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Factors of placement decisions of students with learning disabilities

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FACTORS OF PLACEMENT DECISIONS OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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by

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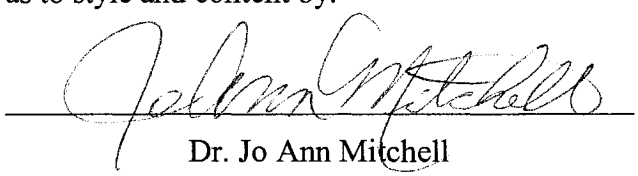

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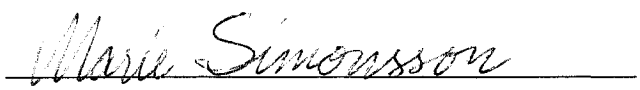

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ABSTRACT

Yetsko, April C., Factors of Placement Decisions of Students with Learning Disabilities. Master of Education (M.Ed.), May, 2005, 36 pp., references, 35 titles. This study looked at the factors that are involved in determining the placement decision of a child with a learning disability. Reading level, previous placement, initial placement, intelligence quotient, English proficiency and behavior were the factors examined in the study. Data was collected by examining the school files of children labeled as learning disabled in two school districts in south Texas. The different placement factors were studied to see which ones were most predictive of the number of hours a week that a student spent in a special education classroom. The research design utilized was a descriptive analysis, a correlation analysis and an all-possible subsets regression analysis. Research indicated that reading level, previous placement, initial placement, and intelligence quotient (I.Q.) and English were significantly correlated with time in special education. Previous placement and reading level accounted for 31% of the variance in placements.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that children be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Implementation practices vary throughout school districts and frequently within the school district. IDEA mandates two major components of LRE. First, children with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers and second, removal of children to special classes and separate schools happen only if a child can not be educated in their regular educational environment with supplementary aids and services (Association of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education Partnership [ASPIRE], & IDEA Local Implementation by Local Administrators Partnership [ILIAD], 2003).

The continuum of special education placements, starting with the least restrictive are: instruction in general education classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. IDEA also has guidelines for how placement decision should be made by the I.E.P. team. It specifies that it should be decided annually, based on the child's I.E.P., and as close to possible to the child's home (ASPIRE & ILIAD, 2003). Although IDEA

mandates LRE federally, the practical implementation varies greatly across schools.

There are conflicting studies on how a child's self-perception is influenced by placement. One study found that children in inclusion settings were more likely to be ranked highly by their peers than similar children in special education settings (Madge, Affleck, & Lowenbraun, 1990). However, another study found that children who are comparing themselves to their more successful peers are more likely to have low self-perceptions and so there is an advantage to separating children with learning disabilities into a separate setting (Butler and Marinov-Glassman, 1994).

Numbers of children in mainstreamed classrooms vary from school to school and state to state. According to the Fifteenth Annual Report to Congress (as cited by Lindsey, Ghose, Rangasamy & Quinn, 2001) the number of children with learning disabilities who were placed in general education classes in 1993 ranged from 2.37% in California to 93.59% in Vermont. Each state has its own way of determining whether a child has a learning disability. Part of the variables regarding placement are state norms, but there is differing placement of students within the same school.

Need for the Study

There are few studies that examine the placement variables of children with learning disabilities in special education. All of them suggest that although there are certain variables that seem to affect placement, there is variability that is not accounted for in the study (Buysse & Bailey, 1994, Hallenbeck, Kaufman & Lloyd, 1993). Further research needs to be done to look at the factors that are taken into consideration when placing students with learning disabilities in the same school and the same district.

It is important that educators know what factors contribute to the services allotted to a child in special education. When educators understand what factors contribute to making a child better able to be educated in a less restrictive environment, they can focus on the education they need to be successful. For educators to know what factors contribute to placement, research needs to be performed on what factors are significant.

There seem to be many characteristics of children with disabilities that lead to different placements. Hosp and Reschly identify three categories that determine placement: academic difficulties, behavior problems and family involvement (2002). In a case study by Hallenback, Kaufman and Lloyd the decisions regarding placing two children in regional facilities showed very little documented reasons for the placement (1993). The researchers felt that there was adequate reason for the placement, but the school was unable to show documentation to support their reasons.

