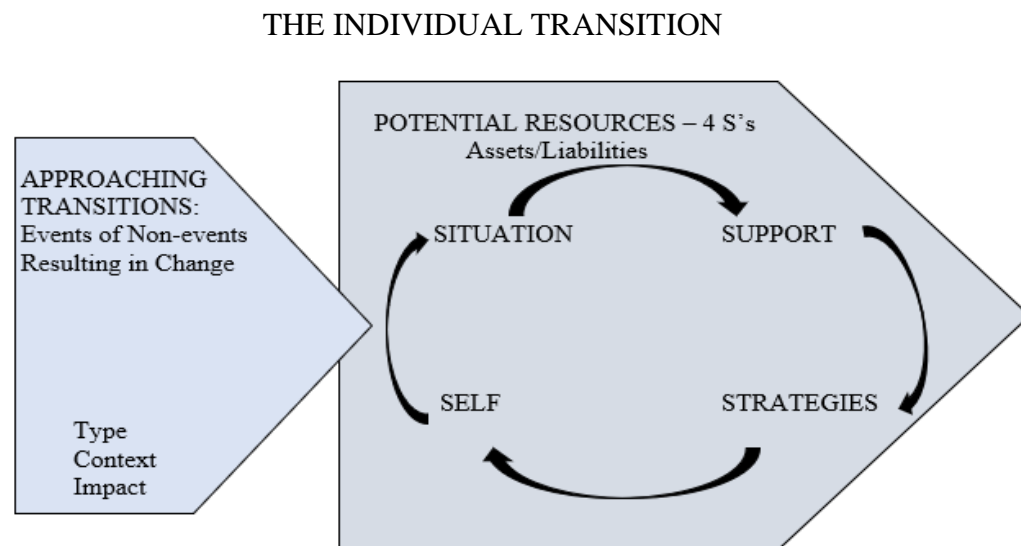
Figure 1. The Transition Framework (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33)

Understanding the assets of what made the transition experience for students with LD

successful has been overlooked by previous research. Upon reviewing the literature on higher

education frameworks, it is safe to conclude that there is no higher education transition

framework for students with LD. The only transition theory that the *Student Services: A*

Handbook for the Professions (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 1996) identifies is

Schlossberg's transition theory.

Even though the identification of self-determination is critical to the success of LD

students, only a limited number achieve the ability to be self-sufficient individuals. One of the

reasons for this deficiency is that the educational process has unsuccessfully prepared students

with LD to become self-determined individuals (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001). Therefore, the

purpose of utilizing SDT is to find out to what extent SDT has played a role in the participants'

success (preparatory, at what level/stages of transition, persistence, and success). Also,

Schlossberg's Transition Theory 4 S's (self, situation, support, and strategies) will be utilized to

guide my questions as I investigate the secondary to postsecondary lived transition experience of

students with LD.

Summary of Literature Review

In all, students with LD experience significant transitions during their secondary to

postsecondary transition process. There is an array of variables about their knowledge of

themselves, disability, resource, and understanding of the differences in disability laws both at

the secondary and postsecondary arenas that can cause great confusion for the learning-disabled

population. Or perhaps it is due to their lack of awareness and preparation in the process of

transition. In all, their transition experience seems to be more extreme and complex than their

non-disabled peers.

Although there is a wealth of research literature about the LD student transition

experience, much of the existing research focused on the one-year secondary to postsecondary

transition experience. Additionally, many of the research focused on the deficits of the student

experiences. Unlike the studies I have reviewed, the goal of this research was to explore the

entire transition experience of students with a learning disability from their first semester through graduation from an assets-based perspective.

Literature reviewed echoed the importance of self-determination skills in student success. However, not a single article indicated that transition planning solely played a role in student persistence and success.

This research addresses questions relating to the successful transition of students with LD into higher education. Finding out why and how they were successful and what made them successful will enable education professionals and researchers to create a higher education transition framework for students with LD. Researching the student's lived experience will support institutions to be more responsive and flexible to the needs of LD students. Lastly, most of the research on higher education transition experiences have focused on undergraduate FYE. Future research should focus not only on the FYE or one -year experience (Gale & Parker, 2014). Research on the entire secondary to postsecondary transition experience from induction to graduation should transpire.

I anticipate that Schlossberg's Transition Theory will allow me as well as other educators to understand better the various situations and circumstances that impact LD students as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education and matriculate toward degree attainment utilizing the 4 S's. So that institutions of learning can adjust and implement programming and or curriculum accordingly to better prepare and support LD student needs and equip them with the necessary tools to cope with the transition process. Reviewing the literature suggests that the gap of knowledge regarding how students cope with transition, and what situations precipitate difficulties require further researching. Furthermore, I expect the data obtained through this

research, in turn, will constructively contribute to the development of higher education transition

framework and pathways specific to students with LD.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methods that were utilized to explore the experience of students with learning disabilities and their transition to and through higher education at Metro Community College (MCC) from an assets-based perspective. Given the focus of this research on the experiences of students with LD, a qualitative methodology, hermeneutical phenomenology in particular, was selected. Specifically, this chapter begins with my positionality in this study then discusses qualitative research methodologies, philosophical assumptions, phenomenology, phenomenological research procedures, participants, ethical considerations, data collection and ethical consideration, and data analysis and reporting.

Positionality

According to Jones, Torres & Armino (2006), "Positionality describes the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic." As a Ph.D. student conducting research, I come into this research with personal beliefs and values, and believe that everyone has a belief system unique to themselves in some form or another. I personally believe that what one would consider factual, coupled with other forms of knowledge and experiences, eventually becomes one's belief system.

Through my educational experience of taking research courses at the university, I have learned that one's research topic, choice of methodology, and interpretation of findings are going to be reflective of one's personal beliefs and values. That when selecting a research topic, it was essential for me to take a step back and examine how my life, education, career, and my view of the world, in general, influenced my research interests, and role as a researcher.

Regarding this research, I agree that my personal beliefs, values, and experiences have contributed immensely to the selection of my research topic and choice of methodology, as illustrated in the introduction. My positionality for this research comes from three viewpoints: (a) an individual with a twin brother who has a learning disability, (b) a student who has experienced the secondary to postsecondary stages of transition, and (c) a higher education professional who provides support to students. Concerning success, I believe that most of our development, the way we learn, how we deal with transition or change, and the skills required to cope, occurs outside of the classroom.

Growing up as a Yon-Sei (Fourth Generation) Japanese-American in Hawai'i, I was always exposed to and interacted with diverse individuals and cultures. Both of my parents were blue-collar workers. I grew up with a twin brother and an older sister, and we all graduated from a local, public high school. My parents instilled in us from a very young age that we needed to attend college. However, coming from a lower-middle-class income family, I did not know if college was something we could afford. I distinctly remember telling my mother that I wanted to go away to college and asking if it was something that we could financially afford. Her response to me was to apply, and we would deal with it when and if that time came.

Fast forward to my senior year of high school. I applied and received acceptance letters to three institutions of higher education, one in Hawai'i and two in Colorado. At that time, I had no idea what I wanted to major in, nor did my parents ask. I remember my parents being elated that one of their children was going to be attending a mainland college and promised to do everything in their power to financially make it happen. As for me, I was simply excited about moving away and being in a new place where I had no parents hovering over me.

During the early spring of my senior year in high school, Colorado State University (CSU) had an orientation session in Hawaiʻi. The orientation session allowed me to meet other students from Hawaiʻi who committed to attending CSU. It was also an opportunity for my parents and me to learn about the financial aid process, which we found to be extremely helpful, as we had no idea that financial aid even existed. As encouraged by the CSU orientation team, my mother and I flew up to CSU to take my English and Math placement exams, finalize my financial aid award, register for class, and take part in a campus tour.

August of 1993, my first semester of college is about to begin, and I am feeling a whirlwind of emotions. As with anything new, I was excited, but at the same time, scared of the unknown, and the thought of not being smart enough to handle the academic rigors of college often crossed my mind. Fortunately, CSU's outreach and new student orientation program connected me to the Asian Pacific American Student Services (APASS) office. Through APASS, I was able to network with other ethnic minority students, took part in their various educational and cultural activities, and became involved in their Hawaiʻi club.

Shortly after the semester started, I began to struggle academically in my courses. The APASS office connected me to a program that offered free tutoring. The program was called TRIO-Student Support Services (TRIO-SSS). TRIO-SSS is a student support services program that is federally funded by the United States Department of Education that provides an array of services to support the academic endeavors of students who are either first-generation in their families to attend college, low-income, and/or have a documented disability. To be eligible for the program, one needs to meet at least one of the three criteria, and as a first-generation and low-income student, I was eligible. Through the TRIO-SSS program, I received free tutoring, mentoring, and various other academic support.

Being actively involved in APASS, the Hawaiʻi Club, and the TRIO-SSS program impacted my transition and contributed to my successes as it gave me a "sense of belonging." I felt that I mattered on campus and that I was not just another number. Whenever I had an issue or concern, I had programs and individuals I could turn to for support. Being part of the clubs and support programs gave me a social space to interact with my peers and build relationships.

Over the course of my first semester, I experienced homesickness, got a part-time job at McDonald's, and impressively earned a 1.2-grade point average (GPA). The feeling of being a failure diminished my confidence. Due to my subpar grades, I was notified via a letter from the institution that I was put on academic probation and had two semesters to raise my cumulative GPA to at least a 2.0 or face the repercussions of being suspended. In the same letter, I was advised to make an appointment with their academic advising office that worked specifically with students who were on academic probation.

My experiences with these counselors were extremely positive. These counselors took the time to get to know me not only as a student but who I was in my entirety. They asked about my sleeping habits if I was a morning or night person, if I was employed, asked me what course subject I found interesting, and even advised me to enroll in a college credit-earning student success course where I learned many valuable study skills techniques. Thankfully, through hard work and support, I managed to get myself into good academic standing.

During my first year of college, I also experienced a phase of transition and development that pertained to my ethnic identity. Growing up in Hawaiʻi, I never really thought about or put forth the importance of knowing and embracing my culture and ethnicity. That was until I moved to the state of Colorado and categorized as an ethnic minority. At first, I did not see myself as being any different from the next person until I saw and experienced the ignorance of

others. A situation I experience quite often, was when people would ask about my ethnic make-up. This question would arise as people would ask me where I was from because they said I spoke with an accent. So, when I told them that I was from Hawaiʻi, they would assume that I was Hawaiian. Like how people from California are called Californians, and people from Colorado are called Coloradoans. When I told them I was Japanese and explained about Native Hawaiians, then they would assume I was from Japan and start asking me how I got my English name or ask when I immigrated to Hawaiʻi because I do not have a Japanese accent.

For the first time in my life, I no longer identified myself as being just Japanese. I was now identifying myself as being a Japanese-American woman. It was such an odd thought and feeling. Growing up in Hawaiʻi, I always identified myself as just Japanese, and practiced the culture that my parents and generations before had practiced growing up in Hawaiʻi. However, living in Colorado, I identified myself as a Japanese-American and did not know what it meant. I knew about my Japanese heritage, roots, and culture, but for the first time in my life, I had to think deeply about what it meant to be an American. Did this mean I needed to act and speak like the majority? Did I need to rid myself of the cultural practices I only knew? The outcome of this transition resulted in me despising who I was before I could genuinely embrace my cultural and ethnic identity as a Japanese-American woman,

Subsequently, during my junior year, I went through another phase of transition and development regarding my identity. This time it pertained to my sexual orientation. As I questioned my sexual orientation, I began to feel a sense of displacement. I was living in a society where being an openly gay woman was still considered taboo. There were so many emotional moments that I internalized. I wanted to drop out of college and move back home because home seemed the most familiar. Then, one snowy afternoon, as I was eating my lunch

and waited for my next class to start, Dr. Knight, my history professor, unexpectedly approached

me. He said that he recognized me as a student in his class and randomly asked, "Are you

okay?" Mind you, this was an introductory level course with at least 100 students, but I guess I

may have looked troubled. We had about a 15-minute conversation about how I was feeling, and

by the end of the conversation, I felt different. Different in a good way, and most of what I felt

had little to do about the content of our conversation. It was the genuine effort that Dr. Knight

put in to approach me. He did not have to, but he did, and that simple gesture of concern, gave

me a strong sense of belonging. I felt that I mattered as an individual and that I was not just

another number enrolled in his course. I have not had the chance to thank him since, nor do I

think he realized how much of an impact his gesture made on me as a student, as an individual,

and a higher education professional.

Eventually, in 1998, five years after entering college, I graduated from CSU with my

baccalaureate degree in history. As I reflect on my undergraduate experience, I can say for

certain that I was not prepared to experience everything that I did. I believe that I was not

properly equipped with even the basic knowledge, skills, or tools to successfully deal with the

transition experiences into higher education and navigate my academic journey both on a

personal and academic level.

In preparing for college, no one really spoke about student development, identity, the

importance of creating a team of support on campus, social equity, how to study, time

management, mindset, study skills, and so forth. In reality, even if someone did, at the age of 17,

how much of that information would I really have been comprehending, or feel was of

importance? However, if I knew then what I know now as a higher education professional, I

would have most likely dealt with some of the situations more differently. For example, I would

have reported the racial incident in the residence hall to the Dean of Students and sought support from some social equity office. Or I would have inquired with my older peers who were in college to share their transition experience with me. In all, it is safe to conclude that my family, friends, support systems on campus were constant supports through my transitions.

My interest in attaining an advanced degree in higher education began when I was hired as a skills trainer by a privately contracted company to serve students with autism who were attending public schools in the state of Hawai'i. As a skills trainer, being actively involved with my clients' IEP meetings gave me an early insight into the basics of postsecondary planning. As I worked with this population, I began to wonder and worry about the future of these students. What will happen to them once they age out of the system? What postsecondary supports are available to them? How can I, as a skills trainer, prepare clients to be independent or contributing individuals to society? As I neared the end of course work of my graduate degree in Education Administration-Higher Education, I decided to take what was familiar to me and conducted a qualitative study on the higher education experience of individuals with high functioning autism/Asperger's.

Upon graduation with my master's degree in education, I soon found employment working in the realms of higher education for a TRIO-SSS program at a private four-year university. Talk about serendipity, being allowed to work for a program that I received support from while attending CSU. For the last 14 years, I have been working with underrepresented students in higher education, more specifically first-generation college students, low-income students, and students with disabilities. Currently, I am employed as the Project Director and Principal Investigator for The Learning Center (TLC) at Metro Community College (MCC). TLC is a program federally funded through the U.S Department of Education with origins dating

back to the 1965 Higher Education Act. TLC provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and motivates students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The goal is to increase the college retention, graduation, and four year-college transfer rates of its participants.

For anonymity purposes, pseudonyms TLC and MCC have been used in lieu of their actual names. In my current role, my duties and responsibilities consist of wearing many hats and taking on various roles. In addition to the management aspects of TLC, I also provide academic, career, personal, and financial aid counseling to an array of students. Additionally, I facilitate many life, academic, and non-cognitive skill workshops, teach a student success course, and plan, organize and implement various educational, cultural, and service-learning events for students.

Throughout my career, I have interacted with many students that come to college with varying academic and personal skill sets. Some are traditional-age students, but most are non-traditional students. We also serve students who were formerly incarcerated, going through drug rehabilitation, homelessness, and who are displaced homemakers. Although I believe that underrepresented students (racial/ethnic minorities, low income, and first-generation status groups) come to college with a unique set of challenges, through my experience students, students with disabilities seem to need the most support.

The idea behind this research also manifested through my experience as a higher education professional working with individuals with learning disabilities, my personal experience of growing up with my twin brother, and being a graduate student with a disability. Up to this point I have shared about my undergraduate transition experience. Upon graduating from college and returning home, I began to have extreme panic episodes. So extreme that it

debilitated me to the point where it interfered with my quality of life. My anxiety and panic attacks were so severe that I was unable to leave my home, be in crowded environments, and prohibited me from driving and enjoying a quality life.

As a graduate student and having a "hidden" disability, I had a different transition experience. I recall during my first semester of graduate school, and I had to leave class when I had a panic attack. I was so embarrassed about the situation that I almost dropped out of school, in fear of having an episode in public again. To an outsider, I looked normal, walked normal, and spoke normal, but they did not know that, on the inside, it was an everyday battle to leave my home and normally interact in society. Although I had experienced transition during my undergraduate years, this new experience prompted me to educate myself about disability laws and their impact on my education. I was aware of the disability services office on campus and opted not to obtain academic accommodations as I felt that I did not need it. Two and a half years after entering graduate school, I earned my master's degree in education (higher education).

A few years after that, I experienced another transition. This time my doctor suggested prescribing me a service dog. My initial thought was, "Oh boy, service animal? That's only for the hearing and seeing impaired, and I am not either of them." My doctor went on to tell me how service dogs can be trained to physically ground people in a panic episode and even showed me websites and videos about service dogs in action assisting individuals during a panic attack. Subsequently, after obtaining more information about this support, I agreed to give it a try and was blessed with a service dog.

The transition in having a service dog was another experience in itself. Fortunately, having a service dog decreased my panic attacks significantly. So significant that not only did

my family and friends see the difference in my ability to become social in society, but I also felt

the difference in my overall energy and self-esteem. Although I was always social, my panic

attacks had caused me to withdraw myself from society, and with my service dog, I felt like my

old independent self again. I was going out more often, socializing more, and even driving on

my own. So far, so good, right? Well, having a service dog also came with its negative

experiences.

Again, as an outsider, I looked normal, walked normal, and spoke normal, so why do I

have a service dog? There have been several occasions where I have been in my rights and

denied my rights to be in an establishment with a service dog. Mainly because the owner,

manager, or individual was not educated about Section 504 disabilities law. For example, I have

been told that my service animal required identification (jacket, vest, harness, tag, certificate) to

be in their establishment, which is false — having those identifications although to some may

make it easier to decipher whether the dog is indeed a service animal. In actuality, it is

discriminatory as it singles me out as an individual with a disability. In another incident, while

visiting my mother in the hospital, I was asked by the head nurse on duty to provide some form

of legal document stating that my dog was indeed a service dog, and if I could not, I had to leave

the hospital. The most memorable experience was when the manager of a large box store called

the police on me when I refused to leave the store as he insisted that my dog was not a service

dog. He even had the audacity to ask me to recite the service animal law. Mind you according

to most recent information on the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division

website (https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.pdf), there are only two legal

questions, establishments are allowed to ask, a) is the dog a service animal, and b) what work or

task has the dog been trained to perform. In all instances, instead of me being a jerk about

things, or filing suit, I politely ask for an apology and simply requested that the individuals educate themselves and their staff about service animals in relation to Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

With regard to having a service dog and my graduate school experience as a doctoral student, I had no negative experiences. All my instructors were accommodating and understanding. Additionally, my experience with obtaining academic accommodation through the institution's student disability services office was positive. The process was straight forward, and if I had any questions, the counselor was always willing to help. In all, through regularly scheduled appointments with my doctors, meditation, and a service animal, I was able to regain control of my life.

The idea of also wanting to understand the transition experience is due to the number of LD students I have interacted with over the years of my career, which I have found to be underprepared as they transitioned into college. When I reflected on my personal transition experiences, I can see how the transition process can hinder the success of students. As I mentioned, without the higher education professionals who took the time out of their day to genuinely care about my success and connect me with the resources, I may not be where I am today as a student and as a higher education professional.

In my current position, being at the front line with the students, I have been able to gain a perspective of their experiences. Regarding students with disabilities, specifically, I have witnessed many of them entering higher education underprepared and unequipped with the knowledge and skills they need to cope and effectively transition in and through college. I have had conversations with students as well as parents who have adamantly demanded services for their child or themselves without knowing the differences in rights to services at the

postsecondary education level — for example, understanding the difference between FAPE and

Section 504 of ADA. In other words, leaving an environment where services are mandated by

federal laws at the secondary level, to an environment where individuals have to qualify for

services. I have also interacted with students who would benefit and qualify for academic

accommodations but were unaware of the services. Also, with the knowledge I gained through

graduate courses, I have inquired with students about their IEPs and transition experiences.

Students reported that they were not aware, and if they were, they were not as vocal or as

involved with their plans as research suggests that they should be.

　　　　As a higher education professional, I believe that learning needs to be student-centered,

and that students need to be equal partners in the learning process, and that institutions of

learning also have an obligation to ensure that the infrastructure is not only designed to meet the

academic rigor of curriculum, but also to support the overall student. My goal as an educator is

to create an environment conducive to learning that is active and engaging so that students can

learn the skills and knowledge needed to support their academic journeys better.

　　　　I may not have the answers to everything. However, what I do have is the passion for

helping students find solutions to their problems, building upon what they already know, and

helping them to discover and unleash their own abilities to solve them. My love of being an

educator has driven me to possess whatever knowledge there is so that I can continue to work

collaboratively with students, colleagues, programs, departments, and committees across the

university system. Over the years, I have concluded that individuals employed in the education

realm have a sense of obligation to evolve and adapt to our ever-changing student population,

regardless of the roles or environment. It is imperative that I not only understand student

development and implement applicable theories, but also to make a connection with each student and build a rapport.

Although my main passion and focus is supporting the needs of students, I also understand as a program administrator and principal investigator, the importance of quantifiable numbers and meeting grant objectives. As a numbers-driven program, it is the actual student success numbers that keeps support programs funded. Thus, we often forget about the real stories behind the numbers, the student experiences. Therefore, I feel the qualitative component of research tells the untold stories and personal experiences of people going through these transition experiences, something that numbers will never be able to demonstrate or quantify. I believe that each person has their own unique experience that adds to the body of knowledge that may inform our way of supporting students with similar situations.

To provide the actual descriptive experiences of individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon, I conducted epoche, otherwise known as bracketing. Epoche translates to a fresh perspective, as it is like the first time the phenomenon is perceived. Epoche is a way for the researcher to sets aside their personal experiences, so they can approach the phenomenon that is being researched without internal biases, perceived outcomes, or passing judgment (Creswell et al., 2007). Readings from Cresswell (2007) also recommends that bracketing should be conducted before the implementation of the actual research as it helps researchers maintain self-awareness.

This step of bracketing was an essential process as unacknowledged preconception may deteriorate the validity of the research outcomes (Tufford, & Newman, 2010). Some methods of bracketing included me, writing memos throughout the data collection and analysis process. I also kept a reflexive journal. Creswell (2007) defines reflexivity as "the writer is conscious of

the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" and indicates that this is a way to assist the researcher in maintaining participants' experiences are at the forefront of the research" (p. 224). This journal included thoughts of my feelings, observations, afterthoughts, fears, questions, etc., which assisted in maintaining a reflexive stance to ensure the participants' voices were represented.

Due to my personal experience as a student experiencing the impact of transition and change coupled with my current career supporting students in higher education and having a personal understanding of what it is to work, support and live with an individual that has a learning disability, I recognized how my positionality could definitely impact my research. Another potential aspect that I recognized in impacting my research is my training, experience, and knowledge working with this population as a faculty member in the higher education realm. As an insider, I already knew there would be assumptions regarding access and my positionality in relation to the phenomenon being studied.

On the other hand, an anticipated hindrance was that the participants would view me as an outsider because I do not have a learning disability. Alternatively, they may possibly perceive me as someone who does not understand their struggles. However, that was not the case. All participants were open to sharing their experiences with me. Before the actual interview, during our pre-session, I disclosed to the participants that although I was an undergraduate student without a learning disability, that I did have a common understanding pertaining to the struggles and changes that one experiences as a student transitioning into and matriculate through higher education. That I was able to self-identify with the various stages of transitions and student development, understand the struggles of academic rigor, and as a current student with a disability having to advocate for academic accommodations. This process was vital where I

attempted to declare all previous knowledge of and experiences pertaining to the phenomenon, as my goal was to unveil my participants' experiences of the phenomenon as they experienced it.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research focuses on describing and understanding the complexities of human experiences. The researcher is not "truth seeking" or omniscient (Creswell, 2007). With the utilization of qualitative methods to gather data of a phenomenon, descriptions are created from narratives to understand the lived experiences better. According to Creswell (2007):

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places understudy, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (pp. 37)

The total number of qualitative designs available to researchers is extensive. Historically, qualitative research consisted of six typologies: human ethology, ecological psychology, holistic ethnography, cognitive anthropology, ethnography of communication, and symbolic interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The designs discussed in the qualitative literature (Creswell, 2007; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2014) focuses on five: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

Philosophical Assumptions

Qualitative research identifies five underlying philosophical assumptions the researcher brings to the study reflecting one's own world views. These philosophical assumptions are (Creswell, 2007): ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality and its characteristics. Qualitative researchers embrace the idea of several realities and then report on the realities by exploring various forms of data from different perspectives and experiences. With regard to this research, the goals were to understand a spectrum of the transfer experiences and find out what factors made these participants successful. Were they successful because they were self-determined individuals, as defined in the literature? Were the students successful because they had the skills and support to navigate their academic journey? Were educational institutions responsible for their success? My assumption here is that there will be varying experiences, and that the experiences will be unique to each individual.

Epistemology refers to the knowledge and relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. The individuals whom I interviewed are the true experts of their experiences. Therefore, the role of myself as the researcher was to collaborate with the participants so that I am can truly capture and understand their personal experience. As a higher education professional, I have first-hand experience working specifically with LD students, and although I may be able to identify with my personal experiences pertaining to transition, I am still an outsider as I truly cannot identify with their transition experience as I do not have a learning disability. However, what I can do, is understand their transfer experience and give voice to them, as the knowledge lies in the hands of the participants. I utilized Schlossberg's

transition theory as a lens to view and understand the data, paying specific attention to the voices of their experiences to note where the 4 S's fit accordingly.

Axiology refers to the role of value in the research. Researchers under this assumption, report on their values and biases. I recognized that I do bring my values to the forefront of this research, which I believe shaped how I viewed the research, the participants, the research method, interview questions, and final write up. As the aim is to give voices to their narratives, I recognize the importance of understanding the students' experiences in their entirety. Additionally, I think it is important that the reader understands where my biases are coming from as well. From an institutional, educational point of view, an assumption in valuing my research is that both the secondary and postsecondary levels can benefit from this. As we live in a knowledge-based society, postsecondary degrees are viewed frequently as a requirement for even entry-level positions. Therefore, the achievement gap between students with LD and their non-disabled peers attaining postsecondary education opportunities and degrees is significant. The assumption here is that if we can better understand our students' experiences, institutions can provide better programming and other institutional support in hopes of closing the achievement gap.

Methodology refers to the process of accessing knowledge and the process of research. This process included how the data was collected and who were the individuals involved. I approached this research with the assumption that my research questions would capture what the phenomenon was "really like," and that my description of the narrative will pull the reader into the questions and feel that actual experience. Of course, that was contingent on if the participants were able to answer the questions honestly and openly.

Rhetorical refers to the writing, language, and structure of the narrative. In qualitative research, the researcher is expected to write in a literary, informal, and narrative style. This form of writing is intended to engage the audience and utilizes a first-person perspective. In utilizing this approach, it is fair to note that research questions may change so that the research problem can be better understood. Upon reviewing the literature about the transition experience of students with LD, many of the research articles were about finding barriers that prohibited students from success.

Moreover, the studies looked only at the first-year experience, or secondary to postsecondary transition experiences. Unlike the research that currently exists, this study aimed to obtain the entire lived experience as experienced by students with LD from their induction into and through college. As I wrote about the participants' experiences, I wanted to ensure that my use of language and structure of the narrative reflected their actual voices and while giving the reader the feeling that they experienced the phenomenon themselves.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as defined by Creswell (2007), attempts to understand the lived experience from the perspective of the individual or individuals. Therefore, in a phenomenological study, participants should have significant and meaningful experience with the phenomenon. The methodology of phenomenology draws heavily from the philosophical understanding and traditions that stem in large from the work of Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician. Although researchers who subsequently followed Husserl expanded on the view of phenomenology, the philosophical assumption by van Manen and Moustakas remains the lived experiences of individuals; perceptions of the experiences are conscious, the essence of the

experiences are developed through the descriptions, not through explanations or analyses (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007, p.58).

Upon reviewing the various qualitative methods, phenomenology was selected to conduct this research and proposed research questions given my interest in understanding the experiences of students with LD who have successfully matriculated through higher education. The focus of phenomenology is "to transform the lived experience into a textural expression of its essence-in such way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful" on the "essence" of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p.36). Phenomenology will allow me to study the lived experiences of LD students who have experienced successful post-secondary transition.

Creswell et al. (2007), described two approaches to phenomenology: transcendental phenomenology as theorized by Moustakas (1994), and hermeneutical phenomenology as theorized by van Manen (1990). I have chosen to utilize hermeneutical phenomenology because this method not only provides a means to understanding the phenomenon, but it also clarifies the circumstances by interpreting and giving life to the transcriptions (van Manen,1990).

Hermeneutical phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the relationship between the event and the person who experienced the event, or the lived experience as experienced by the individual. In other words, this approach focuses on the subjective experience of individuals and groups, and then attempts to tell the story as experienced by the subject through the way it is interpreted through the researcher (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) explained hermeneutical phenomenology through van Manen's (1994) structure. The process for this approach to research begins with the researcher first selecting a phenomenon of interest. The researcher then reflects on essential themes that represent or

signifies the nature of the lived experience. A balanced description of the phenomenon is then composed in relation to the topic that is being researched. This style of phenomenological research is not only about the description; it is also viewed as an interpretive process where the researcher goes beyond the subjective experience and finds the genuine, objective nature of things.

This methodology provided a lens for this research that sought to reveal the phenomenon as experienced by the participants, create meaning, and achieve a sense of understanding. It allowed me, as the researcher, to not only obtain the lived experience but to also further abstract and interpret participants' experiences based on my theoretical and personal knowledge. Hermeneutical phenomenology also allowed me to produce rich textural and detailed descriptions of the individuals who experienced the phenomenon. The transcriptions of the questions asked aimed to pull the reader into the narrative, resulting in giving them a more profound sense, understanding the meaning of the experience as though they experienced the phenomenon themselves.

Phenomenological Research Procedures

Procedures for this research followed the, Moustakas' phenomenological approach as illustrated by Creswell (2007). First, the researcher decides if the research problem is best examined utilizing phenomenology. As mentioned, phenomenology is an approach that is utilized to understand the common shared experience of a phenomenon among individuals. Second, the researcher identifies a phenomenon of interest that is to be studied. Third, the researcher performs bracketing/epoche. In this step the researcher identifies the philosophical assumptions of the phenomenology and brackets out their assumptions and personal experiences that pertain to the phenomenon being studied. Fourth, data is collected from the individuals who

experienced the phenomenon. Fifth, during the interviews, participants are asked broad, open-ended questions. Creswell (2007) suggests two questions that should be asked as it would help support the researcher's textural and structural descriptions: "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2007, p.61). Sixth, phenomenological data analysis, the researcher analyzes the data, which includes statements or quotes significant to understanding the participants' experiences regarding the phenomenon. This step is called *horizontalization*. Subsequently, researchers develop *clusters of meaning*. This step is where researchers take significant statements and create themes. Seventh, the significant statements and themes are then utilized to develop the textural descriptions and structural descriptions. Eight, the researchers then compose a descriptive narrative describing the "essence" of the phenomenology utilizing the textural descriptions and structural descriptions. This process is referred to as the *essential, invariant structure*.

Table 1. Characteristics of phenomenology from Creswell (2007, p. 78-79).

Phenomenology Characteristics	
Focus	Understanding the essence of the experience
Types of Problem Best Suited for Design	Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon
Discipline Background	Drawing from philosophy, psychology, and education
Unit of Analysis	Studying several individuals that have shared the experience
Data Collection	Using primarily interview with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered
Written Reports	Analysis of data for significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural description, description of the "essence"
Phenomenology Reporting Structure	
General Structure of Study	● Introduction (research questions)

	● Research procedures (phenomenology and philosophical assumptions, data collection, analysis, outcome) ● Significant statements ● Meaning of statements ● Themes of meanings ● Exhaustive description of phenomenon

A Phenomenological Study

A review of the literature thus far has revealed a lack of studies that have considered the transition experience of students with learning disabilities and in its entirety (induction to graduation) from a qualitative perspective. Because of these findings and my focus on the lived experiences of students with LD, I utilized qualitative methodology and, specifically, phenomenology, to provide an in-depth account of the transition experiences of students with learning disabilities.

To conduct this research, I utilized the hermeneutical phenomenological approach of phenomenology to understand individuals with LD and their transition experiences from secondary education into higher education. Hermeneutical phenomenology is the most appropriate as it focuses on interpreting the lived experience as experienced by individuals and attempts to tell this story as experienced by the person through the way the researcher interprets it.

Research question. To understand the transition experiences of successful graduates with LD, I have identified the following research question and subquestion that guided this study: What was the lived experience of transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education for college graduates with LD?

1) What experiences promoted their transition into and progress towards their degree attainment?

To answer these questions, I utilized self-determination definition (Wehmeyer, 2004) and 4-S: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (taking stock of coping strategies) of Schlossberg's Transition Theory framework (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Together, these theories helped me to ask and answer my research questions as I investigated the topic of transition while allowing me to understand the students coping assets, coping liabilities better and identify effective transition practices and positive impacts that promote student success. With a better understanding of these student's experiences, their coping assets, and their coping liabilities, institutions of higher education can do more to meet these students where they are, to capitalize on the resources with which students enter college, and to assist students in strengthening these and other resources. Furthermore, with a better understanding of these students and a stronger ability to program with their assets and liabilities in mind, as well as with Schlossberg's transition model in mind, students may be better retained and more likely to persist towards graduation. Not only will students benefit from a smoother transition, but with intentional programming, they can be better equipped to navigate future transitions.

Ethical Issues and Consideration

Due to the interpretative nature of qualitative research, ethical considerations are much more than protecting the participant's identity and ensuring informed consent. Ethical consideration also includes the actual design of the research and where the researcher anticipates ethical challenges. For example, it was vital for me to be sensitive to the issue surrounding the participants, maintaining one's role, being conscientious of one's voice, positionality, and biases (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Informed consent by Malone (2003), "implies that researchers are able to anticipate the events that will emerge in the field about which those to be observed are to be informed" (p.800).

Per the University of Hawaii System - Office of Research Compliance Institutional Review

Board (IRB) website (https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance), the University of Hawaii

policy requires IRB approval for doctoral dissertations that involve human subjects or use private

identifiable information about living humans. Additionally, researchers are also required to

successfully complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program,

Research Ethics, and Compliance Training.

Once I successfully completed the CITI, I submitted an application to the IRB which

included my research proposal; pertinent materials such as letters of permission from the data

collection site (Metro Community College), recruitment email template, participant selection

survey, consent to participate form, and interview questions; and obtained all appropriate

signatures. Upon receiving approval from the IRB, I began implementing this research.

Site selection. MCC is one of 10 campuses that comprise the Hawaiian Islands College.

The College is accredited by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), with a mission to serve the community

as an affordable, flexible, learning-centers, open-door, comprehensive community college that

meets the postsecondary education needs of individuals, businesses and the community. MCC

serves the Pacific Rim as a career technical education institution offering an array of programs as

well as Liberal Arts degrees. Given MCC's demographics and geographical location, the

College has a long history of supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

The goal for this research was to understand the various situations and circumstances that

impacted students with LD as they transitioned from secondary to postsecondary education and

what made them successful. This goal was to be achieved by interviewing graduates identified

as students with LD while they were attending MCC.

I elected to conduct this research at MCC for two primary reasons. First, MCC is my current place of employment, and my ability to gain access to participants would be a less arduous process. Second, the outcome of this research will have direct relevance to the LD population at MCC, and the participant's experience being studied would be purposeful.

Site access. Access to MCC was obtained by both the Dean of Academic Support and Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs. I reviewed with them my research proposal, and upon receiving their approval, I reviewed with them the informed consent letter that outlined the Purpose, Process for Participation, Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation Risks, and Benefits of Participating. To ensure the confidentiality of both the institution and participants, the consent letter also included a statement that mentioned the following:

> To ensure participant confidentiality, please understand that I will not allow you to have access to any of the raw data, including interview transcripts. I will not allow you to have access to any detailed information about the participants. However, you will have access to review the final composition of the research once it is completed.

Upon answering any of their questions or concerns, both parties signed the consent form. Additionally, if a conflict should arise, I would refer back to the signed informed consent letter as confirmation (Appendix F).

Conflicts related to access to participants and venue were not expected as I obtained prior approval from both MCC's Dean of Academic Support and the Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs. In addition, I did not expect to encounter conflicts with regards to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), as I did not need access to student's education records.

Participant sampling and recruitment. Due to the specificity of the population being studied, I relied on purposeful sampling to identify prospective participants. According to Creswell (2007), this approach is frequently utilized when specific individuals and a specific site is selected for the study because it can "Purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (p.125). I chose to utilize this approach as it helped to identify specific individuals fitting this study's criteria. Furthermore, to strengthen the recruitment, the plan also included the snowball or chain-referral sampling strategy. This sampling method involved the utilization of primary data sources identifying other potential primary data sources in the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To assist in the recruitment process, I worked with MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office. I felt it was advantageous to work with MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office as they were the ones who determined and provided accommodations to students who qualified for disability services. To ensure student confidentiality would not be violated, MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office disseminated informational flyers (Appendix A) about the research to prospective individuals via their email list of graduated students. I also provided the Student Disabilities Services Office with an email template (Appendix B). As conducted with the Dean of Academic Support and Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs of MCC, a review of this research and informed consent was done with the personnel of the Student Disabilities Service Office. Additionally, as the Project Director for the TLC program, I also disseminated the same informational flyers to TLC graduates via email and utilized the same email template. The reason I included to seek participants from the TLC program was, besides providing services and support to first-generation and low-income college students, the program also services students with disabilities.

The number of emails sent out to prospective individuals by MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office and the TLC program are unknown. However, the TLC Project Director confirmed that recruitment emails were sent to students who graduated between the years 2009-2018. Although one would anticipate that nine years of students would return a sufficient pool of prospective participants. It is important to notate, that the responses may be lower due to the students no longer being attached to their school or alternative email accounts on record.

Participant selection. For this study, the original targeted number of participants were five to eight. However, through the recruitment process, only a total of five individuals contacted me directly via the contact methods offered on the information flyer, confirming their interest. I then contacted all five confirmed participants via email requesting to meet individually in-person to review the study, answer any questions the prospective participant may have concerning the research, and review the consent to participate form. The consent form discussed all pertinent information regarding participant confidentiality and other information as appropriate, including web-based questionnaires/surveys and emails (Appendix C). Upon meeting with the individuals, they were also given the opportunity to accept or decline participation.

There was no need for prospective participants to submit any official paperwork documenting their disability as MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office coordinator was accountable for verifying their disability and having received academic accommodation. Upon speaking with the Student Disabilities Services Office coordinator, I was informed that their office relies on the standards set in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 to define an individual with a learning disability as they are not allowed to diagnose a student.

Once the five prospective participants accepted and consented to participate in the research, they were given a questionnaire to complete, which was used to ensure that they indeed met participant criteria. Information obtained from the questionnaire included their first and last name, gender, current age, age when entered MCC, and age at the time of graduation. Additionally, the following criteria were utilized in selecting participants for this study:

- Participants will have graduated from a public high school in the state of Hawai'i.

- Participants will have received services and had an IEP in place.

- Participants will have proof of a learning disability, as documented by MCC's disability services office, MCC's Student Disability Services Office (SDSO).

- Participants will have earned a certificate of completion or an associate's degree from MCC.

The questionnaire also included a statement verifying their willingness to participate in both an individually scheduled 30-45 phone session, and 60-75-minute research interview session. I included the phone session in hopes that the interaction would be a gateway to build trust and rapport with the participants through sharing my thoughts about the research, and what it was that I was looking to obtain and explore. I also shared my personal transition experiences in hopes that the participants would be more inclined to openly share without any hindrances so that I could obtain the true essence of their experiences. Individuals who met the criteria were then officially invited to take part in the research.

Of the five prospective participants that I met with, four of them met all of the qualifications to be a participant for my research. The fifth individual met all criteria except for one. This individual clarified to me that although he did have an IEP during elementary and middle school, he did not have any in place for high school. Subsequently, I then sent qualifying

participants a confirmation letter identifying their scheduled pre-interview and interview dates,

time, and location dates via email (Appendix E). Furthermore, two days before the scheduled

interview using a prepared script, I sent a reminder email and made reminder phone calls to each

of the four participants (Appendix H). Below is a table of the participant characteristics.

Table 2. Metro Community College Participant Characteristics

Name	Gender	Age Attended MCC	Age Graduated MCC	Degree Attained
Erin	Female	18	22	Alternative Education Certificate of Achievement
Cody	Male	25	27	Welding Certificate of Achievement
Benjamin	Male	19	21	Liberal Arts Associates of Arts
Julie	Female	28	31	Liberal Arts Associate of Arts

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Conflict of interest was taken into consideration with regards to prospective participants

being former program participants as I was a direct service provider to them. It is important to

note that at the time this study took place, all four participants were graduates of MCC.

Therefore, I did not hold any form of power over them. I also made it clear to the participants

that they could and should be open to me about their experiences as I trusted what they said to be

true as I would with any other qualitative participant. Therefore, reducing any tangible or

intangible relationships between the participants and myself.

The collection of data was through individual in person, face to face interviews. The

participants were given a time frame of approximately 60-75 minutes and consisted of open-

ended questions. However, the specific length of the interview was determined by the

participants, depending on how talkative they were and how much information they shared. One interview went almost two hours long, while the other three stayed within the 75 minutes time frame. In order to capture the richness of the student's experiences, the interviews were semi-structured to allow a "talk-story" type of atmosphere. Each participant was asked questions from the same protocol to ensure general consistency (Appendix I). The questions were used as a guide to allow free expressions, with follow-up questions if elaboration and clarification where needed. The interview questions were geared towards their transition experiences with relations to Schlossberg's 4 S's (situation, self, support, and strategies), and Wehmeyers's definition of Self-Determination.

With regards to where the interviews were to take place, all participants were given the option to have it at a location of their choosing, or MCC. If the participant chose a location of their choice, I requested that the selected space be well lit and well ventilated for comfortability, free of any outside noise or disturbances to ensure that the recording of the interview could be captured in its prime state. Additionally, I also requested the space be private so that the participant's confidentiality could be maintained and be free from any distractions. If the participant did not have a location of choice, MCC was offered as a site that offered the same interviewing room specifications. I felt that MCC would be a great site to conduct the interviews as it would be a non-threatening space and familiar environment for the participants.

Individual interview sessions were conducted per the participant's agreed scheduled availability. Before beginning the actual interview, I gave all participants another opportunity to review the informed consent form and ask questions. I reassured each participant that I would be conducting all interviews and transcribing all transcriptions. Moreover, to protect the identity of the participants, I informed them that in lieu of their actual names and actual institution of higher

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education they attended, I would utilize pseudonyms. Furthermore, I would also remove identifiers per their request.

In order to minimize any psychological risks, each participant was made aware that they could decline to answer any questions and or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. I also conveyed to each participant that if I observed that they, the participant becomes distressed (anxious, in tears, upset), I would interrupt or stop the interview and allow them, the participant to decide if they want to withdraw from the question, study, or continue. Moreover, the participants were informed and reassured that I would keep and maintain all of the data collected during the research in a manner that was secured and confidential, via a locked passcode protected computer that I will be only able to access.

Trustworthiness

All interviews were audio-recorded for later transcriptions and analysis. Upon transcribing the interviews, each participant was given the opportunity to review their transcriptions for accuracy and modify their responses to ensure the transcripts are representative of their voice. In addition, I checked in with each participant to ensure that my interpretation accurately reflected their experiences and clarified any discrepancies. This step is also known as member checking. An important step, as Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) stated, would verify to the reader "that the researcher did not rework the data so that it would be in line with the researcher's pre-established framework or theoretical interests" (p. 130). Necessary changes were then made to the transcriptions to ensure the overall study was both reliable and valid from the participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Creswell (2007) wrote that the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting are not distinct procedures of a process. Instead, these parts are all interrelated. Analyzing phenomenological data "is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom-built, revised, and choreographed" (p. 150). For this process, the keywords were "interrelated" and "not distinct." In other words, although the data analysis process encompassed the procedures listed in Table 3 below, some procedures overlapped each other. Thus, I found myself weaving back and forth through this data analysis process. Data analysis followed the phenomenology format listed in Table 8.2 in Creswell (2007):

Table 3. Phenomenological Data Analysis and Representation

Data Analysis and Representation	*Phenomenology*
Data managing	● Create and organize files for data
Reading memoing	● Read through text, make margin notes, from initial codes
Describing	● Describe personal experiences through epoche ● Describe the essence of the phenomenon
Classifying	● Describe significant statements ● Group statements into meaning units
Interpreting	● Development of textural description "What happened", structural description "How" the phenomenon was experienced, and the "essence"
Representing visualizing	● Present narration of the essence of the experiences; in tables, figures, or discussion

Data analysis is similar for most phenomenologists (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological researcher focuses on the portrayal of what all participants of a particular phenomenon have in common within the experience and attempt to reduce their individual descriptions to one of a more universal essence of a "grasp of the very nature of something" (van Manen, 1990, p.177).

Data management. The analysis began with managing the data. For this step, the data obtained by the participants was first organized in a research binder. The binder had index tabs separating each participant's information and data. Each participant tab included the following: participant selection survey, emails, consent to participate in research project form, a print out of interview transcriptions, textual and structural descriptions, and final participant narratives. This allowed me to access the data at once versus opening and closing various files on the computer. Once organized, I was then able to immerse myself in the data, by religiously reading through each participant's individual transcripts, and listening to their audio recordings. All transcriptions were inputted in a matrix utilizing Microsoft Word. This was done for each participant. An example of data management taken directly from my notes:

Table 4. Data Management Example

Participant: Julie	Date of Interview: 12/14/18
Question: How did you feel you when you transitioned into college?	Answer: I was fricken scared shitless! This is all new to me. I have been out of school for some years now. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know anyone and didn't want to know anyone. I wanted to just get it over with.

Memoing. While immersing myself in the data, I conducted what Creswell (2007) refers to as memoing. Memoing is the process of writing down thoughts and questions as it relates to the interview questions, responses, and reviews. This process provided me with a vehicle by which I could add notations during the interview and create notation as I conducted the data analysis process, which included my thoughts, non-verbal gestures observed, and questions that arose as I analyzed the data. For example, if I needed the participant to expand or clarify their responses, words or statements to ensure that I am understanding the situation as they experienced it, and not how I interpreted it. Moreover**,** memoing gave me the ability to move

back and forth through the data at any given point during the research process, thus, allowing me to digest and understand the data more clearly, and detect for any emerging codes. An example of memoing taken directly from my notes can be seen below.

Table 5. Memoing Example

Participant: Julie	Date of Interview: 12/14/18	Memo/Notes
Question: How did you feel you when you transitioned into college?	Answer: I was fricken scared shitless! This is all new to me. I have been out of school for some years now. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know anyone and didn't want to know anyone. I wanted to just get it over with.	A breath of sigh Silence Why didn't she want to know anyone?

Describing and classifying. The next series of data analysis procedures encompassed describing and classifying, which included epoche and reduction. These procedures were critical as they fashioned the stage to illuminate the understanding and meaning of how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

Epoche. Epoche is when the research set aside any "[p]rejudgements, biases and preconceived ideas" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 106) about the phenomenon. Through epoche, we are confronted with the task of creating new ideas, feelings, awareness, and understandings of the situation and events as they are. However, the challenge of epoche is the ability to maintain transparency, while being mindful to allowing whatever is in the presence of to disclose itself, without judgment (Moustakas, 1994).

As previously mentioned, epoche should be conducted before the implementation of the actual research as it helps researchers maintain self-awareness (Creswell et al., 2007), which I did. I also kept a reflective journal throughout the research process. The journal included my feelings, observations, afterthoughts, fears, and questions to ensure that I, the researcher and

writer, remained cognizant of my biases, values, and experiences throughout the research. This process also allowed me to ensure that the participant's experience remained at the forefront of this research so that their voices were represented without the interference of my personal viewpoints.

Data reduction. Data reduction in phenomenological research is "[t]he task of describing textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external objects, but also the acts of consciousness," (Moustakas, 1994, p. 115). The purpose behind conducting reduction was to remove all information irrelevant so that the essence of the phenomenon can be revealed, also known as horizontalization.