More studies need to be done to determine what the other predictors exist, and if they are the same across age groups, school districts, ethnic groups, geographic areas and disabilities. A study by Buysse and Bailey (1994) found that 75% of placements of children in preschool could be based on studied characteristics. What the study was not able to determine was whether these characteristics warranted different placements. It is known that different minority groups are over-represented in special education (USDE, 1998). Minority status seems to be a characteristic that leads to special education placement, but does research show that it affects what placement a child needs? To properly educate

all children, clearer guidelines need to put into use so that children are given services that they need. Decisions are made based on different variables, but research needs to be performed to determine if the variables should effect placement.

Statement of the Problem

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) requires that students be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE). There are varying practices in least restrictive placement for different children and no uniform way of determining what is least restrictive placement for a particular child.

Varying practices can greatly affect a child's life. Every factor must be apparent to the I.E.P. team so that decisions are based on educational need and not feelings. Placement factors need to be apparent and documented so that the child's best interests are consistently taken into consideration. If there is disagreement about placement, the I.E.P. team needs to discuss the factors that lead to placement. If the factors are not clear, they are difficult to discuss and difficult to document.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine what variables are significant in determining the educational placement of a child with a learning disability in special education, at different levels, within the same school district.

Research Question

The research question that will be used as the guide in this proposed study is as follows: What factors are most important in determining the educational placement of a child with a learning disability?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to clarify the reasons that children with learning disabilities were given different placements in special education. It is unclear exactly what factors go into determining a placement, and to what degree different factors determine placements. Because the placement of a child determines how their education will be administered, it is very important that we know what determines the placement.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this proposal have special meanings and are defined in the subsections that follow.

Behavior. Behavior will be measured by the number of disciplinary referrals that are recorded in student data for the last academic school year.

English proficiency. A student's English proficiency will be determined by whether a student has passed the district test of English proficiency, as recorded in their special education file.

Initial placement. The placement that the child had when he or she was first provided special education services.

Individual Education Plan team (I.E.P. team). "This team writes the Individualized Education Program for the youngster who has been identified by the Eligibility Committee as handicapped. Members are (1) a school division employee, other than the student's teacher, who is qualified to provide or supervise special education; (2) the student's teacher(s), (3) the parent or guardian (4) the student, if appropriate; (5) other individuals whom the parents or the school

division select" (Learning Disabilities Council, Inc., 1991, section I.E.P. Comittee, ¶ 1).

Intelligence quotient (I.Q.). The score listed in a child's most recent special education assessment for any test given that measures intelligence.

Learning disability. The term means "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia" (IDEA, 1997, §300.7, Child with a disability).

Placement. The number of hours per week a child received services in a special education setting, as recorded on their present I.E.P.

Previous placement. The placement the child was in prior to the last Individual Education Plan, I.E.P. meeting when the present placement was decided.

Reading level. The standard score for reading proficiency as recorded in the child's most recent special education evaluation.

Summary

Children with learning disabilities receive differing amounts of special education time, changing their placements. An I.E.P. team decides how much special education time a child needs. It is unclear what factors are considered when the I.E.P. team determines the placement for an individual child.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

There are different definitions of learning disabilities and different ways of determining if a person has a learning disability. In the 1996-1997 school year 2,669,491 students were provided special education services after being identified as having a learning disability. That was a 114% increase of children receiving special education services for learning disabilities in the 1979-1980 school year (Whorton, Siders & Fowler, 2000). The numbers continue to increase, but there is no shared definition of what a learning disability is and how to identify it.

Presently different minority groups are over-represented in special education (USDE, 1998). Blair and Scott (2002) found that not only race, but socio economic status also correlated with children who were identified as having learning disabilities. Singer, Butler and Walker (2001) found that placements were associated with socio-economic status and race or ethnicity. With issues like race and socio-economic status relating to identification as learning disabled and educational placement it is important that we make sure that we are careful with our standards for identification practices. Once the children are identified we need to make sure that we are looking at appropriate placements, based on educational

need, so that we do not have segregation at some levels, based either on disability, race or socio-economic levels.