Horizontalization. Horizontalization is the process conducted to capture each statement otherwise known as horizons and giving them "[e]qual value as we seek to disclose the nature and essence" (Moustaka, 1994, p. 118). Horizontalization also requires the researcher being receptive to each statement made by the participants of their personal experience while fostering a flow of understanding between the researcher and the participant. Through this data reduction process, horizons, are then identified (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994):

> Each horizon as it comes into our conscious experiences is the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character. We consider each of the horizons and the textural qualities that enables us to understand an experience. When we horizonalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence (p. 95).

Part of the reduction process required me to scan through the data where, at this point, I identified and extracted significant statements, quotes, patterns, or instances, and other information to understand and create meaning of the participant's experiences in relation to the

phenomenon. I basically removed all my words from the transcribed interviews, resulting in the participant's responses to stand alone on their own. This process was done by combing through all the interview transcriptions individually and highlighting responses that were relevant to the interview question(s) asked to each participant. Additionally, responses that identified meaning to their lived experience was organized for analysis. Furthermore, all statements that were irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapped in reference to the questions were deleted, thus leaving only the horizons to shine.

     Coding. With the horizons, codes were then assigned to the remaining data that emerged through the reduction process. Saldana (2009) suggests conducting two cycles of coding. The two cycles are defined as follows:

> First Cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence to an entire page of text to a stream of moving images. In the Second Cycle, coding processes, the portion coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves (p. 3).

Coding also provided the foundation in allowing me to prepare for the development of the participant's textural descriptions.

     Clustering. Subsequently, coded statements that emerged from the data were then clustered into thematic labels or categories. As Moustakas stated (1994), the clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience (p. 121). Coded statements were then inputted in a table utilizing Microsoft Word and placed under appropriate categories. If a statement could not be classified under an already identified label, a new label was then created. This process continued until all coded statements were classified under a category.

Themes. In phenomenological research, themes provide order to research and writing by providing a framework for the experiential structures that make up the experience (van Manen, 1990). Themes refer to an element that frequently occurs while theme analysis refers to the process of recovering theme or themes "that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p.78). Each horizon or level that was created through the interviews added meaning and provided a clearer vision of the secondary to postsecondary experience of LD students.

An example of the data reduction process taken directly from my notes can be seen below. Each statement, possible codes and categories, themes the statements would fall under in relation to the theoretical frameworks of this research.

Table 6. Data Reduction Example

Participant: Julie	Date of Interview: 12/14/18	Memo/Notes
Question: How did you feel you when you transitioned into college?	Answer: fricken scared shitless! I have been out of school for some years now. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know anyone and didn't want to know anyone. I wanted to just get it over with.	(College Experience) Feeling, Self-Moving In Situation-Moving In Feelings, Self-Moving In Situation, Self, Feeling-Moving In Feelings, Self-Moving In

Interpreting. Concurrently, as phases of data reduction took place, descriptions of the phenomenon for each of the participants were being created. Starting with the textural descriptions, followed by structural descriptions, and finally the composition of the textural-structural description

Textual descriptions. Themes were then utilized to develop textural descriptions of the phenomenon being studied for each of the participants. This process provided verification for each participant's own experience and illustrated clear images and rich descriptions of their

actual experience by including verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews. Moustakas (1994) articulates the essence of the textual descriptions as follows:

> Throughout there is an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon. In this process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described; every perception is granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of the experience are linked thematically, and a full description is described (p.96).

An example of this taken directly from my notes can be seen as follows:

> Julie: This experience played a big factor in school because we were kind of labeled as fuck-ups. I would go to school tardy, so the high school kids wouldn't see me going to that class or I would just not attend at all, I mean people would tease how stupid you are because you go to special classes. If I reflect back, at that point in time, I think if we were treated differently and not made it obviously known that we were in a special class, I think maybe I would have participated more in school.

> ***Structural descriptions.*** Following textural descriptions, I then created structural

descriptions for each participant. Structural descriptions, according to Moustakas (1994), "[p]rovides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience" (p. 135). It also describes and incorporates the participant's feelings. To develop the structural description, one has to conduct what is known as "imaginative variation." Moustakas (1994) defined the task of "imaginative variation" as:

> to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different position, roles or functions (p.97-89).

The primary task of imaginative variation is to describe the essential structures of the phenomenon being researched. The goal is to discover the underlying and precipitating factors of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This involves the particularities of the textural descriptions. Together, these particularities speak to the essence of the experience.

Structural descriptions attempt to provide the underlying essence of the phenomenon being studied utilizing the textural description as the base. Imaginative variation allowed me to develop an enhanced and expanded version of the textural description. Giving me the opportunity to seek all possible meanings and perspectives of the participant's narratives. This process included a total immersion of myself into the written data and moving back and forth from a position of imaginative variation to one of verification.

Moustakas (1994) presents four steps of imaginative variation which include: systematic varying of possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meaning; recognize underlying themes that account for the emergence of the phenomenon; consider the universal structures that precipitate one's feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon (space, time, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, relation to others); and searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrates the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of the structural descriptions of the phenomenon. Which was then constructed from each participant interviews.

The structural descriptions were created utilizing the textural description as the basis. Through imaginative variation, I was able to develop an enhanced and expanded version of the textural description. An example of this taken directly from my notes can be seen as follows:

Julie: Her experience with having a LD played a huge factor in school because she felt she and her peers in the special classes were labeled as "fuck-ups." Julie was so ashamed

of being in the special classes that she would go to school later so that the other high

school kids would not see her going to her special classes. Then there were times when

she would not go to school at all. Julie stated that her peers would tease her about how

stupid she was knowing she was in the special classes. As she reflected back, Julie

stated, I think if we were treated differently and not made it obviously known that we

were in a special class, I think maybe I would have participated more in school.

   Textural-structural description. This step involved the integration of both the textural

and structural descriptions. At this stage, the descriptions consisted of creating "[t]he meaning,

and essence of the experience, incorporating the developed categories and themes" (Moustakas,

1994, p. 121). In other words, this is where the essence of the phenomenon is presented. This

process allowed for the synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas,

1994). The fundamental synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions portrays the

essences at a time and place from the unique perspective of the researcher, who is following an

exhaustive imaginative and reflective understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In

this step, my goal was to merge both the textural and structural descriptions. At this stage, my

readers should be able to feel and have a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied

as though they experienced the phenomenon themselves. An example of this taken directly from

my notes and can be seen as follows:

   Julie: Julie said that she was embarrassed about having a LD saying, "I felt ashamed and

   less than. I felt that I was not like the normal students in school." She believed her

   disability affected how others viewed her, especially with labels saying, "[W]e were kind

   of labeled as 'fuck-ups.'" Thus, Julie disliked going to school because she did not want to

be singled out or targeted as the "stupid" one because she attended classes she referred to as "special classes."

As aforementioned, I conducted and kept a reflexive journal to ensure that I, the researcher and writer, remained cognizant of my biases, values, and experiences throughout the research. This process allowed me to capture the essence of the phenomenon from my positionality and ensure the participants' voices and essence were being represented in the final write up. In an effort to control my biases and maintain my positionality, I also conducted a peer debriefing and selected my advisor to serve in that position. This process allowed me to work with an individual, who not only has working knowledge and understanding for conducting qualitative research, but someone who also holds an impartial view of the study to examine my transcriptions, coding, case summaries, and analysis. Peer debriefing was an essential step as it allowed me to talk through, receive feedback, and ensure that the clarity of the interpretation was met (Marshall, & Rossman, 2016).

At this point, participants were given the narratives to ensure that their narratives were true to their experiences. Revisions were made per feedback from the participants and resubmitted for their review until each narrative was given the final approval. The goal of the finalized narrative is for the reader to feel and come away with the full understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants

Summary

This chapter presented my positionality for my research, followed by the methodology for my qualitative hermeneutical phenomenology inquiry to explore the experience of students with learning disabilities and their transition into and through higher education at Metro Community College from an asset-based perspective. The qualitative method was selected as its

approach is directed in describing and understanding people's lives through the human

experience.   Hermeneutical phenomenology was selected as it will enable the researcher to

explore the experiences and meanings as articulated by the participants in its most pure form, and

in a way that the reader can feel the lived phenomenon themselves. Research procedures,

participants and ethical considerations, data collection and ethical considerations, and data

analysis and reporting were expressed, including horizontalization, identifying themes to develop

and utilize textural descriptions, and analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the transition experience of successful graduates with LD. As mentioned, this methodology was selected as it provided a lens to reveal the lived experience of students with LD who successfully made the transition from secondary education to post-secondary education and graduated with either a certificate of completion (CA) or an associate's degree (AA/AS) from MCC. This chapter includes an in-depth look at each participant's transition experience.

Each of the participant's structural narratives was developed utilizing the data obtained through their textural descriptions, created from their individual transcribed interviews. Direct quotations have been used to capture the tone or mood of the experience, and language or the spoken words utilized by the participants to allow the reader to achieve the essence of their experience. It is my hope as the researcher that the richness of the narratives provides the reader with a more definite sense of understanding the transition experience of students with LD from an assets-based perspective and the significance behind the phenomena. Pseudonyms were utilized in place of the participant's actual names to protect their identity. Additionally, per the request of the participants, some identifiers tied to the individuals were also changed to protect their identity.

Participant's Narratives

These four graduates come from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds. There were two self-identified women and two men. One is from the Northern part of Oʻahu, two are from Central Oʻahu, and one is from East Oʻahu. Additionally, two of the graduates entered MCC as traditional-aged college students, whereas the other two graduates were non-traditional

college students. Their narratives are presented in this chapter in the order they were

interviewed.

The Girl with a Big Heart: Erin

As a whole, Erin had a shy, genuine, and sincere demeanor, thus why I refer to her as the

Girl with a Big Heart. Standing at a mere five feet tall, Erin walked into the interview with a

blissful bounce in her walk and a smile that could light up any room. As she sat down for the

interview, she gently crossed her legs by the ankles and clasped her hands together as she rested

them on her lap. For the most part, throughout the interview, Erin spoke gently, her voice soft.

However, there were a couple of moments where her responses were enthusiastic and explosive

in an unexpectedly positive way. Throughout the entire interview, even though I maintained eye

contact with her, Erin hardly made eye contact with me. There were times when Erin needed me

to repeat the question, break down the questions, or rephrase the questions. Yet, she was

responsive and open to answering all of my interview questions.

Born and raised in Central Oʻahu, Erin graduated from Wallaby High School at the age of

18. Erin was not exactly sure when she had been diagnosed with a learning disability but

suggested that it was when she was probably around four-years-old. Erin remembers going to a

doctor's appointment with her mother, stating, "We went to the doctor's, and the doctor put me

in the Easter Seals program, and they had given my mom and me lots of resources…like hearing

aids and other services." Easter Seals is an organization in Hawaiʻi that provides services to

individuals with disabilities or special needs. Nothing more was shared about her elementary

school experience other than that her disability did not bother her much, as she had a circle of

friends and for the most part, was academically up to par with her peers.

Erin did not share anything about her elementary school to middle school transition experience. However, it was as a middle schooler when Erin began to socially and cognitively understand that she was indeed different from her non-disabled peers. Saying, her classmates and friends "Recognized me as not being like them." Although Erin did not specify any differences, I can infer what she meant as she continued to share her experiences. For example, as her disability became more apparent to her peers, Erin recalled being slowly excluded from social circles saying, "No one liked me or wanted me around because I was so different." Erin also shared that she even felt her having a learning disability was an annoyance to her teachers, too: "Teachers would push me aside because it took too long to explain things." The experiences caused Erin to feel lonely: "I was isolated. So, it bothered me."

Due to these experiences with her teachers and former friends, feelings of isolation and loneliness, Erin expressed how she began to dislike going to school, telling her mother, "I just want to stay home!" When Erin confided in her mother about her experiences, how she felt about being different from her peers, and how it affected her, her mother said, "Erin, don't worry because it doesn't matter if you're different from anybody. Everybody is different." Consequently, Erin's conversation with her mother left lasting impressions as she did not allow the ridicule from others to affect her as much. Erin said, "Once I got to high school, it didn't bother me. It was just those short few years."

Throughout her primary and secondary education career, Erin remembers most of her IEP meetings. She had an understanding regarding the purpose of her IEP meetings, what the meetings consisted of, and expressed how she was involved in her planning. Erin also shared how the IEP meetings were always positive, and how she was able to vocalize her wants and needs, stating, "I remember being involved, speaking up on what I wanted." Erin's active

involvement and vocalizing her wants was due to having a supportive IEP team, as she mentions later in this narrative.

With regards to her high school IEPs and transition planning, Erin remembers her mom, teachers, and transition counselor being part of the meeting. Although Erin did not remember exactly when the discussion about creating her postsecondary transition plan took place, she did recall having a conversation with her transition counselor to discuss her postsecondary options during her senior year of high school. Erin said the thought about being a senior made her feel, "A little bit nervous." She says, "That's the year you're supposed to find out if you're going to school or what." Erin remembers her transition counselor saying, "You have to make the decision if you're going to go to college." Upon hearing the word "college," Erin said she began to feel a "little bit nervous," because "I never even thought of going to college because I was like, after high school, that's it." Erin admitted that the conversation she had with her transition counselor about college being an option for her made her feel, "A little bit unsettle[d]." After meeting with her transition counselor, and discussing her options with her mother, Erin realized that college was indeed an option for her.

When Erin met with her IEP team to create her postsecondary transition plan, she said they prepared "By making a plan for how I was going to know about the services after I graduate high school. We talked about maybe being able to get connected with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) services, which is the vocational rehab." According to the State of Hawaii Department of Human Services website (https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/vocationalrehab/), "DVR is designed to assist job seekers with disabilities prepare, secure, and retain competitive employment in an integrated work setting." As part of her transition goals, Erin vocalized to her IEP team that she was interested in going on a campus tour of MCC. Erin acknowledged that

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taking part in the campus tour before the start of her first semester made her transition more seamless by stating, "So we made a plan, and then I had come here before then to get a tour of the campus. So that way, it makes things more smooth, and I'm not lost and finding places when I start college."

Overall, Erin stated that her IEP team did an excellent job in preparing her for life outside of high school by composing a step by step transition plan. Erin's transition plan included her transition team educating her and her mom about the differences in services. For example, moving from Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to being qualified for Section 504: "We talked about those differences of free services to college accommodation." Additionally, the plan also included learning about the various services available in the community. Erin said, the step by step plan "was helpful because I could have a hard copy of whatever they talk about, whatever we planned out."

One of the services in the community that Erin spoke highly of, that she was extremely grateful for, and prepared her for the transition into college was the DVR program. According to the State of Hawaii Department of Human Services website (https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/vocationalrehab/), "DVR is designed to assist job seekers with disabilities prepare, secure, and retain competitive employment in an integrated work setting."

Erin shared that her DVR counselor was the one who educated her about postsecondary education institutions having a student disabilities services office and academic accommodations. Erin remembered, "She said, they have different ones on every campus. So she had connected me with them." Her DVR counselor even went as far as assisting Erin in obtaining academic accommodations through MCC's Student Disabilities Service Office by accompanying her. An important part of her transition was familiarizing herself with the

counselor, "I met with my DVR counselor, and she had met me here…[and] [s]o that's how I knew that the services was available to me."

When deciding on a college to attend, there were several factors as to why Erin chose to attend MCC. First, she pointed out how she liked the small class settings; second, the school was near her high school and home, stating, "It was close by from where I graduated high school and then also because of the convenience." Thus, the environment was familiar to her; and third, MCC offered the degree program she was interested in studying. Erin originally intended on majoring in a Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) field. However, upon reviewing the course requirements for STEM majors, it became clear to Erin that she would struggle academically: "All those math classes that I had to take. I was like, I don't think so. Then I'm like, 'Let's look at another major.'" Erin then scheduled a meeting with an MCC academic counselor to discuss her options. Subsequently, Erin also talked with her mother, stating, "I was talking to my mom, and she's like well, you always enjoyed working with children. Then I said, 'Maybe I could try out education.' So, I stuck with it, and I liked it."

Between graduating from high school and her first day of college, Erin said, that it was her DVR counselor that helped acclimate her to the MCC campus, stating, "They were helpful because they were able to be with me on campus to help me get settled into college." However, as Erin made the transition into her first semester of college, she stated the following, "I felt a little bit unsettled, just because transitioning to college is a whole new atmosphere." Erin went on to also share how she felt a mixture of emotions, stating, "I was happy to be at college, but I was a little bit nervous being at college my first semester" because "The people that I had connected with before when I was in my last year of high school, they weren't here in college. So, going to find all those different resources again was hard."

Fortunately, as mentioned, Erin's DVR counselor had connected her to MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office prior to the start of school; thus, she had one familiar support to seek out services. When talking about the Students Disabilities Services Office, Erin expressed a considerable amount of gratitude towards the Student Disabilities Services Office in ensuring that her accommodations were all set up by the start of the semester. In all, Erin felt the accommodations she qualified for were sufficient, and helpful to her success, stating, "Those accommodations were helpful for me because I could put them to good use. Like listening to lectures. I could always listen and take notes on my own time." Furthermore, Erin also mentioned that having a note-taker was helpful because she could focus on the lecture and take notes without worrying about missing anything. She knew that she would be able to compare her notes to the note-takers and fill in the gaps, and also assess her note-taking abilities and adjust her note talking style.

Upon completing her first couple of weeks of classes, Erin said she began to feel a mixture of emotions stating, "It made me feel a little bit nervous, a little bit sad because I didn't know if I could keep up with the college pace and the classes." She also shared how the lectures were much faster than what she was accustomed to, thus, finding it challenging to keep up with the lectures while trying to take useful notes. Erin also professed that the way she learned to study in high school no longer applied to her as an MCC student, "It was a little bit different, the way to study, because you have to do more outside on your own studying." She continues, "The way that I studied for when I was in high school, which was just reading things and writing it out, I didn't know that I couldn't use those study methods…because in high school, I thought there was only one way to study." These experiences began to fill Erin with doubt about her ability to keep up with the rigor of college. Fearing that the attainment of a college degree was

near to impossible. She says, "I felt like I don't know if I'm going to make it to my degree or if

I'm going to get something out of going to college." Erin's understanding and mindset about her

study methods changed as she realized that in addition to listening to class lectures, taking notes,

and completing her assigned readings, she also had to learn how to study independently and

become an independent learner.

Erin knew that for her to succeed in college, she needed to create a support team at MCC,

stating, "If I want to do well in college, I need to take responsibility. I need to go and either ask

for help or talk to my teacher." However, that would entail Erin having to advocate for help and

support. This is a task which many may not find difficult to do but, for Erin, she found it

problematic to perform given her lack of social skills, "I didn't have the social skills to talk to

people. Even if I knew that I could reach out to those services, I didn't. How do I say it that I

need help? What are those skills to talk to people?" Consequently, the lack of social skills also

affected Erin's ability to interact with others, meet new people, or form relationships at MCC.

For Erin to attain her academic goals, she knew that she needed to overcome her social

anxieties and seek out support from services on campus. With the support of MCC's Student

Disabilities Services Office, she was able to do so. The Coordinator of MCC's Student

Disabilities Services Office introduced Erin to two support programs on campus, the TLC

program and the Hawaiian Center's Career Technical Education program. It was through those

programs that Erin was able to obtain wraparound or non-instructional services. Wraparound

services include services that support every aspect of the student, both at the cognitive and non-

cognitive levels. Programing from these wraparound services could include, but are not limited

to, the following: tutoring, coaching, mentoring, advising, financial literacy, time management,

note-taking, self-advocacy, mindset, learning style inventory, study skills, test-taking skill, basic

computer skills, grit (perseverance towards attaining goals), social and interpersonal skills, and communication skills. Through attending a plethora of workshops hosted by these programs, Erin shared how it helped her on her academic journey. She says, "Finding out how to study, finding different ways to study. That was helpful for me." Erin also shared, how learning about her learning style helped her in the way she studied by stating, "I found out, oh, there's many different ways you can study depending on the way that you learn best." Lastly, but equally as important, through these support programs, Erin was able to create friendships with other program participants and form relationships with her peer coaches. Peer coaches are individuals whom she said helped her to hone her social skills, stating:

> I was being more comfortable with communicating and working on my social skills, so that was helpful because I always wanted to be able to talk to people. So, it helped me practice on this is how to communicate with people. I guess it just got me more comfortable with reaching out to people and not being afraid to talk to people.

> Upon creating her network of support, Erin said that as she persisted from one semester to the next, things got better for her, "After that first semester and then going on to the second semester, I felt much better because I had more control of now knowing where to go, who to ask for help." Erin's said her confidence grew because she knew there were people on campus willing to assist and support her academic journey. For example, Erin said that the Student Disabilities Services Office "[w]ere a big support because I could always tell them anything about school and classes." With regards support from non-instructional faculty and staff, Erin said:

> If my counselor for academic wasn't available, I could either go to TLC and talk to them, or I could go to the Hawaiian Center and talk to the Native Hawaiian counselor or go to

Student Disabilities Services Office and talk to them. So, it was helpful in the sense if there's one person that I couldn't talk to, I could just move down the line until I got the help I needed.

Being part of the support programs and receiving wraparound services, Erin's confidence blossomed, resulting in her being more in tune with her emotions. She knew that she had individuals and support programs that she could openly share, seek assistance from, and discuss things regardless of the topic regularly without judgment: "As I was going through the semesters, I was like, 'No, there's people to help me. It doesn't matter if I have a learning disability or any kind of disability because they don't really look at that.'"

As Erin progressed through the semester and neared the attainment of her Certificate of Achievement in Alternative Education from MCC, she said, "I felt really happy because now it's like I'm near the end of getting my…I got my certificate, and now I'm near the end of getting my degree. I'm excited because I never thought I would make it this far". Since her first semester, Erin said she could feel herself develop and grow. More specifically, Erin pointed out how her mindset from high school to college had significantly changed and that she felt more responsible and independent, saying:

My mindset, I think, changed when I got to college. It was different. Then probably learning how to take more responsibility, be more independent. I remember in college, I would say it helped me to know that when I take a class, it's your own responsibility versus when I was in high school. It's different because if you do something in class, your teacher would call your parents then. But I know for me, I would say that was a big change for me.

Erin also expressed that as she progressed from one semester to the next, she became

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more open-minded about everything in general and had a more positive outlook on life.

Socially, she began to put herself out there. Stating, in high school, "I wasn't involved in any

extracurricular activities, anything like that. It was just home and go to school, home and go to

school." However, at MCC, she got involved with extracurricular activities and believes that her

participation in extracurricular activities such as student life and student government also helped

to develop her social skills, enhance her social circle, and acclimate to college life:

> I like the fact that they had the student life where they have different activities.   I
>
> remember my first activity I went to with them. I was a little bit nervous because I was
>
> like, Am I allowed to go to these things?' Then when I talked to them, they're like, 'Oh,
>
> anybody can just show up. All you need is your student ID.' So I was like, 'Okay,' and
>
> they're actually really friendly. So, I liked that fact because I had an easier time to get
>
> accustomed to college.

Throughout her academic journey, Erin experienced many changes and transitions that

were critical to her college experience and successes. Through it all, Erin shared that she was

able to get through them by maintaining a positive mindset, "It was becoming more positive, not

so much negative because it wasn't like everyone was not willing to help. As I was going

through the semesters, I was like, 'No, there's people to help me.'"

Erin also said critical to her success was maximizing all of MCC's campus programming

and support, "There was at least one person on campus that I could connect to. They wouldn't

push me away." Erin also experienced support programs saying, "I can walk you there, or I can

give you the number or the website." They did not "push me aside and tell me, 'This is where

you have to go.'" Moreover, Erin shared that she was able to incorporate skills learned from

various workshops into her academic regiment by saying, "[T]he different workshops that they have on campus to help you with being [sic] a better student."

Overall, with great enthusiasm, Erin expressed the following about her entire college experience at MCC, "I would say my time in college has been really helpful. It's been actually really fun, just in the sense, even though I had a rocky start, it's been good overall." Erin acknowledged that the following individuals and programs as significant assets to her success: her mother, her IEP team, DVR counselor, TLC program, Student Disabilities Services Office, and the Hawaiian Center's Career Technical Education Program. With a considerable emphasis on the significant role of her mother in her academic journey saying, "She was a really big support."

Although there were many pivotal moments in Erin's educational journey that contributed to her academic success, she shared one negative experience. An example of this was during Erin's first day of classes:

> I remember my first day on campus, I was trying to find my classes. I think I went to the main office, that first office where they have the records. I asked them, I need help finding where my classes are. It wasn't that welcoming because they were like, 'You're supposed to ask this office,' and I told them I didn't know where that office is because I'm a brand new student.

Instead of getting the help she expected, she felt unwelcomed as she went bouncing from one office to another. Moreover, although Erin vocalized that she was a brand-new student and did not know the location of the office they were advising her to seek assistance from, she felt that her presence did not matter saying, "They didn't offer me a map or anything. I felt I wasn't important." Instead, she was left to find the office on her own.

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As mentioned, Erin's transition into college was a bit challenging. As she shared, there were many nervous moments, with her wandering mind telling her, "Where do I go from here?" As she graduated, her beliefs about herself took a 180-degree turn. Erin was no longer the shy, lost, less confident individual. She was now happy, confident, and excited. With a massive smile on her face, Erin said that when she told her mom:

> I got my certificate, her mom replied with, 'I knew that you could do it, but do you remember you told yourself you couldn't do it?' I was just reflecting, and I was like, 'Yeah, that was me a while ago.' I couldn't believe it. I was just so happy."

Four years after entering MCC, at the age of 22, Erin achieved her first educational goal by graduating with her Certificate of Achievement in Alternative Education. She is currently enrolled at MCC and working on her attaining her Associate of Arts degree in Alternative Education with plans on transferring to a four-year college here she intends on earning her baccalaureate degree in Education.

The Gentle Giant: Cody

I refer to Cody as the Gentle Giant. Standing a little over six feet and one inch tall, his stature is deceiving as he is quite the teddy bear. As a whole, Cody has a confident demeanor, which was apparent as he sat down for the interview. I could both feel and see his confidence radiate through his posture as he mildly but firmly sat in the chair. His body language spoke volumes that he was ready to begin the interview as he had a slight lean towards the table with his right arm steadily propping him up, and his eyes directed towards mine. With that said, Cody's eye contact was steady throughout the interview and was expressive with his non-verbal body language, such as head nods and various facial expressions.

Born in Waipio and raised in Kapahulu, Cody graduated from King High School at the age of 18. In his spare time, Cody shared that his hobbies included going fishing and exercising. With certainty, Cody said that he was diagnosed with having a learning disability "at an early age in like um…Kindergarten." Although Cody was unable to recall how his disability made him feel as a Kindergartener, he did say, "I probably didn't care. But as I got older, it started to become more recognizable." He noticed that he was a bit different from most of his peers, stating, "I don't know if it was just because of the age or if it was me. I was just more rowdy than the other kids."

Cody shared that his learning disability negatively impacted his primary and secondary education experience saying, "It gave me a lot of trouble." Early on in elementary school, Cody said he was a "naughty student." For some reason or another, he was always getting reprimanded for his behavior, stating:

> So this teacher, I forget if she spanked me or just put me in time out, but anyway I remember her pulling me by the ear because my mom came to the principal's office. And I remember the teacher pulling my ear all the way there and she was just yelling at my mom saying, "Your son's gonna be a drug addict. He's gonna be on the side of the road. He's never gonna accomplish anything if you don't discipline him more!' and stuff like that and I just remember my mom getting really upset.

As Cody shared that experience, I observed him tapping his fingers forcefully on the tabletop with a look of distress on his face. As he told this story, I could feel myself well up with frustration and sadness because I felt that no child should ever be demeaned or judged, especially by an educator. A school is a setting where they are supposed to feel safe and supported. So, to hear that a "teacher" said and did those things was quite shocking.

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As the interview went on, Cody did not mention anything about his middle school experience. Nor did he mention anything about his middle school to high school transition experience. Cody, however, did mention that as a high schooler, his behavior was the exact opposite of how it was in elementary school. Unlike elementary school where Cody was in constant trouble, as a high schooler, his experience was very different, "I became super quiet, and I don't want to say that I didn't want to hang out with other people. I just more kept to myself."

As a high schooler, Cody expressed that academically, he was not a good student: "I don't know if it was their teaching style or if it was me, but it's just even though I tried my best, the results would always be pretty bad." Cody felt that his teachers did not encourage or offer him any opportunities in the classroom to actively learn anything or engage in student learning. Instead, for the most part of his high school experience, Cody shared that he felt he was going through the motions of what he felt his teachers wanted from him, and not what they were expecting of him. Saying, "Oh, here's this piece of paper. Just fill it out, and you can go on."

When I asked Cody about his IEP experiences, he let out a big sigh. He said blandly, "It was a waste of my time." When I asked him to expand on why he felt that way, Cody stated, "Because it felt like the team really didn't care…They asked the same questions every single time." Thus, he felt the process was merely monotonous saying, "I pretty much just wrote down whatever and they pretty much were like, 'Oh, okay you're good.'" Consequently, Cody shares, "After a while I just felt like, 'Oh, my teacher doesn't care about my education, why should I.'"

When Cody met with his high school IEP team to create his postsecondary transition plan, he said, "The school, they didn't say really much about planning to go second [sic] education." The only topic related to postsecondary education Cody remembered his IEP team

talking to him about was a career he would possibly be interested in pursuing. To that, Cody's responded to his team by stating, "I'm not sure because there are so many people in high school telling me I can't really do anything, so I don't know what to do." Cody's uncertainty regarding his postsecondary plans stemmed from hearing his teachers over the years, telling him that he was incapable of succeeding: "So I don't know if they thought I couldn't accomplish anything in my life, so I honestly don't know why they didn't say anything about a second education for me, but I guess it's how it happened."

As he neared his high school graduation, Cody's perception of himself was relatively negative. Over the course of his primary and secondary academic journey, all the negative situations and comments became ingrained in Cody. He remembers, "I guess I just felt like maybe they're all right. Maybe no matter how hard I try, I can't accomplish anything" leaving Cody to believe that he was not good at anything. He continues, "I didn't know what I was good at. I thought, at that time, I was bad at everything." Subsequently, upon graduating from high school, Cody did not enroll in college. Instead, Cody decided to stay home and take care of his mother, who around his senior year, became very ill.

It was not until the age of 25, seven years after being out of the schooling pathway, when Cody thought about possibly enrolling in some postsecondary education program. At that time, Cody shared that his decision to explore his education and career options came about when his mother's overall health increased. He said he told himself, "I have to do something."

Initially, Cody planned on enrolling at the Motorcycle Mechanic Institute. However, his interest in the field of welding came about when his father brought home a welding machine: "My dad brought home a welder, we fixed it, and he let me try, and I enjoyed it. And he said,

'Oh, why don't you go to school for that?' And I said, 'You know what? That sounds pretty cool.'"

Despite having that positive interaction and conversation with his father, it was not enough for Cody to immediately jump on the postsecondary education bandwagon. Instead, Cody admitted that the thoughts of failing and not being good enough began to overwhelm him. He shared, "I was horrible in school, in high school. How am I gonna be in college where it's supposed to be a lot more intense?" Not confident about his abilities, Cody did not give college any further thought and continued to tinker around with the welding machine and help his dad fix things. It was not until Cody's father's friend, who was an experienced welder, stopped by their house one day and saw Cody welding something and said, "Oh you're pretty good. You should definitely think about something," and for Cody, he interpreted "something" to mean school. Subsequently, hearing those words from a professional welder validated his abilities in his mind. Soon thereafter, Cody applied for admissions to MCC.

As Cody prepared for college, he said, "I really tried to keep an open mind." But, "I was still mentally probably a little bit in the past." He continued, "There's still always that voice in the back of my head saying, 'Oh this going to be like high school.'" Cody's transition experience into college occurred through a summer college experience program offered for free by MCC. Through the college experience program, Cody discussed takeaways from experiences like ice breakers, interaction with professors, and support programs. Cody said he enjoyed the ice breaker activities and found them to be helpful, saying, "The ice breaker games we would play in the beginning of the class just for everybody to open up was helpful. Definitely helpful." These activities supported Cody's ability to make friends and interact with others easily, which eased many of his anxieties.

Meeting and interacting with some professors through the college experience program gave Cody the opportunity to talk with one, in particular, an English professor whom he took a liking to stating, "He was super nice, and I actually talked to him a little bit." Cody briefed this professor about him and his situation:

> I'm really nervous this is my first time after so many years coming back after high school. Is there anything that would like help me? So he recommended me getting a library card and borrowing this book called Mindset by Carol Dweck. And then so I managed to finish the book before I came into college which to me was a huge help into keeping an open mind and really thinking like maybe it will be different.

Lastly, through the college experience program, Cody said he was grateful for the exposure to an array of support programs on the MCC campus. One of the support programs they visited that was critical to his experience included the Student Disabilities Services Office. It was through that particular program visit, Cody learned about academic accommodations. To see if he qualified for academic accommodations, Cody said, "After the class was over, I went to go and stop by, and she gave me more information." Upon meeting with the Student Disabilities Services Office Coordinator and submitting all pertinent paperwork for services, Cody was deemed eligible for academic accommodations. Cody said, "The services that they provided were definitely helpful. Like the notetaking, if I needed to borrow a recorder, anything like that to help me in college they provided and definitely were helpful." He shared that if it were not for his participation in the college experience program, he would not have known about academic accommodations saying, "Exactly, why I was so glad I was part of that [college experience program] because, otherwise, I would not have known."

Being a non-transitional student and out of school for seven years, Cody began his first semester of college. He described this feeling when he said, "The whole process to become a freshman in college that was a very scary and a lot of anxiety. It was a pretty intense experience." As Cody got himself settled into his routine, he said things were not all that bad: "It was actually was not too bad I was expecting it to be so horrible, and frustrating and it turns out it actually wasn't. It was pretty good." Academically, Cody ended up doing better than he expected because he kept an open mind about college: "I wanted to keep an open mind. Not to like think this was going to be like high school all over again." Cody enthusiastically shared his experience with his English class: "I got an awesome English teacher, and she was super nice. Whenever I had questions after class, she would be available." In fact, Cody said that whenever he had questions about homework for any of his classes, his instructors were always available.

As Cody progressed through his first semester, he said, "I felt pretty confident in my first semester. I was getting good grades. I had a few friends in my classes. Yeah…it was pretty good." During this time, Cody also connected himself to the TLC and Hawaiian Center's Career Technical Education programs, where he became an avid participant and received wraparound services. Cody mentioned that his involvement with the Hawaiian Center's Career Technical Education program and services from the Students Disabilities Services Office was helpful to his academic success. With a big confident smile, Cody shared that at any time he needed support he could turn to any of those programs saying, "For instance, if I never needed tutoring or if something happens to my laptop. I know where to borrow them from. Or, if like Student Disabilities Services Office, if I'm having a hard time taking notes in the class, they will provide me a note-taker for me, which is very appreciated."

Cody said that he utilized many of the tools he learned through his involvement with the support programs, which helped get him through college. Mentioning time management, making SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), and learning to pace himself. Cody saw significant positive changes in his outlook on school. Unlike high school, where Cody earned below-average grades, as a college student, he was acing his courses:

> High school, I was getting D's and C's. But in college, because all the teachers are so open-minded, they are so willing to take the time [to help]. That, to me, it's kind of hard to fail if you just take the time and put in the effort. So, I really do appreciate the teachers for being so open and so flexible.

Cody shared that when he started his first semester, he was timid stating, "I know when I started my very first semester, I was probably really shy in the first couple of weeks. But then afterward and then even continuing now, I'm a lot more social and open." Cody also noted that in college, his social skills developed to the point that his parents recognized it as well stating, "'Wow, son, we've never seen you like this before.'" Additionally, he said that his most significant growth as a college student had to be his overall psyche and well-being. He went from thinking negatively about himself to a confident individual. He feels he owes much of his development to his college experience:

> I used to think very negatively about myself. But because of being in college, actually doing something, coming to school, going to work, definitely has [given me] a good sense of well being. Emotionally, I can take a lot [more]. So, always at the end of the day, it used to be video games. But now I replace that with exercising, something a bit more healthy.

Being an avid participant of the TLC program, Cody eventually gained employment as a Peer Tutor/Coach for the TLC program. Cody mentioned that being employed as a Peer Tutor/Coach for the TLC program "provided a good support and a sense of well-being." That it was also a "friendly work environment, very open-minded, like, if I made a mistake, it's okay, just try to learn from it kind of thing. Which I appreciated." Furthermore, Cody mentioned that he also took part in various campus-sponsored service-learning projects stating,

> Going out and doing community services. Just helping out somebody whoever needs
> help, like, I enjoy doing. It makes me feel really good. Like a sense of pride kind of
> thing, restoring the land and all that kinds of stuff.

As Cody persisted through the next few semesters, he said that his confidence carried over, stating he could feel his confidence as he puts it "building and building," which made him feel "really good" about himself. Cody earned his way on to the Dean's list and was inducted into MCC's Honor Society. As Cody neared graduation, he admitted that his experience was "great." At the same time sad stating, "It's almost sad that I have to leave, really. But I know it's for the best. I've learned what MCC can offer for me and I'll enjoy putting that on the workforce utilizing the skills." Through his college experience, he had a better understanding of himself:

> When I graduated with my certificate, it was really positive. A huge accomplishment. I
> felt really good, a lot of pride, and it was kind of like I finally proved to myself, and to all
> those other people who used to say, oh you won't be able to do anything you'll never
> accomplish anything. So yeah it felt really good.

Throughout his academic journey, Cody acknowledged that he experienced many positive changes. Cody had nothing negative to share about his college experience. In fact, he said that college was, "definitely fulfilling. I've enjoyed coming to college and really happy that

I made the decision to come here." Two years after entering MCC, Cody graduated with a 4.0-grade point average, earning a Certificate of Achievement in Welding. Cody is currently in the process of finishing up his course requirements for an associate's degree in Welding. In all, I would have to agree that Cody did himself well. Cody closed the interview with the following, "I just had a really positive experience coming to college. I just really enjoyed it and glad I made the decision. It's definitely really positive."

The Energizer Bunny: Benjamin

I refer to Benjamin as the Energizer Bunny, as he literally never runs out of energy. In actuality, Benjamin's interview was the longest one I conducted, which included a lot of detailed experiences that I really appreciated. Standing at five feet seven inches tall, Benjamin walked into the interview with a confident swag. As he sat down, and before we began the interview, he admitted that he usually would not take part in a study that required him to share his experiences. Thus, I am grateful for his participation in this study. I believe Benjamin is a driven and confident individual who possesses the focus to succeed and beat the odds.

Benjamin grew up in Honolulu and graduated from Kingston High School at the age of 19. As far back as Benjamin could remember, his doctor diagnosed him with having a learning disability. Growing up, Benjamin never correctly understood what his disability entailed, but recalled his academic journey being very difficult: "I tried to be a normal kid, but, of course, there was something wrong because I was constantly having to see a counselor." When Benjamin did grasp an understanding of his disability, he said, "Truthfully, the best word that comes to mind is I felt 'stupid.'" In elementary school, Benjamin mentioned that he would consistently get frustrated in class:

I'm coming to school. They're throwing math problems on the board, and the kid next to me can easily figure it out, whereas I'm sitting here, and I'm just like, 'What's going on?' [I'm] [c]onstantly having to raise my hand. Kids would always tease you and say, 'Why can't he understand it?' That was hard for me. I look back, and it's something that I have to live with through all my entire life.

In all, Benjamin stated that his learning disability affected his educational experience "tremendously," stating that, "It was a horrible experience growing up going from elementary school and middle school to high school more so, "[b]ecause I was placed into the special education system," and his peers knew it. In elementary school, Benjamin said he felt like he was singled out stating, "The teacher would come in midway and then she would pick me up, he or she would grab me, and then take me to the special education class. It's embarrassing." Benjamin said he could hear the whispers of his peers saying, "Why is he missing class?" Eventually, his classmates found out who his special education teacher was and why he was leaving class in between lessons and would say things like, "'Oh, well, he's got to go to the red door.'"

To cope with his disability, Benjamin shared a time when he was in elementary and cheated on one of his English tests. He said, "I couldn't spell before because I had a learning disability. I think I remember writing on my arm one time. I just had a test, and I kept flipping my arm over because I didn't want to fail the test. I wanted to be amongst other students." Benjamin said that it came to a point in his life where his self-esteem hit a low and that he became embarrassed about his disability, especially knowing that his peers knew that the classroom with the red door was where the "special kids went: "As a kid, you talk about segregation and whatnot, and you're looking at yourself being segregated from the regular

population. It's kinda impactful." Like the experiences of the other participants, these feeling of isolation, shame, and negative self-perception associated with having an LD are long-lasting.

When I asked Benjamin to share his IEP experiences, he said, "IEP, is that like when you get together with the teachers?" and I responded with a nod of affirmation. Benjamin shared that throughout his educational career, he recalls going to the meetings but did not realize they were called IEP meetings. He shared how his mother fought to get him involved in his IEPs because, initially, the school did not want him to have a say in the meetings. Benjamin mentioned that as he got older, he became more vocal when it came to standing up for himself, sharing his likes and dislikes, expressing how he did not like being treated like a child, or being spoken to condescendingly by his teachers:

> It was me speaking. This is what we want to do. This is what we feel, and I would object to it and say, no, this is what I think is best for me. She would say, do you truly feel that you can get through it? Yeah, and I would get through it. We did have IEP meetings.

Benjamin also shared an experience pertaining to his IEP meetings when one of his teachers told his mom, "Your son will end up in jail." Benjamin said his mother replied to the teacher with, "Why do you say that?" and then Benjamin said the teacher replied with, "With the way he acts and how he is." Benjamin went on to share how that experience affected him thereafter, stating, "So, in essence, learning disabilities back in the day, was sometimes a marking for you to be in jail. That's how I took it, my perception."

When Benjamin transitioned to middle school, he shared that he felt his experience was not any better. Although he had different classes to attend and no longer taken out of class, his peers still knew he was in special education classes because he had to walk into the special

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education classroom. With regards to transition and self-development, Benjamin said middle school was a difficult time as well:

> I think in middle school, what hurt me the most is because you're going through that transition of developing, who you are as a person. You're starting to have feelings; you're starting to like girls all that stuff. I can remember that the teacher that I had would treat me like a child the way she would talk to me. She would talk to me in a manner; it was as if I was a baby. You're transitioning, your body and your personality, so it's like you have this teacher talking to you like a child, you have the students who went to the normal classes observing this, so they look at you as you look kind of stupid. I remember telling this one teacher, 'Can you please stop talking to me like that?'

Benjamin mentioned how the teacher's attitude rubbed off on to his peers to the point even his peers would tease him and talk to him in an infantile way.

Transitioning into high school, Benjamin became more aware of himself and how his disability affected him. Additionally, his ability to keep up academically with his peers got worse. Admitting that he no longer wanted to be academically segregated from his peers he said,

> High school, it was even more so difficult because now you're going into your adult age. You're understanding more of what's going on. The world means more to you. You're comprehending everything. As I'm in that period of my life on having to, again, be segregated into this separate class.

To overcome his deficits in his English class, Benjamin said, "I tried to study English as much as I could. I would go home. I would try to read more." Subsequently, he was united with his non-disabled peers. However, being enrolled with his non-disabled peers, Benjamin realized that not

everyone was on the same learning plane. He shared that he now felt that he was competing with

his all his peers regardless of them having a LD or not:

> In one class, you have the normal students looking at you as somebody with a learning
>
> disability. But in this class, you have those with disabilities looking at you with a more
>
> harsher learning disability. It's even more so competitive. You're looking at them, and
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> they're looking at you, and you're going, 'Why can't I understand one plus one? Why
>
> does he understand it?' Again, teasing, saying things, sly remarks, being called stupid.

Benjamin also shared how he felt cheated out of receiving a good education, arguing that

his teachers would rather pass him out of their class than to recognize that he had a learning

disability and help him understand the subject content at hand. He felt hurt by these attitudes and

actions:

> What's hurtful sometimes was that some of the teachers never stood up for us. They
>
> never made it to where like, 'He's got a learning disability. I'm going to help you.' Some
>
> of the teachers would actually just want to pass you to get you out of that class.

As Benjamin neared his last year in high school, he knew that he wanted to attend

college. In actuality, he had a specific college in mind that he wanted to attend because the

college specialized in a degree program he was interested in studying. Benjamin admitted that

he did not know what attending college entailed relaying, "I truthfully didn't know what I was

getting into. I basically said, like everybody else, I want to go to college." So, to pursue his

dream of one day attending college, he sought assistance from the high school college counselor.

Benjamin recalled telling the college counselor that he wanted to attend a specific college.

However, upon submitting his college essay to the college counselor to review, the response he

received was not what expecting. The college counselor told him the following, "Do you think

this will get you there? I don't think you can get there." Shocked by the response, Benjamin's hopes and dreams were dashed!. Instead of receiving constructive criticism from the college counselor to improve his essay, Benjamin felt criticized. Benjamin said, "I was basically pissed. I was mad. I tore that paper up in front of her" and then "I threw it in the trash and walked out."

Fortunately for Benjamin, there was a secretary who witnessed what transpired and cared enough to go out of her way to track him down. Still disgruntled about the incident, Benjamin reluctantly went and listened to what this secretary had to say. He remembered the secretary saying to him, "So, you're just going to give up? You're just going to give up the rest of your life because one person said that to you?" By the end of their conversation, Benjamin found the gumption not only to prove the college counselor wrong but, most importantly proved to himself his worth. Benjamin shared how he would meet with the secretary regularly, to fill out college applications, search for scholarships, review his personal statement, and so forth: "She made me come in, if not every other day, every week to fill out a scholarship application. She would find the scholarships for me, she would work with it. She would look at my papers." Through it all, Benjamin did not get into his school of choice. Reflecting on his academic journey, Benjamin acknowledged that it was a blessing to have started at a community college: "I didn't go to the school that I had in mind, but I think it was for the better because I probably wouldn't have survived there with it being a private school. I needed to start from the bottom and work my way up."

When I asked Benjamin to share his postsecondary education transition planning and his IEP experience, he said, "All I remember about IEP meetings was, 'Hey, everybody, let's sit down. He's doing okay. He's doing great. He's going to pass. Thank you.' I don't recall ever a time when anybody looked at me and said, 'You're going to go to college,' never." Benjamin

went on to state, "I don't think the public school system really educated me." He felt his teachers were just biding their time with him by giving him busy work versus giving him work that would prepare him for life after high school, providing the following example:

> I remember one teacher. Basically, you could just sleep in class. There was actually a teacher that would give work to students, and there would be varying levels of work. At times students would just be like, 'Hey, I don't want to do this,' and, 'Okay, let me give you the easier one because you need to get something done to put on the books.' Give them the easier one, and then for the next 45 minutes, students would be sleeping.

While tapping the table firmly with his index finger, Benjamin said:

> There wasn't anybody that really helped me in high school. Aside from that secretary, I would say that she really instilled [in me] that I am going to go to college. I don't recall anybody else sitting me down or grabbing my hand and, basically, fighting my own non-desire to go to college because of what had happened to me.

Additionally, Benjamin also credits the secretary for connecting him to Hawai'i's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

It was through the DVR program that Benjamin learned that he could attend college and get assistance from them to finance his education. Upon hearing this, Benjamin said he was in disbelief, stating:

> I looked at her, and I laughed, and I said, 'Yeah, that's too good to be true. You're telling me that because of my learning disability, which I've always been embarrassed of in my life, that this organization or entity of the government is going to pay for my college, hire me a tutor, provide me with the tools that I need, and monitor me all the way up until getting job, and even help me transition into life in this job?' She said, 'Yeah.' I

laughed, and said, 'Well, you show me when that happens, and I'll believe it, but until then I think you're lying.'

Then with a nod of affirmation from Benjamin, he said, "It was true." Receiving financial assistance to pay for his college education from DVR was very important to Benjamin as he knew his mother could not afford to send him to college.

Upon graduating from high school, at the age of 19, Benjamin enrolled at MCC. Although Benjamin did not get into his first college of choice, he decided to attend MCC after he attended a presentation where an instructor in his interested field of study disseminated information about the program at his high school. Benjamin recalled the instructor speaking very highly about the program and, thus, he enrolled at MCC.

Although the DVR program had educated Benjamin about qualifying for academic accommodations, Benjamin did not inquire about them. Benjamin shared how he felt enrolling in college allowed him to start his college career with a new slate. He did not carry the burden of having to worry about being singled out by teachers or his peers at the college level because he had an LD. In all, Benjamin thought he would go to class, learn, and progress towards earning his associate degree without experiencing all that he did in high school.

As Benjamin transitioned into his first semester of college, he said, "I was scared. I was nervous." There were moments of self-doubt, feeling not good enough, that he did not belong in college, and even asked himself, "What the hell am I doing here?" Benjamin knew that it was his mindset that was psyching him out, while his inner voice was telling him, "If I didn't get through this, then I'd basically live up to everything everybody else said about me in life."