Children with learning disabilities are placed in a continuum of instructional settings to receive their education. These range from the most restrictive, being self-contained, to spending part of the day in a resource room to partial and the least restrictive placement, full inclusion in general education classes. Placements can affect the education of special education children in many different ways. In a study comparing students with learning disabilities in inclusion with students who performed similarly in academics, researchers found that children who were in the inclusion classroom were more likely to be ranked highly on a social scale by their peers (Madge, Affleck, & Lowenbraun, 1990). Both groups of students still had lower social ranking than their peers without disabilities, but there was a significant difference between the two groups. Another study focused on the academic differences between students who received inclusion services in general education classes and students who received pullout services for academic areas. It found that students in inclusion received better grades in reading, math, science and social studies and had higher attendance rates (Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). The number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions was similar for the two groups. Another study looked at children with mental retardation. It had similar findings, that children in inclusion were more successful academically and socially than children who were educated separately (Freeman and Alkin, 2000). However, another study found that children in special schools had higher perceived competence than their peers in special education classes in regular schools or

general education classes (Butler & Marinov-Glassman, 1994). Children with emotional disturbances who were placed in segregated schools were found to have smaller social networks than their non-disabled peers (Panacek & Dunlap, 2003).

There is still controversy over what placements are best for children with disabilities and how those placements are defined. Some would argue that least restrictive environment is a specific setting, while others would argue that it was an educational context (Rueda, Gallego &Moil, 2000). The traditional resource classroom model was intended to provide instruction in specific skills, but the majority of schools now have resource settings that are content classes (McKenzie, 2001). Although both skill-based and content area resource classes may be placing a child in a special education classroom for a period of time, they are drastically different services that could define how will the child is ultimately educated. Edgar and Palloway urge us to "create more options for our students" (1994, p. 450) so that we do not disenfranchise our special education students. But it is still unclear as to how we should determine the best educational placement for a child, even if it is clear that we need to have a continuum of services available.

Many studies have compared students in different physical placements. A study done by Butler and Marinov-Glassman (1994) looked at self-perceptions of children with learning disabilities and low-achievers in relationship to their placement. It found that in third grade students in special schools, special classes, and similar low-achievers in general education classrooms have similar self-perceptions. In fifth grade children in special schools had the highest self-perceptions. This held true in the seventh grade as well. The authors suggest that

"exposure to more-competent peers will undermine perceived competence" (Butler and Marinov-Glassman, 1994, p. 331). Another study looked at different types of social functioning of children with learning disabilities and concluded that when deciding on placements, both social functioning and academic and learning needs should be considered (Vaughn, Elbaum & Boardman, 2001). Many people support a continuum of services, although others believe that all students should be included, or all students should receive services in a special education setting.

Knowing that a continuum of services exists does not tell us how children are best placed in different educational settings. What are the variables that determine the placement of special education students? Allen (2002) did case studies of children, following reasons for different school placements. She noted, "Educational decisions are not as simple as deciding to retain or promote, to include or exclude. Sometimes teachers make decisions that are not the best they could make for a child, given *real* choices, but simply the best they can make, given *forced* choices" (Allen, 2002, p. 61). The researcher recommends that decisions about student placement be made by people who are directly involved with the children as their decisions are more likely to be beneficial than decisions made by state or district people who are not directly involved.

A case study by Hallenbeck, Kaufman, and Lloyd followed two children with emotional disturbances who were placed in regional placements (1993). The researchers noted that the decisions seemed to be adequately developed, but there was little data explaining the reasons behind the placements. They described some decisions as being haphazard, especially when there are students who seem to be

eligible for special education services, but are not served. Even when it seems that there is rationale for a placement there is frequently no clarification as to why the placement was made. How is the least restrictive environment decided if there is no clear reason why a placement is made? How are the rights to least restrictive environment ensured if teachers, parents, and other I.E.P. team members are not sure of the factors that lead to a decisions and do not document decisions and interventions that happen prior to a more restrictive placement?

The placement of children with learning disabilities seems to constantly change. It varies greatly from state to state and even from district to district. Placement tendencies have changed greatly over the years as well. In 1984-1985 26% of the special education population was educated in the general education classroom and in 1997-1998 48% of the special education population being educated in the general education classroom (Whorton, Siders, & Fowlers, 2000). According to the Fifteenth Annual Report to Congress (as cited by Lindsey, Ghose, Rangasamy & Quinn, 2001) the differences in state placements can vary from Vermont's 2.37% of special education students placed in a general education classroom, to California, where 93.59% of special education are placed in a general education classroom. Lester and Kelman (1997) found that states with larger African American populations, higher population concentrations in cities, and higher average pay are statistically more likely to have children with learning disabilities placed in more restrictive environments. But there are more variables that seem to change not only across time and states, but from other factors as well, when placing individual children within the same school district.