But that feeling quickly changed upon completing the first day of classes. Benjamin expressed how his first day of classes overwhelmed him, how he began to feel that finishing

college was going to be an impossible task stating, "There's no way I can do this. There's no way. I should just walk out of this school now, and just go pick up any job and stick with it." Although feelings of self-doubt began to creep up, he decided to respond to the situation with a positive mindset. Reiterating to himself that he did not want to live up to the expectations of others who told him he would amount to nothing and end up in jail and/or on drugs.

As Benjamin persisted through his first semester, and on to the next, he said that he was "More nervous, more scared." That the feeling of failure often crossed his mind, stating:

I'm going to fail. Every time I got a report card, 'I'm going to fail the next class, I'm going to fail.' That was always the belief. In my head, it played out as this is just what you need to do in life to show that you are a part of society. I thought to myself. You take college classes. You either pass or fail. Whether or not you do good or bad, you just tell somebody, I went to college.

Benjamin ended up passing his courses and earned himself better grades than what he expected; however, he knew that the rigor of the courses would get more complicated. The rigor and complexity did increase, particularly in math. Math was the subject that he admitted always struggling with.

As far as Benjamin can remember, the subject of math had always been a struggle for him. He expressed his appreciation for a couple of math instructors whom he felt went over and beyond to make sure he successfully passed the course. Reflecting on these teachers, he said, "I had a good math teacher here. I had two of them, actually, more than one good math teacher." Benjamin recognized that unlike the primary and secondary math teachers he had experienced, his college math instructors never spoke down to anyone. Benjamin shared that when he vocalized his difficulties with math to his instructors, the teachers took the time to schedule one

on one tutoring appointments after class and during her office hours. He remembers, "The math teachers that actually sat down, helped me outside, told me when to come. These teachers are just amazing." Although he did not pass the math course on his first attempt, Benjamin did not become discouraged. Instead, he attributed this positive mindset because of the way the instructor treated him – like he mattered:

> We'd go over it 20, 50, 60 times in her allotment of time that she had. If I took up all of that time she'd say, 'Tomorrow, 1:00, be back here.' That was just an amazing thing because you don't have that. Here's a teacher working one-on-one. She's got like a hundred students. Come back here tomorrow.

Through perseverance and hard work, Benjamin passed his Math class the following semester.

While enrolled in his pre-college math class, Benjamin said, "I was struggling to take the test. I made up some wacky excuse of why I couldn't take the test in class." Without mentioning anything about having an LD to his instructor, the instructor informed Benjamin that if he wanted to take his test in a separate room, he needed permission from MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office. Subsequently, Benjamin sought academic accommodations from MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office. Benjamin expressed how his experience with the Student Disabilities Services Office and interaction with the director was positive: "I would say he went above and beyond to help me." As a whole, Benjamin felt that the process of qualifying for accommodations was transparent, and he felt comfortable enough to seek assistance and support from the Student Disabilities Services Office director as needed. With the Student Disabilities Office director stating, "Oh if you ever need help come by." Benjamin stated, "I found a level of comfort with him…I made sure I took that up, and I came by." Benjamin shared that the accommodations were helpful to his academic success providing this example:

The separate room removed the anxiety because when I heard the tapping of the pencil when I heard the papers moving, my thought was, holy cow, I'm going to fail because they're flipping a page, and I'm still on the first problem. When I was separated, I was able to focus more.

At the same time, Benjamin also shared how the accommodations negatively affected him. That although he was now in a separate room, he was now in a room with cameras, which heightened his anxiety. Additionally, Benjamin mentioned the handicap sign being a hindrance to his confidence saying, "There's a big handicap placard on this private room. People started to ask me questions." Benjamin also shared the following experience:

I've had a few girls come up to me and be, 'Hey, so and so said that you have a disability. What is it?' And I'm like, 'What do you mean by that?' She's [like], 'Oh, well, we always see you transition into the other room. How come you transition in there?'

Keep in mind that Benjamin shared that his experience of change and transition occurred at a time in life when he was also learning about himself, being an adult, a college student, and building relationships with the opposite gender. He explained how he was ashamed of telling this girl why he was taking his test at the testing center, stating, "I can't even remember what excuse I gave her. I probably gave 50 excuses. I had to say why I'm going into this room. I walk fine. That was one thing people said, 'You walk fine, you talk fine, so why are you going into a room with a placard on it?'"

As Benjamin transitioned from one semester to the next, he shared that throughout his academic career, he found ways to cope with his disability, the rigor of his course work, and how his ability to tap into his learning styles and implement study skills to help him with his learning. When I asked to expand on his response, he said, "I was able to mask my disability by initiating

study groups." Benjamin's strategy to form study groups would allow him to learn and digest the course work without exposing his learning disability to his peers, thus, making him feel like a "normal" individual.

Benjamin also shared that to support his academic journey, he sought assistance and support through the TLC program. He became aware of the TLC program as he heard that the program offered a laptop loan out program. Benjamin shared that when he first heard about the TLC program, he was very hesitant to inquire about their services due to its program qualifications:

> I was embarrassed at first to join the TLC program because of - it's labeled as far as being you're the first college student in your family, or, I guess, it's low income. I didn't want people to think I was poor because I already had a learning disability. You're going to put me more and more in a hole of people looking at me in a negative light.

However, due to his financial situation, Benjamin was unable to purchase his own laptop. Thus, admitting that his only reason he was applying to the TLC program was to borrow a laptop. Benjamin shared that he learned that the program was sincere in wanting to support his overall academic journey saying, "Transition to TLC that was a critical moment because TLC provided the in-school help that I needed." Whenever he needed to print out homework, use the computer, get personal academic and financial aid advising, tutoring, or coaching, it was the TLC program that was there to support him:

> I needed somebody on this campus with me because when I exited that class, I came straight to TLC. That's where I felt a little more comfortable because of the people and you knowing me talking to me. I was nervous, I was scared, but outside of that it's very hard to explain, but there was some comfort in that TLC classroom.

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Benjamin also shared that enrolling in the College Experience course through the TLC program was also helpful, saying what he learned "is a strategy I'm using [now] as far as time management and organizing."

Benjamin expressed that support from the TLC program, DVR, Student Disabilities Services Office, and his two math teachers were vital to supporting his overall academic journey:

> The way they handled themselves and the way that they took me under their wing was just so amazing that it almost made me feel like I really had family here. That's the best way to describe it. So, these people actually kind of masked the negativity that I had in life and showed me that despite all that I had been through, there are people that are willing to help you.

Although Benjamin's college experience revealed many positive critical moments, there was one critical moment he experienced that almost led him to drop out of MCC. Keep in mind, as previously stated, Benjamin attended MCC to major in a specific program that he was interested in. Upon not being accepted to his college of choice, he decided to pursue college still and enrolled at MCC. However, upon enrolling in his courses specific to his major, Benjamin said:

> I would have to say that I was a bit - I don't know - I can't think of the word right now. It was kind of like an illusion. This guy came down to the school, talked highly about the program, and made it sound like it was a great program and that he was the best teacher, not realizing that I was going to go into this program with the same problem. My learning disability and his teaching style and how he actually treated me was very poorly. More than once, I almost thought about dropping out of this school because of that.

Benjamin felt like he did not matter as a student, but he could not allow this situation to hinder him from succeeding. Benjamin expressed that it was his internal motivation that helped him through this experience. He realized that he had to be his own cheerleader:

> I'm going to graduate, and that teacher [in high school] that told me I'm going to amount to nothing because I'm sitting in the back row, I'm going to one day show him that I did it. That teacher that told me I'm going to be a criminal. I'm going to one day show her that I'm working. I'm not in it. I'm not a number. The internal motivation, taking advantage of what's available to you and working amongst those that believe in you, doing things out of the ordinary, staying focused.

As Benjamin neared graduation, he admitted that his beliefs about himself did not change much. He was still anxious and scared of failing; however, at that point in his life and his educational journey, his belief of "not being able, changed to, I need to because so many people in my life told has told me that I can't." Upon hearing this, it was sad to hear that despite his positive college experiences, Benjamin still maintained a negative self-image, and continued to hold on, at a subconscious level, the beliefs that were ingrained in him [secondary education experience] about him amounting to nothing.

Besides acknowledging DVR and the secretary from his high school in supporting his endeavors, Benjamin also credits his mother and outside mentors in the community in supporting his academic journey through MCC. His mentors in the community taught him the value of a college education, the value of money, how the world works, and thus the importance of attaining a college degree. Due to his outgoing personality, Benjamin was able to make friends easily in class, on campus, and form relationships in and through the various support services programs where he was actively involved.

Two years after entering MCC, at the age of 21, Benjamin graduated with his associate's degree from MCC. He also made the Dean's list for multiple semesters and graduated with honors. Upon graduating from MCC, Benjamin earned his baccalaureate degree from a four-year college and then went on to earn his master's degree from the college he initially had his heart on attending.

Since graduating from MCC and looking back on his entire educational journey, Benjamin expressed how his mindset about himself has developed significantly. He does not see himself in the same light as he did when he was in elementary school or high school. Every time Benjamin passed a test, quiz, or course, he felt stronger and smarter. Benjamin recognized how his writing and communication skills had improved, stating, "I grew as an individual. I grew to be a better person." Additionally, Benjamin felt that his college experience made him a teacher in life:

> What I've learned I can share with others. If you can't understand what I told you, then I haven't done my part because I feel like in life we have to grow. We all have to grow. I grew as an individual. I grew to be a better person. I'm able to hold conversations."

Additionally, through all his academic and career accomplishments, he always remained true to himself. He reminds himself of the importance of being humble.

As we neared the end of the interview, I allowed Benjamin to share or add anything regarding his transition experience that I failed to ask. In all, Benjamin expressed how his college career and transitions were a huge struggle, and that this was the first time he has ever opened up to anyone about his college education and transition experiences. When looking back at it all, Benjamin stated:

Overall, my transition and when I look back at it, I'm still going through transitions. I'm not done yet. Overall, it was a struggle. It's a really big struggle. When I look back on the people that I had gone through special education program with, and I see where some of them are today, I see how some of them have excelled in life and whatnot, it's interesting. You look at where I came from to what I am, how I talk, how I carry myself, how I comprehend things. Today I can actually answer questions to other people that were above me then. That's how I looked at life. It's an amazing thing.

The Firecracker: Julie

I refer to Julie as a Firecracker because when I interviewed Julie, the responses and conversations that transpired were unfiltered. I appreciated that Julie felt comfortable enough to share her experience with candor, including quite a bit of fricking and fracking. Julie made me feel like I was one of her homegirls she was idle chit-chatting with. Standing at five feet two inches tall, Julie strutted into the interview with a confident feminine walk. As she made her way to her seat, I noticed that she had compensated her actual height with at least four-inch wedges. Julie definitely is a petite woman packed with a lot of spunk, humor, sincerity, and blunt honesty.

Born in Honolulu, Hawai'i and raised in 'Aiea, Julie is the youngest of three adopted children. Her siblings come from different biological families. Julie referred to herself as a "latchkey kid" as her parents owned a laundry business and were gone from six in the morning to four in the afternoon. Julie attended Kapalama Elementary school, and then attended a small local private school. However, her educational career did not end there as she eventually got suspended and then expelled. Julie then attended one local area high school but then transferred to another local area high school when she moved out of her parents' house. While moving out

of her parent's house at a young age seems like a significant event, Julie did not go into details about it. Then, upon taking a deep breath in and exhaling out, Julie said that she later transferred back to the first area high school and was placed into their Special Motivation Classes.

Julie shared that it was not until she was well into her high school years, at the age of 16, when she was diagnosed with having a learning disability. She remembered during her younger years having minor difficulties academically, but it was not apparent until she was a teenager, stating, "I was in high school when I had a hard time comprehending." She said the only reason why she was able to find out that she indeed had a learning disability was through her high school counselor: "My counselor had a meeting with my parent suggesting that I get tested and sure enough I did have a learning disability."

Julie said that she was embarrassed about having a LD saying, "I felt ashamed and less than. I felt that I was not like the normal students in school." She believed her disability affected how others viewed her, especially with labels saying, "[W]e were kind of labeled as 'fuck-ups.'" Thus, Julie disliked going to school because she did not want to be singled out or targeted as the "stupid" one because she attended classes she referred to as "special classes." Julie said, "I would go to school tardy, so the high school kids wouldn't see me going to that class. Or I would just not attend at all. I mean people would tease how stupid you are because you go to special classes." Nothing much more was shared by Julie regarding her secondary education experience and how her disability affected her except for the following statement about how she viewed her high school teachers:

Kind of like they were just there for their paycheck kind of deal. No real encouragement or anything. I kind of felt like they were paid babysitters. If we wanted to smoke, they

would let us and tell us if we get caught don't tell the security that we knew. You know that kind of crap. As I said, they weren't very helpful just there.

Upon graduating from high school at the age of 19, Julie was able to find employment easily. When I asked Julie if anyone in high school helped prepare a transition plan related to postsecondary education or work, she replied, "No one really helped me, not even my counselor in high school." However, Julie mentioned that when she did make it to class, her special education teacher took more of an interest in her career goals: "Maybe it was because of the meetings we had, you know the one we sit around a table with our parents and make a plan?" "You mean the IEP?" I said. With Julie nodding her head affirmatively, she said, "Yes that's it! IEP! They asked me then about my goals." When I asked Julie if she recalled her IEP team discussing any plans regarding going to college, she said, "Oh no, no. Nothing like that happened. Just goals and sign here, and that was it." Those responses alone validated to Julie that the school, her special education teachers, and her IEP team did not really care as she had very minimal understanding of an IEP or transition plan. As Julie reflected back on her high school experience, she said, "I think if we were treated differently and not made it obviously known that we were in a special class, I think maybe I would have participated more in school."

Due to the school's lack of care and Julie's lack of care about her own education, she began to be truant on a regular basis. Consequently, Julie shared that she did not graduate with the rest of her peers, stating, "I failed senior year." This suggested maybe that was the reason why she felt that college was not an option for her. Saying, "I mean seriously if I wasn't passing high school, what made me think that I could pass classes in college. I didn't even think of college after high school. I didn't want to fail again, so I literally looked for a job at first." After

taking a deep breath, exhaling, and a few seconds of silence, Julie continued on with the interview.

Nine years of being out of school, at the age of 28 years old, and working minimum wage jobs, Julie decided to enroll in postsecondary education. Julie said, "I realized that to get a good-paying job, I needed to further my education." At first, Julie was interested in cosmetology. Additionally, Julie said the college was located on the bus line where the bus stops right in front of the college, thus would make transportation convenient for her. Julie candidly said, "I honestly thought trade school, I will be doing the cosmetology thing, you know, learning how to cut, color, etc." She then stopped and took another deep breath. Upon exhaling, Julie continued, "I was in for a big ass surprise when they told me I needed to do Math, English, Chemistry. All the things that I knew I sucked at. I was devasted, literally." Feeling deflated, Julie's thoughts and mindset regressed back to her high school days stating, "I felt scared. I did not want to fail again." She then exclaimed, "I wanted to be like a normal student. I wanted to make sure that I would be able to understand what they were teaching me." Eventually, Julie decided on attaining her associate's degree in liberal arts and enrolled at MCC.

As Julie transitioned into her first semester of college, she admitted that her first semester was very challenging. Besides having to deal with her emotions and state of mind, she had to figure out how she was going to make it academically through the semester stating, "I was fricken scared shitless!" Entering college as a non-traditional student at the age of 28 was no easy task for her. Being out of school for so long, coupled with her learning disability, Julie did not know what to expect, which affected her overall well-being. She remembers, "I was depressed and to be honest, I didn't want to get close to anyone in school, or to socialize. My thinking was the less anyone knew about me, the better...I didn't know anyone and didn't want to

know anyone. I wanted to just get it over with." Julie did not share anything about her first day

or first week experiences as a college student. However, Julie did share, overall, her first

semester was a bit of a challenge: "I was the oldest, or at least I thought I was, in the lowest

English and math class. I felt like I had to learn English and math all over again. I had a hard

time retaining and comprehending."

Fortunately, Julie's therapist suggested to her that she seek support from MCC's Student

Disabilities Services Office, which she did. Julie shared that the accommodations received were

sufficient and she was grateful that she was educated about the Student Disabilities Services

Office, and accommodations through her network of support at MCC. If not, Julie admitted that

she probably would not have done as well as she did in college without that support network in

place. Julie admitted she initially had reservations with seeking out support:

> Being raised the way I was, I was always taught that you do not ask for anything. When
>
> my therapist suggested to ask about accommodations through Student Disabilities
>
> Services Office, it brought up feelings again like I was in high school. Here we go again
>
> the stupid girl, can't understand, can't retain what you're being taught. That feeling
>
> sucked balls. Honestly, it kind of put me through a depression again.

With the support of her therapist and the project director for the TLC program, Julie realized

that she should not be ashamed to ask for help. Julie expressed, with great gratitude, about the

support she received from the TLC director when seeking academic accommodations from

MCC's Student Disabilities Services Office:

> She supported me and even went as far as would you like me to go with you for support?
>
> Wow! That blew my fucken' mind. No one ever, ever said that to me while in an

> educational setting. I was like, is she for real? 'Cause shit like that just do not [sic]
>
> happen.

Julie then let out a burst of laughter, as she went on to share how she ended up having to eat her words because the project director was with her as she advocated for academic accommodations. While still giggling, Julie stated, "All I know was this is amazing. There is [sic] people out there who is genuinely there for you." By the end of Julie's second semester, she had formed herself a support team:

> I was hooked up with and utilizing the TLC program and Student Disabilities Services
>
> Office and a First-Year [Experience] Counselor. It was an amazing feeling. I was
>
> actually gaining self-confidence, and I was going to finish something that I started.
>
> Prior to Julie beginning her third semester of college, she took part in TLC's summer

bridge program. Julie shared that through their College Success course, she learned about many cognitive and non-cognitive lessons. Lesson such as mindset, time management, note-taking, self-advocacy, goal setting, and test-taking skills, to name a few. With an emphasis on mindset, she said, "[T]his is where I changed my mindset from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset." Mindset, a lesson Julie said she learned about via the TLC's summer bridge program on how one's intelligence, mind, and brain can be developed with effort and persistence. Consequently, Julie started to see change within herself for the better, stating, "I was starting to trust and open up more in class as well as when I would meet with Student Disabilities Services Office, my counselor, and mostly with the TLC workers and participants." Additionally, acknowledging that her ability to accept and work through change had also developed:

> I had control of the way I thought and felt, such as when I didn't do good on a test. I use
>
> [sic] always to tell myself that I was stupid, now I can self-talk and ask myself what is it

that I have to do and who can I see to get help or support from. I realized that I had no

control over anyone but myself. I had no control over how people thought of me and my

disability. Whatever, that's the past.

In all, Julie shared that her participation in the summer bridge program through the TLC program

helped her to be successful. Stating:

It gave me self-confidence in my education. I learned many types of skills that helped

me continue in college. I also learned about the culture of college expectations. The

instructor never made me feel that I was less than or stupid.

As Julie continued on her academic journey, progressing through the semesters, Julie also

gained support from the First Year Experience (FYE). Julie said the FYE program "helped me

through my semesters" and that the FYE counselor was always there to listen and support her

decisions. When things didn't pan out, she recalled her counselor saying, "It's okay, what can I

do to help you get through it?" With regards to the TLC program, Julie said she was grateful for

their overall wrap around support such as tutoring, check-ins, being able to talk to the project

director when she could not speak to anyone else. Julie shares how the project director never

judged her, understood her, gave her suggestions, and never told her what to do. Instead, the

project director would encourage her to figure things out and become an independent learner.

After "getting hooked up," as Julie puts it, she said she realized that she could attain her

academic goals: "There was a definite possibility of succeeding and being able to graduate,

maybe not in the time frame that I wanted to, but I was able to accomplish that goal of

graduation." She continued:

I'm going to be real. I constantly talk about the TLC program, the Student Disability

Services office, and my FYE counselor. It's because they were the ones that helped me

through my journey at MCC. When I fell, they were there to help me up, and when I

asked for answers, they would direct me how to find it. These programs have given me

the opportunity to find myself and give me self-confidence. Best programs ever!

With a huge grin on her face sitting tall in her chair, Julie said, "I am happy to say that during

the third and final year at Metro Community College, I was able to be inducted with the Phi

Theta Kappa Alpha Kappa Iota chapter (MCC's international honor society)."

Prior to her first semester at MCC, Julie said that she felt like she was not good enough

for college. However, once she found the right support, her beliefs about herself changed.

Three years after entering MCC, at the age of 31, Julie graduated with her associate's degree in

Liberal Arts. She is currently enrolled at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa and working on her

baccalaureate of science degree in Human Development and Family Studies, a significant shift

from her wanting to enroll in cosmetology

Because of the support programs and individuals mentioned in her interview, Julie

decided to obtain her baccalaureate degree. Julie ended the interview with the following

statement:

> You all have been an inspiration to me and want to be able to give back to the
>
> community. I would like to help students who are or are just like me when I first
>
> attended college. I want to be there to support them and let them know that there is hope
>
> and to believe in myself, just like how you all did for me.

Summary

Through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, a total of four graduates of MCC who

graduated with either a CA or an AA/AS from MCC from a variety of academic disciplines

participated in this research. Each of whom met the participant criteria. This chapter began with

a general background of the participant's demographic characteristics. Followed by an in-depth

look at each participant's transition experience where direct quotations were utilized to capture

the richness of their experience while providing the reader with a more definite sense of

understanding the transition experience. Having read the participant narratives, sets the stage for

the next chapter where the results and data are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

This hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry was designed to elicit meaning and understanding of students with LD and their secondary to postsecondary transition experiences from a holistic perspective. At the same time discovering what factors made them successful, and to what extent self-determination played a role in the participants success. This research project was designed to understand the transition experiences of successful graduates with LD, and have identified the following research question and subquestion that guided this study:

What was the lived experience of transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education for college graduates with LD?

1) What experiences promoted their transition into and progress towards their degree attainment?

As identified and acknowledged in research by Connor (2012), it is essential to recognize that the experience of LD students do not fit into any single perceived trajectory of transition into college life. The process of preparing, transitioning, and completing postsecondary education offers an immense amount of development. For participants in this study, transitioning from secondary education to postsecondary education was perceived as a significant life transition experience, an experience where they all faced adverse situations that they had to overcome in order to attain their educational goals. To uncover the essence of the transition experience of successful graduates with LD, the Schlossberg's transition theory was utilized as a lens to view and understand the data, paying specific attention to the voices of their experiences to note where the 4 S's fit accordingly. Additionally, Whemeyer's definition of self-determination was also utilized to see where it played a role in their success.

Theme Development

Before I delve into how the themes transpired, I have provided a brief narrative of how the themes were developed. Operating with the framework of phenomenology, and navigating through the data analysis process, three significant transition phases emerged.

Three significant phases

They are Pre-Flight (Pre-College Experience), Venture (College Transition Experience), and Departure (Exiting Transition Experience). The labels designated to the themes were created with the word "journey" in mind. According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary (2019), the word journey is defined as "an act of traveling from one place to another." I felt "journey" was most appropriate as their college experiences definitely fit the definition.

| Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience) | → | Venture (College Transition Experience) | → | Departure (Exiting Transition Experience) |
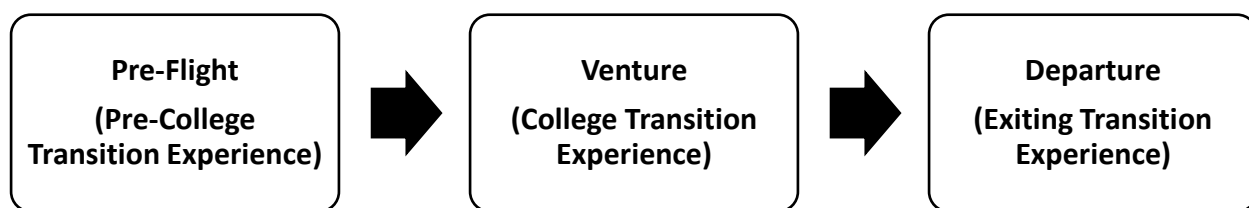
Figure 2. Three Major Transition Phases

Themes were then aligned and fashioned under Schlossberg's taking stock of coping resources: the 4 S system (Situation, Self, Support, Strategies), with the addition of Self-Determination elements. Subthemes were then created and organized under each major transition theme in alliance with the 4-S elements (Appendix J).

Situation. Situation refers to the individual's situation at the time the individual is experiencing transition and how the individual perceives the transition. More specifically, Pre-Flight (Pre-College Experience) encompassed the participant's pre-college transition experience. This included the knowledge of their disability and how it impacted their secondary education, their transition planning which included their knowledge of the process and degree of

involvement, and their college selection. Venture (College Experience), encompassed the

participant's college transition experience into their first semester of college, and as they

persisted from one semester to the next. Departure (Exiting Transition Experience),

encompassed the participants experience as they prepared to graduate and transition out of

college.

Transition Phases	Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience)	Venture (College Transition Experience)	Departure (Exiting Transition Experience)
Approaching Transition Themes (4S)	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes
Situations	Knowledge of Disability -Impact on secondary education Transition planning -Knowledge and involvement -College Selection	First Semester of College Persisting from One Semester to the Next	Transition out Preparing to Graduate &

Table 4. 4-S Situation

Self. Self refers to the individual's inner strength and ability to cope with the situation.

In other words, does the individual have the inner coping resources to maintain a sense of

control, be resilient, or possess the gumption to cope with the situation. For this subtheme,

statements that the participants made during their interviews related to their confidence levels,

and the way they perceived themselves were included.

Transition Phases	Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience)	Venture (College Transition Experience)	Departure (Exiting Transition Experience)
Approaching Transition Themes (4S)	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes

Self (Perception of the Transition) Confidence Level	Low Confidence Failing	Changes and Growth -Academically -Socially -Psychologically	Sense of Accomplishment Overall Changes and Growth

Table 5. 4-S Self

Support. Support refers to assets available to the individual. Support could be one's social circle, family members, organizations, or institutions. For this subtheme, statements that the participants made during their interviews related to their individuals that supported their transition stages were included here and grouped under personal, community, and institutional.

Transition Phases	**Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience)**	**Venture (College Transition Experience)**	**Departure (Exiting Transition Experience)**
Approaching Transition Themes (4S)	*Sub-Themes*	*Sub-Themes*	*Sub-Themes*
Supports	Personal -Friends -Family Community -Disability Vocational Rehabilitation -Therapist	Personal -Friends -Family Community -Disability Vocational Rehabilitation -Therapist Institutional -Academic Accommodations -Tutoring Services -Faculty -Support Programs that offered wraparound services -Student Employment	Personal -Friends -Family Community -Disability Vocational Rehabilitation -Therapist Institutional -Academic Accommodations -Tutoring Services -Faculty -Support Programs that offered wraparound services -Student Employment

Table 6. 4-S Support

Strategies. Strategies pertains to approaches that an individual can utilize when coping with a situation. For this subtheme, statements that the participants made during their interviews related to the strategies utilized by the individuals that supported their transition stages were included here. The use of self-determination was also included throughout their entire journey.

Transition Phases	Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience)	Venture (College Transition Experience)	Departure (Exiting Transition Experience)
Approaching Transition Themes (4S)	*Sub-Themes*	*Sub-Themes*	*Sub-Themes*
Strategies	Pre-College Event -Campus Visit -Experience Week -Summer Bridge Self-Determination Skills	On Campus Programs and Organizations Academic Accommodations Use of Faculty -Office Hours -Tutoring Workshops -Academic -Soft Skills Self Determination Skills	On Campus Programs and Organizations Academic Accommodations Use of Faculty -Office Hours -Tutoring Workshops -Academic -Soft Skills Self Determination Skills

Table 7. 4-S Strategies

Four Essential Themes

Although each of the participant's narrative is unique to their own lived experience, and analysis of the data when considered altogether revealed the following themes throughout the structure of their transition experience. Within the three significant phases of transition, a synthesis of the participant's lived experience of transition from secondary to postsecondary education resulted in four essential themes. These four themes are:

1. Interaction with peers and teachers/educators can hinder or aid one's self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition.

2. Secondary teacher/educator attitudes, knowledge and abilities about Individual Transition Planning can affect student outcomes.

3. Support teams matter.

4. Academic and self-determination skills are essential to learning at the high school level.

Interaction with peers and teachers/educators can hinder or aid one's self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition

At some point in the participant's secondary education experience, interaction with their teachers/educators and peers contributed to their self-confidence level and the way they perceived themselves. Specifics in their narratives revealed that their negative perceptions of their abilities stemmed from their negative experiences at the secondary level as an individual with a learning disability. As noted in Erin's narrative, she felt her having a learning disability was an annoyance to her teachers, stating "Teachers would push me aside because it took too long to explain things." The experiences caused Erin to feel lonely: "I was isolated. So, it bothered me." Julie noted, "I would go to school tardy, so the high school kids wouldn't see me going to that class. Or I would just not attend at all. I mean people would tease how stupid you are because you go to special classes." Benjamin mentioned that he noticed his teacher's attitude rubbed off on to his peers to the point even his peers would tease him and talk to him in an infantile way. An example of an extreme interaction was noted in Cody's narrative:

So, this teacher, I forget if she spanked me or just put me in time out, but anyway I

remember her pulling me by the ear because my mom came to the principal's office. And

I remember the teacher pulling my ear all the way there and she was just yelling at my

mom saying, "Your son's gonna be a drug addict. He's gonna be on the side of the road.

He's never gonna accomplish anything if you don't discipline him more!' and stuff like

that and I just remember my mom getting really upset.

Benjamin's narrative echoed the same sharing and experience when his teachers told his

mom, "Your son will end up in jail." Benjamin went on to share how that experience affected

him thereafter, stating, "So, in essence, learning disabilities back in the day, was sometimes a

marking for you to be in jail. That's how I took it, my perception."

Additionally, each of the participants placed a value of not wanting to be different and

wanting to be "normal." Although the definition of "normal" varied for all, the basis of normal

for all participants came up in every single one of their narratives. As Julie stated in her

narrative, "I wanted to be like a normal student. I wanted to make sure that I would be able to

understand what they were teaching me." Similarly, Benjamin stated, "I was able to mask my

disability by initiating study groups." so that he could learn and digest the course work without

exposing his learning disability to his peers, thus, making him feel like a "normal" individual.

Erin's definition of normal focused on her social circle, sharing that confided in her mother how

she felt about being different from her peers, and how it affected her, "No one liked me or

wanted me around because I was so different." Cody echoed the same feeling of insolation

stating, "I became super quiet, and I don't want to say that I didn't want to hang out with other

people. I just more kept to myself."

Students' negative perceptions of themselves continued throughout their secondary

education, and for the most part, the thought about attending college or attaining a college degree

was a farfetched dream. Expressing their difficulties academically at the secondary level, being

enrolled in special classes, and taking longer than the norm to comprehend or complete class assignments. Their adverse experiences in turn affected the way they perceived themselves, with constant thoughts of being ashamed of their disability, not being smart enough, or confident enough, even for college as Benjamin's narrative stated, when he conversed with his college counselor that he wanted to attend a specific college and upon submitting his college essay to the college counselor to review, the response he received was not constructive. Instead, the college counselor told him, "Do you think this will get you there? I don't think you can get there." Cody echoed the same statement, that his uncertainty regarding his postsecondary plans stemmed from hearing his teachers over the years, telling him that he was incapable of succeeding, stating, "[t]here are so many people in high school telling me I can't really do anything." Similarly, Erin noted that she did not even think of college was an option for her until her transition counselor brought it up. Stating that the thought of college made her feel a "little bit nervous," because "I never even thought of going to college because I was like, after high school, that's it." Additionally, Julie's narrative suggested that because she was placed in Special Motivation classes and did not graduate on time with her graduating class, played a role in maybe why she just found employment after high school.

Per the participant's narratives, two of the participants (Erin and Benjamin) enrolled in college right after high school. The other two (Cody and Julie) did not enroll in college until being out of the academic pathway for quite a number of years and entered MCC as non-traditional students. In some way or form, the participants expressed that making the transition into college was scary and unsettling. Julie even stated, "I was fricken scared shitless!" Benjamin said, "I was scared. I was nervous." There were moments of self-doubt, feeling not good enough, that he did not belong in college, and even asked himself, "What the hell am I

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doing here?" Similarly, Cody said, "The whole process to become a freshman in college that was a very scary and a lot of anxiety. It was a pretty intense experience." Erin echoed the same "I was happy to be at college, but I was a little bit nervous being at college my first semester."

As you can see it is safe to infer that negative interaction with their peers and teachers/educators at their secondary education level hindered their self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition.

At the postsecondary level, all of the participants for the majority of their career expressed having positive interaction and helpful instructors. These positive interactions, in turn, left positive impressions on the students and affected their self-esteem in a positive way, although, at times, some of them doubted their abilities. They persevered through tough situations with the help of having positive educators supporting their endeavors. For example, Benjamin shared how his math teacher would meet with him during her office hours and after class to tutor him, how all of the participants acknowledge the wraparound services, and program individuals as being positive mentors to them. How their peers and teachers/educators approachability made it easier for them to ask for help, and the comfortability to openly share and express themselves, and ask for help, without anyone passing judgment on them.

Benjamin shared, "I had a good math teacher here. I had two of them, actually, more than one good math teacher." Benjamin recognized that unlike the primary and secondary math teachers he had experienced, his college math instructors never spoke down to anyone. Benjamin shared that when he vocalized his difficulties with math to his instructors, the teachers took the time to schedule one on one tutoring appointments after class and during her office hours. He remembers, "The math teachers that actually sat down, helped me outside, told me when to come. These teachers are just amazing." Although he did not pass the math course on

his first attempt, Benjamin did not become discouraged. Instead, he contributes this positive

mindset because of the way the instructor treated him – like he mattered.

It is evident from their narrative that the positive interaction with their peers and

teachers/educators at the postsecondary education played an important role in their increased

self-confidence and perception of themselves.

Secondary teacher/educator attitudes, knowledge, and abilities about Individual

Transition Planning can affect student transition outcomes. Teachers/educators play a

critical role when it comes to the transition success of an individual. Based on the literature,

students with LD will be more successful in terms of transition, persistence, retention, and

graduation in their secondary to postsecondary experience when they are: (a) actively involved in

their IEP meetings; (b) knowledgeable about their disability; (c) knowledgeable about the

differences in disability laws; (d) taught and given the ability to actively practice self-

determination skills (goal setting, decision, choice, self-advocacy); and (e) aware of the services

and supports they are available/entitled to (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010;

Connor, 2012; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Kurth & Mellard; Marshak et al., 2010; Skinner, 2004;

Trainor, 2005; Trainor, 2007; Wehmeyer, 2001; Wehmeyer, 2004; Williams-Diehm and Lynch,

2007). However, out of the four participants in this study, only Erin's transition planning

experience, fit this description. She shared, "I remember being involved, speaking up on what I

wanted." Erin also shared that being involved and vocalizing her wants was due to having a

supportive IEP team who she mentioned did an excellent job in preparing her for life outside of

high school by composing a step by step transition plan that included her transition team

educating her and her mom about the differences in services. For example, moving from Free

Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to being qualified for Section 504: "We talked about those

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differences of free services to college accommodation." Additionally, the plan also included

learning about the various services available in the community. Erin said, the step by step plan

"was helpful because I could have a hard copy of whatever they talk about, whatever we planned

out."

Moreover, the literature suggested, better education and training for teachers on the topic

of transition was in dire need of improvements (providing teachers with education and training

on the transition process; have administration allow teachers more time to work with students

and families with their transition planning) (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010;

Trainor, 2005). This need is evident in the other three participants narratives. Benjamin stated

that although he was aware of an IEP and was able to voice his wants and needs, "All I

remember about IEP meetings was, 'Hey, everybody, let's sit down. He's doing okay. He's

doing great. He's going to pass. Thank you.' I don't recall ever a time when anybody looked at

me and said, 'You're going to go to college,' never." Similarly, Cody said, the IEP "[w]as a

waste of my time." When I asked him to expand on why he felt that way, Cody stated, "Because

it felt like the team really didn't care…They asked the same questions every single time." Thus,

he felt the process was merely monotonous saying, "I pretty much just wrote down whatever and

they pretty much were like, 'Oh, okay you're good.'" Additionally, when I asked Julie if she

recalled her IEP team discussing any plans regarding going to college, she said, "Oh no, no.

Nothing to like that happened. Just goals and sign here, and that was it." Those responses alone

reinforced for Julie that the school, her special education teachers, and her IEP team did not

really care as she had very minimal understanding of an IEP or transition plan.

To make the transition more seamless, the participants' experiences clearly suggest that

perhaps more productive and meaningful opportunities to learn and be involved with their IEP

and ITP before leaving secondary education would address these challenges. As evidenced in this study, by allowing opportunities for students to develop and actively practice their self-determination skills (e.g., goal setting, decision, choice, self-advocacy) prior to entering their first semester of college, they may be less hesitant when seeking out support and services. Additionally, from what the participants shared about their IEP experiences validates and stresses the urgent need for administrators at the secondary education level to support education and training for teachers on transition for students particularly with LD. Furthermore, to ensure that the special education policies in secondary education are implemented to the extent necessary, administrator should monitor and provide accountability to whether these expectations have been implemented.

Support teams matter

As Schlossberg (2011) stated, individuals transitioning to higher education are significantly impacted by the transition in many aspects as they manage new environments, experiences, relationships, routines, learning, and responsibilities. The inclusion of formal and informal supports is essential to transition planning as they can assist in student's achieving desired outcomes. Informal supports are individuals who are part of the family's social network. These supports could include relatives, neighbors, or friends. Formal supports are individuals from community organizations or agencies that provide support or service to the family. These could include service providers, case managers, or physicians (Wehman, 2013). Moreover, a synthesis of the literature revealed that students with LD are leaving or being "pushed out" by institutions due to lack of support (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Prior to college, the participant's narratives suggested that their primary sources of support were made up of personal and community programs and individuals. All four of the

participants mentioned that their personal support consisted of their family and friends. Two out of the four participants mentioned that their community support consisted of the DVR program, while one of the participants mentioned her therapist as her community support. For all of the participants, both personal and community supports were consistent supports through all three main stages of their college transition, Pre-Flight, Venture, and Departure.

As the participants transitioned into their first semester of college, they realized that they needed help. Academically they realized that the rigor and pace of the course were much faster than they expected. Benjamin expressed how his first day of classes overwhelmed him, how he began to feel that finishing college was going to be an impossible task stating, "There's no way I can do this. There's no way. I should just walk out of this school now, and just go pick up any job and stick with it." Similarly, Erin said, "It made me feel a little bit nervous, a little bit sad because I didn't know if I could keep up with the college pace and the classes." Julie said, "I was the oldest, or at least I thought I was, in the lowest English and math class. I felt like I had to learn English and math all over again. I had a hard time retaining and comprehending." Additionally, Cody said, "There's still always that voice in the back of my head saying, 'Oh this going to be like high school.'" Thus, a new type of support was identified, institutional support.

Erin stated that for her to succeed in college, she needed to create a support team at MCC, stating, "If I want to do well in college, I need to take responsibility. I need to go and either ask for help or talk to my teacher." Cody's institutional support team began with attaining academic accommodations through MCC's Student Development Services Office (SDSO), stating that, "The services that they provided were definitely helpful. Like the notetaking, if I needed to borrow a recorder, anything like that to help me in college they provided and definitely were helpful." Benjamin further expressed that his experience with the SDSO and interaction

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with the director was positive: "I would say he went above and beyond to help me." He went on to expand his support team by seeking out assistance from the TLC program stating, "Transition to TLC that was a critical moment because TLC provided the in-school help that I needed." Whenever he needed to print out homework, use the computer, get personal academic and financial aid advising, tutoring, or coaching, it was the TLC program that was there to support him:

> I needed somebody on this campus with me because when I exited that class, I came straight to TLC. That's where I felt a little more comfortable because of the people and you knowing me talking to me. I was nervous, I was scared, but outside of that it's very hard to explain, but there was some comfort in that TLC classroom.

Similarly, Julie stated, "All I know was this is amazing. There is [sic] people out there who is genuinely there for you." By the end of Julie's second semester, she had formed herself a support team:

> I was hooked up with and utilizing the TLC program and Student Disabilities Services Office and a First-Year [Experience] Counselor. It was an amazing feeling. I was actually gaining self-confidence, and I was going to finish something that I started.

Furthermore, Cody echoed what Julie and Benjamin said about the TLC program, stating the TLC program "provided a good support and a sense of well-being." That it was also a "friendly work environment, very open-minded, like, if I made a mistake, it's okay, just try to learn from it kind of thing. Which I appreciated."

An article by Case (2011) suggested that participation in clubs and organizations is one form of involvement associated with an array of learning and developmental gains. This statement is validated by Erin, who mentioned that critical to her success was maximizing all of

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MCC's campus programming and support, "There was at least one person on campus that I could connect to. They wouldn't push me away." Erin also experienced support programs saying, "I can walk you there, or I can give you the number or the website." Cody mentioned that he took part in various campus-sponsored service-learning projects stating,

> Going out and doing community services. Just helping out somebody whoever needs help, like, I enjoy doing. It makes me feel really good. Like a sense of pride kind of thing, restoring the land and all that kinds of stuff.

Once their on-campus support system was in place, they began to feel connected to the institution and experienced and some sense of belonging. Relieving some of their initial anxieties about college and being in a college environment. Overall, the participants mentioned a plethora of campus supports, programs, organizations, and individuals that made up their institutional support teams. Consistently mentioning the Student Disabilities Services Office which provided academic accommodations and individualized counseling, the TLC and Hawaiian Career Technical Education Program which provided wraparound services such as tutoring, coaching, individualized counseling and advising to name a few, and individual Faculty who provided on going in and out of class support.

Having their institutional support team in place and having had positive interaction with peers, teachers/educators, this experience cycles back to how their interaction with peers and teachers/educators can either hinder or aid one's self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition. The more connected they became to campus, the more willing they were to seek out support when needed. As the participants transitioned from one semester to the next, their overall self-esteem and confidence began to grow. For the most part, the participant's college experience became more positive as they experienced positive interaction with both individuals

(faculty, staff, tutors, mentors) and support programs. As Erin validated saying, "After that first semester and then going on to the second semester, I felt much better because I had more control of now knowing where to go, who to ask for help."

When they face new situations and or challenges, their ability to transition, cope with, and venture through change successfully was dependent on their amount of assets. Assets include their support team. All participants mentioned that during the three critical stages of transition (i.e., Pre-Flight, Venture, and Departure), that Personal (e.g., friends and family) and Community (e.g., DVR, therapists) were their main constant supports off-campus. Beginning of the Venture stage, all of the participants acknowledged that Institutional (e.g., academic accommodations, tutoring services, faculty, support programs that offered wraparound services, employment) were their supports on campus. Which also carried through to the transition stage of Departure.

Although still a bit hesitant in their belief to be successful, with the continued support of their network of supports both on and off-campus, they were able to persevere towards attaining their educational goals. However, in order for these participants to seek out support, they needed to skills required to advocate for them. This leads us to the next theme.

Academic and self-determination skills are essential to learning at the high school level.

As students transition into and through college, they must possess the skills to critically think/problem solve, set goals, self-manage, and be knowledgeable about themselves. Although the overall, research related to transition planning revealed the importance for students with LD to be equipped with and given the ability to practice self-determination at the secondary level as it enhances post-school outcomes (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Trainor, 2005). All of the participants expressed that as they transitioned into college that were not

equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate their academic journey. Skills that all of the participants believed were critical for functioning in an educational environment in which they had to cope and adjust to — stating skills such as time management, effective note-taking skills, mindset, social skills, communication skills, advocacy skills, and organization skills, and self-determination to name a few.

As the participants faced difficult situations, they had the choice to either give up or persevere forward. Fortunately, they decided to seek out and create a support team of their own institutional support team. A task that the participants felt they lacked the skills to do. For example, Erin said she found it problematic to advocate for herself given her lack of social skills, "I didn't have the social skills to talk to people. Even if I knew that I could reach out to those services, I didn't. How do I say it that I need help? What are those skills to talk to people?" Benjamin shared his hesitancy and embarrassment of getting support from the TLC program because of its label stating,

> [a]s far as being you're the first college student in your family, or, I guess, it's low income. I didn't want people to think I was poor because I already had a learning disability. You're going to put me more and more in a hole of people looking at me in a negative light.

Julie echoes similar hesitancy is asking for support stating,

> Being raised the way I was, I was always taught that you do not ask for anything. When my therapist suggested to ask about accommodations through Student Disabilities Services Office, it brought up feelings again like I was in high school. Here we go again the stupid girl, can't understand, can't retain what you're being taught. That feeling sucked balls. Honestly, it kind of put me through a depression again.

In the end, the participants were are able to create their team of institutional support. This was a prime example of how they were able to think critically and, in turn, gain a new understanding and strategy of how to deal with the new situation and/or environment.

Through forming their institutional support team, they gained the skills needed to be successful. Erin stated that through attending a plethora of workshops hosted by her support programs, helped her on her academic journey. She says, "Finding out how to study, finding different ways to study. That was helpful for me." Erin also shared, how learning about her learning style helped her in the way she studied by stating, "I found out, oh, there's many different ways you can study depending on the way that you learn best." Lastly, but equally as important, through these support programs, Erin was able to create friendships with other program participants and form relationships with her peer coaches. Peer coaches are individuals whom she said helped her to hone her social skills, stating:

> I was being more comfortable with communicating and working on my social skills, so that was helpful because I always wanted to be able to talk to people. So, it helped me practice on this is how to communicate with people. I guess it just got me more comfortable with reaching out to people and not being afraid to talk to people.

Cody said that he utilized many of the tools he learned through his involvement with the support programs, which helped get him through college. Mentioning time management, making SMART goals (i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), and learning to pace himself. Additionally, Cody said through the recommendation of an English professor who suggested he read the book *Mindset* by Carol Dweck, "help[ed] into keeping an open mind [sic]."

Benjamin shared that enrolling in the College Experience course through the TLC program was also helpful, saying what he learned "is a strategy I'm using [now] as far as time management and organizing." Julie echoed what the three other participants shared that through their College Success course, she learned about many cognitive and non-cognitive lessons. Lesson such as mindset, time management, note-taking, self-advocacy, goal setting, and test-taking skills, to name a few. With an emphasis on mindset, she said, "[T]his is where I changed my mindset from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset." With these skills, they were are able to continue advocating for themselves, turn to family, friends, teachers, coaches, etc. for support. Additionally, they now held the knowledge and skills to critically ask the right questions so that they cope with transition better.

As the participants transitioned into and through college, each of the participants shared that although the transition experience was challenging, it was also life-changing. Life-changing in a good way as they expressed having to face the transition difficulties that challenged them. Subsequently, facing, coping, and moving through the transitions ultimately led to the participant's overall personal growth, self-improvement, and development.

Erin shared that her beliefs about herself took a 180-degree turn compared to her first semester of college. She was no longer the shy, lost, less confident individual. She was now happy, confident, and excited. With a massive smile on her face, Erin said that when she told her mom that she earned her certificate, her mom replied with, 'I knew that you could do it, but do you remember you told yourself you couldn't do it?' I was just reflecting, and I was like, 'Yeah, that was me a while ago.' I couldn't believe it. I was just so happy."

Benjamin expressed how his mindset about himself has developed significantly. He does not see himself in the same light as he did when he was in elementary school or high school.

Every time Benjamin passed a test, quiz, or course, he felt stronger and smarter. Benjamin recognized how his writing and communication skills had improved, stating, "I grew as an individual. I grew to be a better person." Additionally, Benjamin felt that his college experience made him a teacher in life:

> What I've learned I can share with others. If you can't understand what I told you, then I haven't done my part because I feel like in life we have to grow. We all have to grow. I grew as an individual. I grew to be a better person. I'm able to hold conversations."

As Cody stated, he feels he owes much of his development to his college experience:

> I used to think very negatively about myself. But because of being in college, actually doing something, coming to school, going to work, definitely has [given me] a good sense of well-being. Emotionally, I can take a lot [more].

Julie acknowledging that her ability to accept and work through change had also developed:

> I had control of the way I thought and felt, such as when I didn't do good on a test. I use [sic] always to tell myself that I was stupid, now I can self-talk and ask myself what is it that I have to do and who can I see to get help or support from. I realized that I had no control over anyone but myself. I had no control over how people thought of me and my disability. Whatever, that's the past.