In an ideal situation placement decisions would be simple. The needs of the child and the implications of different placements would determine the best way to educate a child. "It is very important to note that service should be provided on the basis of defined need, not the other way around where a need has to be dropped into the slot of the best available service" (Reger, 1977, p. 10). Unfortunately, placement decisions seem to depend on more variables than just the needs of the child. It seems that there are many factors, such as the people who are making the decisions themselves. One study showed that principals were more supportive of inclusion than special educators (Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999). Because administrators often make programming decisions, special education teachers may make decisions based on administrative views, rather than their own views of inclusion. It is important that everyone work as a team to make students successful in their placements. A study by Kennedy, Long, Jolivette, Cox, Jung-Chang & Thompson (2001) showed that positive behavioral supports can decrease behavior problems that may interfere with inclusive practices. The positive behavioral supports were only successful when they were implemented by everyone; regular education teachers, special education teachers and administrators.

General education teachers are included in the committee that determines student placement and ultimately can make a placement successful by their methods of working with students with special needs. Corbett points out "Many professionals do not welcome any challenges to their long-established practices" (2001, p. 120). The addition of children with special needs into their classrooms could be a challenge to their practices if they are not prepared. Characteristics of

general education teachers, their views on mainstreaming and their perception of classroom conditions also determine which children are referred for special education services (Smart, Wilton, & Keeling, 1980). In this study the teachers who viewed mainstreaming as beneficial and felt prepared to teach children with low I.Q.s in their classes were less likely to refer children to special education than teachers who did not feel capable of educating children with low I.Q.s and who did not see mainstreaming as beneficial. A study by Scruggs and Mastropieri (as cited in Heflin & Bullock, 1999) concluded that only one third of general education teachers think that general education classrooms are the most appropriate placement option, although most teachers are willing to try it. In another study, general education teachers were given pre-service classes about inclusion practices. Although it did not significantly change attitudes about inclusion it did show that teachers were more aware (Kirk, 1998). It seems that if educators are determining placement of children with special needs they should at least be educated about the different practices that are possible in the placements that are discussed for a child.

There seem to be many variables that go into the decision of placing children with learning disabilities, but are those consistently used and agreed upon? A study done by Vance, Bahr, Huberty and Ewer-Jones found that grade, sex, age, intelligence, achievement levels, motor ability, anxiety levels and behavior only accounted for 33% of the variance in placement of the children studied (1998). In another study by Hosp and Reschly severity of academic difficulties, presence of behavior problems and family involvement most influenced student placement (2002). And in yet another study age, severity of disability, developmental status,

functional abilities and behavioral characteristics predicted placement with 75% accuracy of actual placement (Buysse & Bailey, 1994). I.Q. was not studied in the above studies, but in research by MacMillan & Forness it was determined that I.Q. does not play a large role in determining placement (1998). They found that achievement was much more indicative of a placement of a child with a disability.

Summary

There seem to be many characteristics of children that determine their placement, though no one has been able to determine all of the variables. Some of the variables seem to be characteristics of the child, others seem to be characteristics of the teachers and yet another variable seems to be who is determining the placement of the child. It seems that there is no clear rationale that I.E.P. teams use to determine a child's placement consistently. Studies have suggested such variables as severity of disability, state, grade, sex age, intelligence, achievement levels, motor ability, anxiety levels, behavior, developmental status, and functional abilities. None of the studies are able to account for the total variability of placement.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that predict the placement of a child with a learning disability. The methodology was divided into the following subsections (1) research design, (2) population and sample, (3) instrumentation, (4) research hypothesis, (5) data collection procedures, and (6) data analysis procedures.

Research Design

A linear regression design was used to explore the research question. This design was selected because it would be impossible to use an experimental design and manipulate the factors for placement. This design allows us to identify the factors that are present for different placements of children with learning disabilities, and determine the extent that they affect the student placement.

In this study the independent variables were the placement factors. The placement factors included were reading level, previous placement, initial placement, I.Q., English proficiency, and behavior.

The dependent variable was the placement, as measured by the number of hours per week spent in a special education setting, as determined by the students' most current I.E.P.s.

Population and Sample

The targeted population in this study was children with learning disabilities in two school districts in southern Texas. 120 students with learning disabilities were sampled from two middle schools (grades six to eight) in two school districts in south Texas. The students included in the study were students of the researcher or random students with learning disabilities who returned signed letters of consent to participate. All data was taken from the students' special education folders and from P.E.I.M.S. data.

The population in these school districts was unique. According to Texas Education Association (TEA) about 96% of the students is Hispanic, 2% is white and 1% is African American. Approximately 84% of the children attending school in the districts are labeled as economically disadvantaged. Thirty five percent of the students qualify for bilingual or English as a second language services. Eight percent of the students qualify for special education services, although it will only be children in special education who are labeled as having a learning disability that will be sampled. Because the researcher has included children with similar demographics the sample should be highly representative of the population, with 100% of the sample qualifying for special education services as children with learning disabilities.

Instrumentation

The factors that pertain to placement were determined by information in the students' confidential folders. Reading level was the level reported at the child's last I.E.P. meeting. I.Q. was determined from the reports from the child's last assessment to determine special education eligibility. Different test had been administered to determine I.Q. The I.Q. reported by the school district to determine eligibility for special education services of a child with a learning disability was the one included in this study, although they were determined by different tests. The previous placement was the placement the student had before the most recent I.E.P. meeting. This was quantified as the percentage of the week that the child was in a special education placement. Initial placement was the placement that the child had immediately after being found eligible for special education services. This was quantified as the percentage of the week that the child was in a special education placement. Number of disciplinary referrals was recorded from the students' special education folder, or if it is not present there it was taken from the students' Public Education Information Management System (P.E.I.M.S.) data. The number of referrals was counted from the beginning of the last school year to the end of the last complete school year. Reading level and English proficiency was reported from the students' special education file. Reading levels was taken as the difference between the child's recorded reading level and the child's academic grade level. When the data were not available in one area the data for that area was omitted.

Hypothesis

The overall research hypothesis being studied in this research was as follows: Special education placement for children with learning disabilities is a function of reading level, previous placement, initial placement, I.Q, English proficiency, and behavior.

Data Collection and Procedures

All data were collected from confidential student folders. Permission from the superintendent of the school districts studied and from the director of special education for the districts was obtained before the study began. The permission is attached in the appendix of the document. Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Texas- Pan American approval was secured before research was started. IRB approval is attached in the appendix of this thesis. Students of the researcher were used as participants as well as students in the same two schools where the researcher worked. Letters of consent were given to special education teachers to distribute to all the students with learning disabilities in the school. The letters were distributed once and students were reminded to return the letters. Students were included in the study if they returned a letter of consent signed by a parent.

Each subject was numbered and the information regarding reading level, previous placement, initial placement, I.Q., English proficiency, and behavior was recorded next to the number. No identifying information was taken from the student folder. Only the researcher accessed and noted the collected data.

Reading level and I.Q. was taken from the students' most recent special education evaluation. The students' functional reading level was subtracted from the students' grade level to determine how far behind the student was in reading. Time spent in Special education settings was recorded from the students' I.E.P.s. Previous placement, initial placement, English proficiency and number of disciplinary referrals were recorded from the student information in the student special education folder or from P.E.I.M.S. data. Any missing data were omitted from the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive Analysis was done to examine the data collected. Number of participants, minimum values, maximum values, means, standard error and standard deviation were recorded. Correlation analysis was done using SPSS software. Each variable was compared to the other variables to determine covariance at with a two-tailed test, with alpha at .05 level. A multiple linear regression with alpha at the .05 level determined statistical significance using SPSS software. This predicted which factors were significant in determining placement of children with learning disabilities.

Summary

This study was intended to determine significant predictors of placement of children with learning disabilities. Children with Learning Disabilities in South Texas from two school districts were studied. Reading level, previous placement, initial placement, I.Q., English proficiency and behavior were examined as the independent variables with placement time as the dependent variable. Descriptive

analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were used to study the relationship of the variables.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The results subsections include a section of descriptive, correlation and regression analyses used in addressing the research question for this study.

Descriptive Analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed on the collected data and recorded in Table 1. Interestingly the mean for IQ was 94.34 as opposed to the standard 100.

Table 1.