Self-Determination

As Wehmeyer (2004) stated, self-determination consists of a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enables individuals to engage in goal-oriented activities, self-regulate, and take charge of one's life. The purpose for utilizing Wehmeyer's definition of self-determination was to find out to what extent it played a role in the participants success (preparatory, at what level/stages of transition, persistence, and success). Results and findings

from this study validated that self-determination skills indeed plays a role in the participants

success at all levels and stages of transition, persistence and success.

Participants realized that as they faced adversity, they needed to make the decision to

either drop out or persevere on. They needed to decide whether or not to create their campus

support team but inquiring and or advocating for services. When planning out their academic

journey, the participants realized that they needed to employ their self-determination skills. For

example, making decisions on what courses they needed to register for, which instructors to take

it from, and what time of the day worked best for them. Furthermore, unlike their non-disabled

peers, the participants needed to take the time to meet with MCC's Student Disability Services

Office to ensure that their academic accommodation were in place every semester. Thus,

concluding that self-determination skills are extremely important skills that should be learned at

the secondary level so that they are able to take care of their own lives and be accountable for

their outcomes. Skills that can easily be implemented at the secondary level, however were

learned at the postsecondary level through MCC's support programs they were actively involved

in, workshops the institution officered, and peers that they interacted with.

As stated in Chapter Two, when students with LD transition into college, it is essential

that they possess the skills to critically think/problem solve, set goals, self-manage, and be

knowledgeable about themselves (Wehmeyer, 2004). It is important to understand the college

experience of students with LD and to explore the meaning students make of their college

experience. Upon hearing, reading, and combing through the participant's data, the participants

utilized many different strategies to navigate their transition. Although each experience was

unique to each participant, the strategies and supports utilized clearly were the foundation for

their academic success in all stages of their transition.

Transcriptions clearly show that all the participants experienced essential self-determination skills such as the ability to critically think and problem solve, set goals, self-manage, self-advocate, knowledge about self, and knowledge about their disability. Additionally, each participant interviewed had the ability to self-govern, were their own decision-makers, and took responsibility for their own successes. As a couple of the participants stated, although they felt that they were not equipped with the skills to self-advocate when they first transitioned into college, they knew they had to take the initiative to learn the skills in order to seek out the support and services they needed to be successful. Even though all four of the participants had self-doubts about being successful in college, they knew that they had to manage their emotions, thoughts, mindset, and deal with the situation by implementing coping strategies to get through whatever transition stages they were experiencing.

Individuals' transcripts also revealed the necessity to cope with various transition situations. Thus, participants demonstrated immense strengths in moving through these transitions. What supports did they have in place in order to get cope and move through the situation? All four of the participants' experiences revealed that as they made the transition into college, their assets or support team was primarily limited to family members, friends, and/or community support programs.

As they experienced transition, the participants expanded their strengths by self-advocating, identifying their needs, and actively seeking out services benefitting them during their academic journey. These skills included finding support programs, student organizations, advisors, academic accommodations, peer support, instructors, mentors, and coaches, to name a few. Additionally, they further built upon these skills by also attending workshops on, for

example, building study strategies, affective skills, test taking, and time management provided by the institution.

Most importantly, in some form or another, each participant expressed how internal motivation played a role in their success - motivation in proving others wrong who passed judgment on their ability to be successful in college and in life. Shutting down the statements made by their peers and individuals who were supposed to be nurturing educators that said they would amount to nothing. But, more importantly, proving to themselves that they did belong in college and were capable of attaining their educational goals. Through persistence and motivation, as well as equipping themselves with the knowledge and skills to change their mindset with the belief that they mattered.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to investigate the lived experience of the students with LD who successfully made the transition from secondary education to postsecondary education and graduated with either a certificate of completion or an associate's degree from MCC. Through the data analysis process, significant transition stages were identified Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience), Venture (College Transition Experience and Departure (Exiting Transition Experience. Additionally, the participants narratives also revealed five essential themes:

1. Interaction with peers and teachers/educators can hinder or aid one's self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition.

2. Secondary teacher/educator attitudes, knowledge and abilities about Individual Transition Planning can affect student outcomes.

3. Support teams matter. and

4. Academic and self-determination skills are essential to learning at the high school level.

The transition process is critical to assuring the success of students (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). The purpose of transition planning at the secondary level is to provide the individual with a pathway to follow as they matriculate through high school and transition to postsecondary education. According to IDEA (U.S Department of Education (2018), students are to be invited to their IEP. Additionally, much of the literature states that for students with LD to transition successfully into postsecondary education, they must be involved in their IEP and the transition planning and decision-making process (active participation, meaningful participation, self-determination, self-advocacy, goal setting). However, of the four participants, only one mentioned that she was meaningfully involved with her ITP. Results from a study by Trainor (2005) concluded that students with LD are not meaningfully involved in this process. This conclusion was validated in the participants narrative for this study where three out of the four participants experienced not having meaningful involvement with their IEPs or ITPs.

Although researchers and policymakers for decades have recognized that self-determination is an educational practice that promotes positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001). Students are typically not prepared to self-advocate once they leave the realms of high school (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). All fours participants in this study reported that they lacked the skills and were not taught about them in secondary education. If this was the case decades ago, the question is why were these lessons not being implemented at the secondary level? The participants' narrative infer that the secondary education system failed them by not providing them the opportunity to learn self-determination skills and to be actively involved with their IEP and ITP planning process.

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Fortunately for these four participants, these skills were things that all four participants learn to do through internal motivation and self-determination at MCC. Having the choice to either give up when they were faced with a challenge or barrier or self-advocate for services, support and help from the various programs MCC offered. Providing the opportunity to build these types of skills from the secondary level could prove to be very helpful when transitioning to college so students are unafraid and empowered to ask for help early on.

As students transition into college, they must possess the skills to critically think/problem solve, set goals, self-manage, and be knowledgeable about themselves. Troiano (2003) reported that the responsibility for student success is not only in the hands of the students themselves but also in the hands of postsecondary educational institutions. The positive interactions and experience at MCC could be due to the culture of the campus taking responsibility in offering an array of workshops. As the participants experienced learning skills such as time management, goal setting, SMART goals, mindset, self-advocacy.

What makes MCC unique is that the support programs are actively putting their programs out there and making themselves available to students. MCC's support programs are intrusively letting student know that they are there for the students and want to help them succeed by being part of their academic journey. MCC offers programming such as college experience, summer bridge and introduction to college courses that they encourage students to take advantage of. For example Cody said that he was able to meet people, learn about support services, academic accommodations, and speak with a teacher prior to his first semester of classes. That experience in itself, calmed much of his anxieties about college. Julie participated in a TLC summer bridge and enrolled in the introduction to college course where she was able to learn many academic and study skills.

MCC is practicing intrusive but meaningful and wholistic counseling, an approach the secondary education arena should consider. Specifically, MCC puts themselves out there letting students know that they are there outside of class hours if they need help, making themselves approachable, not talk down to them. Give them a sense of belonging on campus, that they matter as an individual, and not just another student number.

In all, students with LD experience significant transitions during their secondary to postsecondary process, and an array of variables exits both at the secondary and postsecondary arenas that can cause great confusion for the LD population. The results of this research offered insights into how students with LD can be better retained with the likely hood of them persisting towards graduation in more significant numbers. Additionally, how students can benefit from a smoother transition through intentional programming, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and tools both at the secondary and postsecondary education arenas. All which will be presented in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this research was to explore the entire transition experience of students with a learning disability from their first semester through graduation from an assets-based perspective. I believed that finding out why and how they were successful and what made them successful will support institutions to be more responsive and flexible to the needs of LD students. Additionally, I anticipated that Schlossberg's Transition Theory and SDT would allow me as well as other educators to understand better the various situations and circumstances that impact LD students as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education and matriculate toward degree attainment.

Reviewing the literature also suggested that the gap of knowledge regarding how students cope with transition, and what situations precipitate difficulties required further researching. Therefore, expecting that the data obtained through this study will support institutions of learning to adjust and implement programming and or curriculum accordingly to better prepare and support LD student needs and equip them with the necessary tools to cope with the transition process. Additionally, constructively contribute to the development of higher education transition framework and pathways specific to students with LD for future researchers.

This research addressed questions relating to the successful transition of students with LD into higher education with findings that revealed that students with LD faced many challenges with transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education. Concurrently, they also experienced many positive aspects of transition that led to their overall academic success and individual development. This research also revealed significant transition stages where a synthesis of their lived experiences resulted in five essential themes.

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Participants in this study, although they faced many transition challenges, they all agreed that their transition experience was in all, a positive one. The narratives revealed that over the course of their academic journey, the participants had different perceptions of their situations, different support teams and implemented varying coping strategies, which resulted in their transition experience is unique to their own. Which resonated with Schlossberg's 4 S system and SDT.

Review of the Themes

Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience)

Under the umbrella of college preparation included subthemes pertaining to knowledge of disability and its impact, and IEP and transition planning, which included participants, knowledge and involvement, and college selection. The reason behind electing to include participant's knowledge of their disability as part of the pre-college phase is, as mentioned in Chapter Two, students with LD are said to be more successful in terms of transition, retention, and graduation in their secondary to postsecondary experience if they are knowledgeable about their disability.

Three out of the four participants were diagnosed and aware of having a learning disability while they were in elementary school. The fourth participant did not get diagnosed until she was well into her high school years. In regard to how their disability impacted them at the secondary level, all of the participant statements confirm that the effects were adverse. Stating that their disability made them feel isolated, withdrawn from their peers, and "stupid". One participant would actually be tardy or absent from school on purpose so that her peers would not see her going into her special classes.

All four participants were aware of what an IEP was. Unfortunately, they consistently did not have a complete understanding, knowledge, or significance of an IEP. One of the

participants, Benjamin, even stated, "IEP, is that like when you get together with the teachers?" With regard to the formulation of the participant's college transition plans, only one out of the four participants could conclusively state that they were actively involved in the planning process. When it came to thoughts about going to college, only one out of the three participants had intentions of going to college. The only participant that had plans of going to college was Benjamin, stating, "When I was in high school, I had a dream of going to a specific local private college."

Upon reading through their transcription responses, it is safe to conclude that their confidence levels were quite low. Additionally, all four participants had self-doubts about going to college, while two shared their fears of failing. Stating, "I'd say I didn't believe that I would actually go to college.", "There's still always that voice in the back of my head   this going to be like high school.", and "I had a belief that if I couldn't graduate high school, what would make me think that I would finish college."

Helping the participants copes with this phase of transition, the constant sub-themes for the four participants viewed into two capacities. They are personal and community. Personal supports included their family and friends with regards to their secondary to postsecondary support system, the contact of the fours participants were their parent, parents, friend's, or family members. Community supports included individuals or programs outside of the secondary education realm, which included the DVR program and a therapist.

Erin mentioned that her parents, IEP team, transition counselor, and DVR counselor supported her. Cody mentioned that his mother and his high school construction teacher were his two most significant supports. Benjamin mentioned that his mother, friends, older peers,

DVR counselor, and a high school secretary made up his support team. Julie mentioned that her mother and her therapist were her support.

To assist them through this phase of transition, strategies utilized focused on the individuals coping mechanisms, which took the form of pre-college events. Three out of the four participants took part in some form of pre-college event. One participant participated in a pre-college experience week program, one participant participated in summer bridge programs, and one participant mentioned going on a campus visit. All of which were positive to their pre-college transition experience. Erin shared how her IEP team made a transition plan for her where it included a visit to the campus. Cody mentioned being part of the college experience week was "definitely helpful" as he was able to get connected to various support programs and most importantly disability services office. Julie said, the participating in TLC Summer Bridge Program gave her the self-confidence she needed to change her fixed mindset.

Venture (College Transition Experience)

As the participants transitioned into their first semester of college, all four of the participants stressed that they were nervous, hesitant, had a fear of failing, or mixed emotions. As the participants experienced their first semester in college, three out of the four participants shared that their first semester in college was challenging. Three out of the four participants expressed self-doubts about being in college. Julie stated that her first semester of college was a challenge and that she had a hard time retaining and comprehending the course content. Erin stated, "I didn't know if I could keep up with the college pace and the classes". Similarly, Benjamin stated, "I went in there, and I sat in class. By the end of the class, I said, there's no way I can do this.". The only person who had a positive experience during his first semester in

college was Cody, stating "Entering college, yeah, actually. It was actually was not too bad. I was expecting it to be so horrible and frustrating, and it turns out it actually wasn't."

As the participants persisted from one semester to the next, three out of the four participants reported feeling more positive. Up to this point all four participants mentioned the same personal and community supports as their constant assets. However, in this phase of transition, a new theme for supports emerged, institutional. Institutional supports refer to the various student and academic supports they were involved in that they found was critical in supporting their overall success. Some of the programs and organizations mentioned were: SDSO, TLC program, Hawaiian Center, Tutoring Center, Writing Center, Math Tutoring, Student Life and Development, and the Honor Society. Despite all four of the participants doing very well academically with their new group of support in place, Benjamin's mindset and belief about himself and his abilities continued to be pessimistic. Sharing that his negative experiences were so deeply engraved that it stick with him.

To cope with the transition and change as they faced new situations, participants sought out support from various supports. The sub-themes are on-campus programs and organizations, academic accommodations, faculty, and workshops. These various supports on campus provided the participants a place to study, learn study and soft skills, someone to talk to, provide advising and guidance, learning resources, and opportunity to expand their social circle.

With regards to the participants understanding in differences between secondary education laws of IDEA and what happens in postsecondary education with qualifying for services through Section 504, only one of the participants was versed on them. Benjamin learned about Section 504 and academic accommodations through his DVR counselor, Julie was

educated about it through her therapist, and Cody was made aware of it through taking part in

MCC's College Experience program.

Erin and Benjamin were aware of SDSO and academic accommodations as they were

educated about this service by their DVR counselor. On the other hand, Cody was made aware

of the SDSO and their services only because he participated in MCC's experience week, while

Julie was made aware of it SDSO through her therapist. Participants expressed that the

utilization of academic accommodations played a role in their academic success. Another

strategy utilized for seeking assistance on course content and assignments was the utilization of

faculty and their office hours. Furthermore, another strategy all four participant spoke about

pertained to attending study and life skills workshops provided by the institution.

As previously mentioned, change is inevitable. As the participants experience transition,

elements of their feelings and emotions transformed and developed. They are presented under

the following sub-themes: academically, socially, psychologically. In all, the four participants

shared how they have grown for the better from the first time they transitioned into college, and

as they matriculated through their academic journey.

Departure (Exiting Transition Experience)

All four participants who took part in this study, all graduated from MCC. Erin

graduated with her Certificate of Achievement in Early Childhood Education four years after

entering MCC and is working on attaining her Associates in Early Childhood Education. Cody

graduated with his Certificate of Achievement in Welding two years after entering MCC and is

currently working on attaining his associate's degree in Welding. Benjamin graduated with his

associate's degree in Liberal Arts two years after entering MCC and then transferred to a four-

year college where he went on to complete his Baccalaureate degree and Master's Degree. Julie

graduated with her associate's degree in Liberal Arts three years after entering MCC and has

since transferred to a four-year college where she is in the process of finishing up her

Baccalaureate degree in Human Development and Family Resources.

Three out of the four participants felt a sense of accomplishment, expressing their

happiness and excitement. Again, despite doing very well academically, Benjamin remained

hard on himself. As mentioned in both the *Pre-Flight* and *Venture* stages, personal and

community were consistently given supports. The institutional supports were also consistent

contributors to supporting the participant's overall academic success. All four individuals who

took part in this study graduated in good academic standings, had earned their rightful place on

the academic Dean's List, were inducted into MCC's Honor Society, and graduated with honors.

<p align="center">**Essence of the Experience**</p>

All students transition into college with a number of challenges, including students with

LD. Given all that has been discovered through this study, *the essence is students with LD*

experience is different and unique from the general population. In addition to the factors that all

students face when transitioning into and through college, for students with LD to be successful,

they also have to be knowledgeable about their disability. This is important as they their

disability distinctly plays a role in how it affects their learning. Unlike their non-disabled peers,

students with LD need to be educated and versed about the differences in disability laws. For

example, moving from an environment that where IDEA laws are mandated at the secondary

education level, to an environment where they individual is no longer covered under IDEA, but

instead needs to qualify for services under Section 504. Additionally, providing the appropriate

documentation of their disability to qualify for accommodations at the postsecondary education

level. Unlike their non-disabled peers, students with LD have to deal with faculty and staff who

<p align="center">180</p>

are unfamiliar with the academic accommodation process, and ensure that their accommodations are in place every semester.

Limitations

Due to this research being broadly explored, it did not take into consideration the full scope of their demographics, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, race, or gender identity of the participants. My decision to only research individuals who met the participant criteria resulted in a limited me to the number of individuals that responded to my research inquiring. And although five participants had initially agreed to take part in this research, only four met the participant criteria guidelines. Additionally, I acknowledge that perhaps insight of participant experience from other public two-year colleges may have been gained by expanding my participant criteria. However, I wanted to keep this research close to home, an environment that I am familiar with, and see how positive changes and programming to better support students with LD at the home front before extending the exploration beyond MCC.

Implications and Recommendations

This research explored the secondary to postsecondary education transition experience of students with LD. As discussed in Chapter One and the review of literature in Chapter Two, there are existing gaps in the literature in relation to students with LD and their secondary to postsecondary education experience from a holistic point of view. And although this research is only a small piece in decreasing the gap, it is my hope that it does shed some light on increasing the postsecondary education success rates of students with LD.

Although there is federal legislation regarding students with learning disabilities and transition in place, students with LD are still entering and completing college at lower rates than their non-disabled peers. Additionally, as validated through the participant's narratives, students

with LD are still transitioning into and through college without the necessary skills needed to transition smoothly and navigate their academic journey.

Interaction with peers and teachers/educators. The participant's narratives revealed that negative interaction with peers and teachers/educators could hinder their self-confidence and ability to transition smoothly. Participants shared in great detail how their negative interactions became ingrained in their mindset, leading them to perceive that they were not capable of functioning at the postsecondary level. A negative mindset that carried over as thy transition in and through college.

Perhaps education on differences and equality (race, ethnicity, language, disability) and even mindset for students could be included at the secondary education level. Although it is mandated that students with disabilities be included in regular class settings and lessons, participants to a degree felt excluded from their peers. The participants shared how peer mentors at MCC contributed to their ability to socialize and acclimate to their environment. Perhaps peer mentoring could be practiced at the secondary education level where they are teamed up with upperclassmen where discussion and the opportunity to think, discuss and interact with a diverse group of individuals can assist with them confidently building their social skills.

Teacher/educator attitudes, knowledge, and abilities about Individual Transition Planning. Teachers/educators play a critical role when it comes to the transition success of an individual. Perhaps more productive and meaningful opportunities to learn and be involved before leaving secondary education would address these challenges.

As the literature suggested, better education and training for teachers on the topic of transition was in dire need of improvements (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Trainor, 2005) Additionally, much of the literature states that for students with LD to transition

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successfully into postsecondary education, they must be involved in their IEP and the transition

planning and decision-making process. The more the student is involved with their education

and the more they develop understanding and knowledge of who they are, how their disability

affects their learning and the more adept they become, which leads into the next section.

There should be more of an emphasis on teaching the students the importance of knowing

their disability and understanding how their disability affects their learning. Additionally, a

student should be versed that they do have a voice in their IEP and transition plans, and

teachers/educators should encourage this practice. It is understandable that special education

teachers have more paperwork to do and meeting to facilitate than non-special education

teachers. However, they are special education teachers for a reason; they chose to be in that

specific field of work. Thus, they should understand that practice and implementation of IEP's,

transition plans, the special education laws, as part of their due diligence in ensuring that the

student is supported.

Structurally, it is imperative to point out that administrators at the state and school levels

have a responsibility in ensuring that best practices are being employed in the classroom.

Additionally, ensuring that all federal mandates within the scope of special education (IEP, ITP,

FAPE, IDEA) are also being followed.

Ensuring that students who are preparing for transition should are being encourage to be

actively involved in the planning of their future. That they are being exposed to postsecondary

institutions through campus visits. Advising students about their postsecondary options, and

educating them on the difference between FAPE and Section 504. Participants mentioned DVR

being a huge support to their academic success, perhaps an emphasis on connecting them to the

various support programs in the community that can assist with their transition into postsecondary education.

Cognitive and affective skills. As students transition into and through college, they must possess the skills to critically think/problem solve, set goals, self-manage, and be knowledgeable about themselves. Although the overall, research related to transition planning revealed the importance for students with LD to be equipped with and given the ability to practice self-determination at the secondary level as it enhances post-school outcomes (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2001; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Trainor, 2005). All of the participants expressed that as they transitioned into college that were not equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate their academic journey. Skills that all of the participants believed were critical for functioning in an educational environment in which they had to cope and adjust to — stating skills such as time management, effective note-taking skills, mindset, social skills, communication skills, advocacy skills, and organization skills, and self-determination to name a few. These skills can be easily incorporated into everyday interaction and lessons. Through group projects, decision-making skills

Postsecondary education.

Summer bridge/transition programs/college success course. As the participants transitioned into and through college, they did so with fears and anxieties of the unknown and not knowing what to expect. For students with LD, literature in Chapter Two revealed that they enter college underprepared. Fortunately, three out of the four participants were able to take part in some sort of summer bridge or transition program that aided in their success.

Julie shared that she took a College Success course through the TLC's summer bridge program, and through that program, she learned about many cognitive and non-cognitive lessons.

Lesson such as mindset, time management, note-taking, self-advocacy, goal setting, and test-taking skills, to name a few. With an emphasis on mindset, she said, "[T]his is where I changed my mindset from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset." Mindset, a lesson Julie said she learned about via the TLC's summer bridge program on how one's intelligence, mind, and brain can be developed with effort and persistence. Although she enrolled in the bridge program a year after she entered college, Julie benefitted greatly from taking the course, and she started to see change within herself for the better, stating, "I was starting to trust and be [more] open." Similarly, Benjamin enrolled in the same College Success course offered by the TLC program, and through that program was able to gain the skills he needed to navigate his academic journey better.

Cody on the other hand participant in the MCC's College Experience Week program and it was through that program that he learned about academic accommodations, support services on campus and was able to talk one on one with instructors. Through this experience, Cody said that he was able to get himself connected to various support programs, get his academic accommodations in place, and interact with his classmates. Although Cody mentioned his anxieties and concerns about not being ready for college, he ended up doing better than he expected of himself because of his participation in College Experience Week. As Cody progressed through his first semester, he said, "I felt pretty confident in my first semester. I was getting good grades. I had a few friends in my classes."

Erin, although she did not take part in any bridge, transition, or college success course, she did say that if known about it, that she would have joined saying "[i]t would make me better prepared." When I had asked Erin to expand on what she meant by being "better prepared," she said, "I would have met people, have a familiar face, and know the supports."

The following recommendations were generated from these graduates' experiences in higher education. However, many of the strategies are already identified in the literature for both students with LD and best and promising practices for the general student population. However, it is important to reiterate these recommendations as they are integral to supporting the success for students with LD:

Recommendations for college-going students with LD.

1)   Connect to college support early;

3)   Be knowledgeable about your LD;

4)   Network with other LD students through, for example, support programs;

5)   Build cognitive and affective (including executive functioning) skills;

7)   Advocate for and attend campus visits (if applicable);

9)   Advocate for postsecondary support;

10)   Be knowledgeable about academic accommodations available in college; and

11)   Cultivate a strong support team inside and outside of higher education.

Recommendations for all educators.

1)   Learn about effective teaching/learning pedagogies for students with LD;

2)   Differentiate classroom setting and teaching to meet various learning styles or ensure multiple styles of teaching and learning are available in your classroom;

3)   Be compassionate;

4)   Be available outside of class time; and

5)   Be knowledgeable about academic accommodations and disability protocols

Recommendations for all campus and all administrators.

1)   Exercise inclusivity for students with LD;

2)   Be visible and available to students on campus;

3)   Get to know the experiences of your students with LD;

4)   Program on-campus opportunities for students with LD to connect with support

programs;

5)   Be knowledgeable about support programs on and off campus;

6)   Provide transition programs for students with LD; and

7)   Provide and attend training about disability laws as well as university policies and

processes for students with disabilities.

Recommended practices for all educators. In relation to FAPE (must be educated with

students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate) and improving the experience

and success for students with LD. All secondary education teaching faculty and staff should

implement the following:

1)   Provide education on differences and equality (e.g., race, ethnicity, language

disability);

2)   Provide opportunities to build students' self-determination skills and mindset;

3)   Offer peer mentoring and learning community opportunities;

4)   Provide skill building opportunities for academic work, executive thinking,

affective or "soft skills" strategies including advocating for services, setting postsecondary goals,

and building social support circules; and

5)   Provide productive and meaningful opportunities for students to practice self-

determination skills in everyday settings.

Recommendations for IEP and ITP planning in secondary school.

1)   Educate student about people with disabilities education rights including IEP and ITP process and FAPE vs. Section 504, for example;

2)   Encourage students to be actively involved in the planning processes;

3)   Expose students to postsecondary education options through, for example, campus visits with support programs and exploring academic options (e.g., majors, degrees); and

4)   Support students in developing circles of support on and off campus.

Recommendation for secondary education administrators.

1)   Periodic training opportunities for all teachers on IEP, ITP, and FAPE;

2)   Provide teachers with time to work with the student, family, and transition team;

3)   Be accountable and ensure that current evidence-based practices are being implemented;

4)   Be accountable and ensure that the IEP and ITP are being implemented in general education classroom; and

5)   Provide access to resources on the transition processes for students with LD from secondary to post-secondary education. For example, *A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities*

Conclusion

For this research four participants were interviewed to find out their lived experience to what made their secondary to postsecondary education transition experience a success from an assets-based perspective highlighting the achievements of students, and identifying the components impacting success, including those supports from the institution so that it can allow

education practitioners to identify and implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success for LD students.

Through the data analysis process, the participants narratives were dissected in-depth where three significant transition stages were identified Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience), Venture (College Transition Experience and Departure (Exiting Transition Experience. Additionally, the participants narratives also revealed five essential themes, 1) Interaction with peers and teachers/educators can hinder or aid one's self-confidence, self-perception, and ability to transition; 2) Secondary teacher/educator attitudes, knowledge and abilities about Individual Transition Planning can affect student outcomes; 3) Support teams matter; and 4) Academic and non-cognitive skills are essential to learning at the high school level.

Results of this research revealed that their support team, learning study, and non-cognitive skills, getting themselves connected to the campus services, programs, clubs and organizations, and positive interaction with their peers, faculty, and other professional support aided in them successfully navigating through transition and their academic journey.

From the results, it was recommended that positive interaction with peers and teachers/educators should occur at the secondary level as it does affect the way students perceive themselves, their self-esteem, and their ability to succeed. There should be more involvement and education about IEP and transition planning. Educating the student that they do have a voice in their planning and encourage active participation. Transition planning should include college campus visits and career exploration. Regarding student's disabilities, they should be versed in learning about their disability, how it can affect their learning, knowledge about the differences between FAPE and Section 504, and connecting them to supports in the community.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT INFORMATIONAL FLIER

I WANT TO KNOW YOUR STORY

A research study is being conducted to gather information to understand the transition experiences of college graduates with a learning disability by highlighting the achievements of students while also identifying approaches or practices facilitating student success. In essence, I hope my research will help to inform educational institutions and professionals about how to better serve students with learning disabilities.

Participants Criteria

- Participant will have graduated from a public high school in the state of Hawaiʻi.
- Participants will have received services and had an IEP in place.
- Participants will have proof of a learning disability as documented by Metro Community College's disability services office.
- Participants will have received academic accommodations from Metro Community College's disability services office.
- Participants will have earned a certificate of completion or an associate's degree from Metro Community College.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have questions regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me, Jolene Suda (researcher) directly jolenes@hawaii.edu. If you know someone who may also be interested in taking part in this study, please feel free to pass this information on to them.

Researcher: Jolene Suda, Ph.D Candidate
Research will be conducted under the direction of Dr. Erin Kahunawai Wright, PhD

APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT INFORMATIONAL EMAIL

Aloha,

My name is Jolene Suda and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa in Education Administration. As part of my dissertation study, I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in my research study that will be looking at the personal experiences of individuals with learning disabilities who successfully made the transition from high school to Metro Community College. As the researcher for this study, my rationale for focusing on the experiences of students who have successfully transitioned is to highlight the achievements of students while also identifying approaches or practices facilitating student success. In essence, I hope my research will help to inform educational institutions and professionals about how to better serve students with disabilities.

Participant Criteria:

- Participant will have graduated from a public high school in the state of Hawaiʻi.

- Participants will have received services and had an IEP in place.

- Participants will have proof of a learning disability as documented by Metro Community College's disability services office.

- Participants will have received academic accommodations from Metro Community College's disability services office.

- Participants will have earned a certificate of completion or an associate's degree from Metro Community College.

If you meet all of the participant criteria stated above and interested in taking part in this study, please email me (Jolene Suda) at jolenes@hawaii.edu with an available date and time to meet. At the time of meeting, I will discuss in depth the purpose of my research, the importance of your participation, answer any questions or concerns you have about the research, and you will fill out a participant selection survey. Furthermore, if you know someone who meets the participant criteria, and would be willing to take part in my research, please feel free to forward this email and/or share this information with them.

Mahalo for your kind consideration of my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

Jolene Suda
PhD Candidate
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Department of Education-Education Administration

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

University of Hawai'i
Consent to Participate in a Research Project
Jolene Suda, Student Investigator

Project title: The Secondary to Postsecondary Transition College Experience of Individuals with A Learning Disability.

Aloha! My name is Jolene Suda and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the Department of Education. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am doing a research project.

What am I being asked to do?
You are being asked to take part in a doctoral research being conducted by Jolene Suda. Please review this form carefully and express any questions or concerns you may have before deciding whether to participate in this study. If you participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview at a location and time convenient for you.

Taking part in this study is your choice.
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you. You will be allowed to decline answering any questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of my study is to learn about the personal experience of individuals with learning disabilities who have successfully made the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. By highlighting the achievements of students, finding out why they were successful, and what made them successful will allow education practitioners to identify and implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?
As a participant in this study, you will provide information to me about your personal high school to college transition experiences through interviews. The interview will be conducted to better understand what experiences lead individuals with learning disabilities be successful in postsecondary education (e.g., college, university, vocational school).

As a participant of this study, you agree to take part in a 60-75-minute audio-recorded interview consisting of open-ended questions related to your personal experiences and contributing factors that made you successful. At a mutually agreed upon date and time, the interview will take place at Metro Community College where I will ensure that the room in which the interview will be conducted is safe, well-lit and ventilated, quiet and free from any distractions so that the data may be captured clearly. Or the interview may take place at a venue of your choice that is also safe distraction-free and meets the above conditions. The decision for the location will be yours.

Only you and I will be present during the interview. To help with accuracy and with your permission, I will audio-record the interview with a digital audio recorder so that I can later

transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. During the interview, you may ask me to stop recording at any time should you feel uncomfortable or would like to share important information with me off the record. Following the interview, I will be transcribing the interview using Microsoft Word. Upon completion of your transcriptions, I will send you the completed transcript for your review via email. If needed, I can meet with you to review the transcript.

Any revisions or clarifications needed thereafter will occur within two weeks from when I receive your feedback. If you are interested in reviewing the final draft write-up, I can send you the draft for your review and feedback via email.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?
I believe there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating it this research beyond your experiences in your everyday life. However as stated in the "Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation" heading: "there is a slight possibility that your story could be recognized, and you could be identified by the reader" which may result in a loss of privacy.

To minimize any psychological risk, you will be allowed to decline answering any questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. In addition, if I as the researcher observe that the participant becomes distressed (anxious, in tears, upset) I will interrupt or stop the interview and allow the participant to decide if they want to withdraw from the question, study, or continue.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may allow education practitioners to identify and implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
I will conduct all interviews and complete all transcriptions. Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of name and will not use and other personal identifying information that can identify you unless they would like to be named in the study.

I will keep all study data secure in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office and a locked password protected computer that I (the researcher) will only have access to. Only my University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information.

The audio recordings of your interview will be destroyed upon submission for publication. You will be notified via email verifying when the destruction is complete.

Future Research Studies:
Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study collected for this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Questions:
If you have any questions or concerns about this study at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me (Jolene Suda) at (808.393.883 or jolenes@hawaii.edu). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Erin Kahunawaika`ala Wright, at (808.956.4116 or ewright@hawaii.edu). You may

contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date this signature page. For your records, you will be given a copy of this signed consent form.

Signature(s) for Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study.

I give permission to join the research project entitled, "*The Secondary to Postsecondary Transition College Experience of Individuals with A Learning Disability.*"
                                                                              "

Please initial next to either "Yes" or "No" to the following:
_____ Yes   _____ No   I consent to be audio-recorded for the interview portion of this research.

Name of Participant (Print):_____

Participant's Signature: _____

Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Mahalo!

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT SELECTION SURVEY

To help ensure consistency for my study, please answer each question to the best of your knowledge and ability by marking the answer that relates to you. All information will be kept private and confidential. Mahalo!

Personal Information

First and Last Name: _____

Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female   ☐ Other_____   ☐ Prefer to not disclose

Current age: _____

Are you diagnosed with a Learning Disability? (check one only)   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

School Information

Did you graduate from a public high school here in Hawai'i? (check one only)
☐ Yes   ☐ No

Did you graduate with one of the following: (check one onl)
☐ High School Diploma
☐ Certificate of Completion
☐ GED (General Education Development or General Education Diploma)

Did you receive IEP services in high school (check one only)?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Age when you entered Metro Community College: _____

Did you receive a certificate of completion from Metro Community College? (check one only)
☐ Yes   ☐ No
If yes, what major:_____

Did you receive a an associate's degree from Metro Community College? (check one only)
☐ Yes   ☐ No
If yes, what major: _____

Age when you graduated from Metro Community College: _____

Did you receive academic accommodations at Metro Community College? (check one only)
☐ Yes   ☐ No

Interview Information

Participants who are invited to be part of this research will take part in both an individually scheduled 30-45 phone session and a 60-75-minute research interview.

The 30-45-minute phone session will not be audio recorded. At the time of the scheduled phone session, I will be reviewing with you the Consent to Participate Form which will include the following: purpose of research, process of participation, confidentiality and voluntary participation, risks and benefits of participating, provide contact information, and answer any questions you may have about the research or myself at that time.

Please continue onto the back side

Are you willing and able to participate in an individually scheduled 30-45-minute phone session? (check one only)

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Phone Session Date and Time: Please select two and indicate 1st and 2nd choices

☐ Monday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Tuesday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Wednesday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Thursday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Friday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Saturday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Sunday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice

The 60-75-minute research interview will be audio-recorded, consisting of open-ended questions related to your personal experiences and contributing factors that made you successful. At a mutually agreed upon date and time, the interview will take Metro Community College where I will ensure a parking pass, that the room in which the interview will be conducted is safe, well-lit and ventilated, quiet and free from any distractions so that the data may be captured clearly. Or the interview may take place at a venue of your choice that is also safe distraction-free and meets the above conditions. The decision for the location will be yours.

Are you willing and able to participate in an individually scheduled 60-75-minute in person research interview? (check one only)

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Location of Interview (check one only)

☐ Metro Community College   **OR**   ☐ Your Choice of Location:_____
                                                          (state location)

Interview Date and Time: Please select two and indicate 1st and 2nd choices

☐ Monday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Tuesday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Wednesday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Thursday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Friday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Saturday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice
☐ Sunday   Time:_____   ☐ 1st Choice   ☐2nd Choice

I am interested in participating in this study and give Jolene Suda, consent to contact me directly via email and/or phone for interviews.

_____   _____
Prospective Participant's Signature   Date

Mahalo for completing this form. I will be in touch with you shortly. Should you have any questions for me, please contact me (Jolene Suda) at jolenes@hawaii.edu or 808-393-1883.

Running head: INDIVIDUALS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY

APPENDIX E: CONFIRMATION LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

Date

Dear (Participants First and Last Name)

Congratulations! Upon reviewing your completed *Participant Selection Survey,* you have met all of the criteria to be a participant of my research. As a higher education professional at Metro Community College (MCC), your participation can provide valuable insight that can be used to assist the college, educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders with information from your experience to develop program and policies that support the transition and success of other students with learning disabilities into higher education, particularly MCC.

Based on your *Participant Selection Survey*, your scheduled phone session will be conducted on (Date, Time). The scheduled research interview will be conducted on (Date, Time, Location). As a reminder:

- The 30-45-phone session will not be audio recorded. I will be reviewing with you the Consent to Participate Form which will include the following: purpose of research, process of participation, confidentiality and voluntary participation, risks and benefits of participating, provide contact information, and answer any questions you may have about the research or myself at that time.

- The 60-75-minute research interview will be audio-recorded, consisting of open-ended questions related to your personal experiences and contributing factors that made you successful.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and at any time, you may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent and terminate participation without any consequences. If you choose to participate, any questions you may have regarding this study will be answered as honestly and accurately as possible. Please be assured that your identity and responses will be treated confidentially, and the information obtained with be used for this study only. Upon completion of the study, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed information for accuracy if you desire.

As a reminder, I will email and call you two days prior to the scheduled interviews. I look forward to learning about your educational experiences. If you have any questions, concerns or need clarification on anything thus far please feel free to contact me (Jolene Suda) at 808-393-1883 or email jolenes@hawaii.edu or my advisor, Dr. Erin Kahunawai Wright, at ewright@hawaii.edu. If you have questions about your rights and responsibilities as a research participant, you may contact the University of Hawai'i's Human Studies Program (UH HSP) at uhirb@hawaii.edu. Additional contact information for UH HSP can be found on the following web link: https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance/human-studies

Sincerely,

Jolene Suda
PhD Candidate
University of Hawaii at Manoa

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT FOR GATE KEEPERS

To: (Dean of Academic Support, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs),

Project Title: The Personal Experiences of Students with Learning Disabilities Who Successfully Made the Transition from Secondary to Postsecondary Educational Institutions.

Researcher: Jolene Suda, Ph.D. Candidate

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Erin Kahunawai Wright

Please review this form carefully and express any questions or concerns you may have before signing this agreement.

Purpose
I am conducting this study to learn about the personal experience of individuals with learning disabilities who have successfully made the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. By highlighting the achievements of students, finding out why they were successful, and what made them successful will allow education practitioners to identify and implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success.

Process for Participation
Participant in this study, will provide information to me about their personal high school to college transition experiences through interviews. The interview will be conducted to better understand what experiences leading individuals with learning disabilities be successful in postsecondary education (e.g., college, university, vocational school).

Participants who agree to take part in this study will take part in a 60-75-minute audio-recorded interview consisting of open-ended questions related to their personal experiences and contributing factors that made them successful. At a mutually agreed upon date and time, the interview will take place at Metro Community College where I will ensure that the room in which the interview will be conducted is safe, well-lit and ventilated, quiet and free from any distractions so that the data may be captured clearly. Or the interview may take place at a venue of the participant's choice that is also safe distraction-free and meets the above conditions. The decision for the location will be up to the participant.

To help with accuracy, the interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder. During the interview, the participant may ask me to stop recording at any time should they feel uncomfortable or would like to share important information with me off the record. Following the interview, I will be transcribing the interview using Microsoft Word. Upon completion of their transcriptions, I will send each participant their own completed transcript only to review via email. If needed, they can meet with me to review their transcript. Any revisions or clarifications needed thereafter will occur within two weeks from when I receive their feedback. If they are interested in reviewing the final draft write-up, I can send them the draft to review and feedback.

The audio recordings of their interview will be destroyed upon submission for publication. Each participant will be notified via email verifying when the destruction is complete.

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation
The study will follow a qualitative phenomenological design as this approach focuses on the lived experiences. As a result, there is a slight possibility that their story could be recognized and could be identified by the reader. But I will do as much as I can to insure participant confidentiality in the reporting phase. All data obtained from the study will be safeguarded, personal identifiable information will be removed, and replaced with pseudonyms unless the participant would like me to use their name.

To ensure participant confidentiality, please understand that I will not allow you to have access to any of the raw data, including interview transcripts. I will not allow you to have access to any detailed information about the participants, However, I you will have access to review the final composition of the research once it is completed.

Individuals who will have access to the data obtained from this study will be myself (Jolene Suda) and my faculty advisor, Dr. Erin Kahunawai Wright, assistant professor of Educational Administration. She will adhere to the same confidentiality standards set forth in this document.

Risks and Benefits of Participating
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating it this research beyond your experiences in your everyday life. However as stated in the "Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation" heading: "there is a slight possibility that the institution could be recognized, and identified by the reader" which may result in a loss of privacy. However, allowing me access to MCC will be beneficial because my research will be highlighting the achievements of students, finding out why they were successful, and what made them successful. Thus, will allow MCC and education practitioners to identify and implement approaches or practices that facilitate student success.

Contact and Questions:
If you have any questions or concerns about this study at any time, please feel free to contact me (Jolene Suda) at 808-393-1883 or email jolenes@hawaii.edu or my advisor, Dr. Erin Kahunawai Wright, at ewright@hawaii.edu. If you have questions about your rights and responsibilities as a research participant, you may contact the University of Hawaiʻi's Human Studies Program (UH HSP) at uhirb@hawaii.edu. Additional contact information for UH HSP can be found on the following web link: https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance/human-studies

Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. For your records, you will be given a copy of this consent form. You will be given a signed copy of this consent form for future reference as well.

_____   _____
              Gate Keeper's Signature   Date

_____   _____
              Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT EMAIL FOR GATE KEEPERS

Aloha (Dean of Academic Support, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs),

My name is Jolene Suda and as you know, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa in Education Administration. Part of my degree requirement requires me to conduct a dissertation study and for my proposed study, I will be looking at the personal experiences of individuals with learning disabilities who successfully made the transition from high school to Metro Community College, and graduated with a certificate of completion or an associate's degree. My rationale for focusing on the experiences of students who have successfully transitioned is to highlight the achievements of students while also identifying approaches or practices facilitating student success.

I am writing this letter requesting permission to utilize the TLC programs office to conduct participant interviews, as well as working with MCC's disability services office, to help disseminate information about my research. Because the prospective participants will have graduated from MCC, I will not need access to any student academic records thus, will not be in violation of any FERPA regulations.

To ensure participant confidentiality, please understand that I am unable to allow you to have access to any of the raw data, including interview transcripts. I will be unable to also allow you access to any detailed information about participants, however, I will allow you to review the final composition of the research once it is completed.

The research is anticipated to begin upon approval from the University Of Hawaii Office Of Research Compliance System Institutional Review Board. Anticipated Timeline:

- July 20, 2018 - submission of research proposal to IRB.
- Fall 2018 semester – start of research upon approval.
    - August through September: disseminate research information to recruit participants
    - October through November: collect data (interviews); transcriptions of data
    - December: begin data analysis.
- Spring 2019 semester – research continued.
    - January through March: data analysis; write up of results; discussions chapters;
    - April through May: defend research.

In essence, I hope my research will help to inform educational institutions, especially MCC and professionals about how to better serve students with learning disabilities. In addition, increase the retention, matriculation and graduate rates of this population.

Sincerely,

Jolene Suda

APPENDIX H: REMINDER CALL TELEPHONE AND EMAIL SCRIPT TO PARTICIPANTS

Phone Call

Aloha (Participants Name),

This is Jolene Suda, and I am calling to remind you about your scheduled (phone session) for (date, time, location). Will the date, and time still work for you?

If yes:
Excellent, mahalo for your time and I will see you then.

If no:
I am sorry you will not be able to make our scheduled date. What (date, time) will work better for you?

When new date, time is provided:
Mahalo. I have it marked on my calendar and I look forward to seeing you on (new rescheduled date, time).

Email

Aloha (Participants Name),

This is Jolene Suda, and I am emailing to remind you about your scheduled (phone session) for (date, time). Will the date, and time still work for you?

If yes:
Excellent, mahalo for your time and I will see you then.

If no:
I am sorry you will not be able to make our scheduled date. What (date, time) will work better for you?

When new date, time is provided:
Mahalo. I have it marked on my calendar and I look forward to seeing you on (new rescheduled date, time, location).

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Pseudonym: _____

Date of the Interview:_____

Location of the Interview:_____

Interview Time: _____ am/pm (start) & _____am/pm (stop)

Research Overview: I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in my research. As you know I am studying the secondary to postsecondary transition experience of students with LD who have attained their certificate of completion or associates degree from Metro Community College. As I ask you questions, what I am hoping to gain is your individualized story (your thoughts, feelings, and experiences). Please keep in mind that as you respond there are not right or wrong answers. At any time during the interview if you need me to repeat a question, clarify anything, stop the interview or take a break, please do not hesitate to let me know. Additionally, if you come across a question you feel uncomfortable answering, just say so, and I can skip it. Are you ready to begin?

1. Please tell me about yourself. For example, where are you from, where did you go to school, and anything else you feel like sharing, etc.

2. When were you diagnosed with a learning disability? What was that experience like for you when you found out about your disability?

   a. How did that impact your experience in school?

3. In high school and before you transitioned into college, was there anything that you did to prepare for the transition?

   a. Did it help or not help you prepare for college? Why or why not

   b. What additional kinds of support (academic, community, family, psychological, etc.) did you receive in high school that helped you to transition to postsecondary education (college)? How were they helpful?

4. Please describe your transition from high school to college

   a. Why did you choose to attend MCC?

   b. What stands out for you when recalling this time? (academically, socially, psychologically)

   c. How did feel you when you transitioned into college? Your first semester? As you persisted to the next semester? As you neared graduation?

   d. What are some critical experiences you had during this time?

   e. What experiences were particularly helpful for you?

   f. What strategies did you utilize to get you through the transition stages into and through college?

5. What kinds of growth or changes (academically, social, psychologically, mindset) did you experience as you transition into and through college?

   a. As you experienced transition/change, what elements of your feelings/emotions did you feel you had control over? Or no control over?

6. Bridge Programs

   a. Did you participate in any pre-college or summer bridge programs?

   b. If so, please tell me about your experience (what did you learn, skills, was it helpful?)

7. Please tell me about your college experience.

   a. How would you describe your time in college?

   b. How did you decide on your major?

   c. What kinds of supports did you receive while in college?

   d. What are 3 [or whatever] critical skills/knowledge, events, people, experiences in your college journey that you feel best helped you to succeed?

8. Where you involved with any campus clubs, organizations, support programs? If so how did, they play a role in your success?

9. Please explain your experience with obtaining academic accommodations.

    a. How did you know what to do to access these accommodations?

    b. Do you feel these accommodations were sufficient? Or helpful for to your success?

    c. Were you knowledgeable about the process?

10. What beliefs did you have about yourself at the beginning as you prepared for college?

11. What beliefs did you have about yourself once you transitioned into college?

12. What beliefs did you have about yourself once as you graduated from college?

13. What do you feel would be beneficial for future LD students who are planning/transitioning to college to know?

14. What do you feel would be beneficial for campus leaders to know about students with LD to help improve their experiences and success?

15. What do you feel would be beneficial for campus educators to know about students with LD to help improve their experiences and success?

16. Is there anything that I did not ask regarding your transition experience that you would like me to know or add?

APPENDIX J: THEME MATRIX

APPROACHING TRANSITION THEMES	Pre-Flight (Pre-College Transition Experience)	Venture (College Transition Experience)	Departure (Exiting Transition Experience)
	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes
Situations	Knowledge of Disability • Impact on secondary education Transition planning • Knowledge and involvement College Selection	First Semester of College Persisting from One Semester to the Next	Preparing to graduate & transition out

Self (Perception of the Transition)
 Confidence Level
	• Low confidence
	 • Failing
		• Changes and Growth
		   o Academically
		   o Socially
		 Psychologically
			Sense of Accomplishment
			
			 Overall change and growth

Supports	Personal • Friends • Family Community: • Disability Vocational Rehabilitation • Therapist	Personal • Friends • Family Community: • Disability Vocational Rehabilitation • Therapist Institutional: • Academic accommodations • Tutoring Services • Faculty • Support Programs that offered wraparound services • Student Employment	Personal • Friends • Family Community: • Disability Vocational Rehabilitation • Therapist Institutional: • Academic accommodations • Tutoring Services • Faculty • Support Programs that offered wraparound services • Student Employment
Strategies Utilized	Pre-College Event • Campus Visit • Experience Week • Summer Bridge • SDT	• On campus programs and organizations • Academic accommodations • Faculty • Workshops • SDT	• On campus programs and organizations • Academic accommodations • Faculty • Workshops • SDT