Descriptive Means of Variables used to Determine Time in Special Education Placements for Students with Learning Disabilities

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	*SE*	*SD*
Previous placement	120	0.00	62.00	32.33	1.50	16.41
Initial placement	120	0.00	50.00	30.38	0.98	10.73
IQ	120	72.00	120.00	94.43	0.87	9.49
English	120	1.00	2.00	1.29	0.04	0.46
Behavior	120	0.00	39.00	4.52	0.59	6.49
Reading level	120	0.00	7.00	3.42	0.15	1.60
Time in Special Education	120	0.00	38.00	21.51	1.56	17.07

Correlation Analysis

The results from a correlation analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Correlation Matrix of Variables used to Determine Time for Learning Disabled Students

	Initial placement	IQ	English	Behavior	Reading level	Time
Previous placement	0.49**	-0.32**	-0.21*	0.040	0.40 **	0.59**
Initial placement		-0.40**	-0.05	-0.03	0.37**	0.36**
IQ			0.11	-0.09	-0.31**	-0.29**
English				0.02	-0.26**	-0.21*
Behavior					0.19*	0.09
Reading level						0.67**
Time						

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Previous Placement, Initial Placement, I.Q. and Reading Levels were all significantly correlated to time in special education at the 0.01 level and English was significant at the 0.05 level. Previous placement and time in special education showed 35% covariance. Initial placement and time in special education showed 13% covariance. I.Q. and time in special education showed 8% covariance. English and time in special education showed 4% covariance. Reading level and time in special education showed 45% covariance. Behavior showed no significant correlation to time in special education.

Regression Analysis

All-Possible Subsets Regression Analysis on SPSS software reported an R Square for each predictor entered, showing the total variance explained on the dependent variable, time spent in special education. When all variables were input, they accounted for 55% of the variance in relation to time spent in special education. Results of the predictors that were significant from the multiple linear regression are recorded in Table 3.

Table 3.

Summary of Regression Results used to Determine the Time in Special Education for Students with Learning Disabilities

Model	B	*SE* B	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-10.21	2.75		-3.71	0.00
Reading level	5.49	0.71	0.51	7.76	0.00
Previous placement	0.40	0.07	0.39	5.83	0.00

Note. Multiple R=0.75; R Squared=0.57; Adjusted R Square=0.56

Previous Placement accounted for 34% of the variance of a student's placement. Initial Placement accounted for 8% of the variance of a student's placement. I.Q. accounted for 8% of the variance of a student's placement. English as a first language accounted for 4% of the variance of a student's placement. Behavior was found to be insignificant with regards to students' time in a special education setting. Reading level accounted for 45% of the variance of a student's placement.

Reading level and previous placement together accounted for 52% of the variance. This was very close to the 55% of the variance that was explained when all predictors were analyzed.

Linear Regression allows the construction of a formula to predict the placement of students with learning disabilities. Knowing a student's reading level and previous placement would allow the calculation of time in special education. The unstandardized regression equation would be: Time= (5.50) reading level+(.40) Previous Placement-10.24. The standardized regression equation would be: Z time= (0.51) Z reading level+(.39) Z previous placement.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Principle Research Question

The aim of this study was to investigate what factors are most important in determining the placement of a child with a learning disability. The factors that were considered in determining the placement were reading level, previous placement, initial placement, intelligence quotient, English proficiency and behavior. In the subsections that follow the implications of the results are discussed, principle research question, implications of the results, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, recommendations, limitations of the study and relevant factors.

Implications of the Results

The results of this study suggest that there are significant predictors to determining placement of a children with learning disabilities, accounting for 55% of the variance. Several of the predictors showed a stronger correlation with the dependent variable than others. This study also showed that 45% of the variance was not accounted for with the predictors in this study. Reading level showed the most variance with the dependent variable (45%).

Reading level showed the most variance with the dependent variable. This is

not surprising because most children with learning disabilities have difficulty with reading. Reading is also a very important tool throughout the school curriculum. Many children with learning disabilities are placed in special education classes or given special education services solely because of disabilities in the areas of reading.

Previous placement accounted for 34% of the variance. This suggests that when a decision is made to place a child in a special education program, the last placement plays an important role. This study can not show the cause of the significant variables. It could be that the committee deciding on placement continues programs because they have been appropriately chosen in the past. It could be that children stay in the same placements because children in more intensive programs continue to need intensive programs with more special education time and children who are doing well in the general education classrooms are less likely to need more restrictive placements in the future. Initial placements only accounted for 8% of the variance, suggesting that in the long term there is more change of placement than there is from year to year. This is important, but could reflect one of two phenomena. The first is that students progress and their needs change and so their placements are changed. It is also possible that this reflects that there are changes in how schools run programs. Recently there has been more push for children to be in less restrictive environments. As the schools' programs become less restrictive obviously this will affect the placement of the students.

I.Q. explained 8% of the variance. This may be because the committee that

places the child determine placement by taking into consideration the intelligence of a child as well as their academic abilities. If this is true, I.Q. is less of a predictor than reading level, suggesting that the committee relies much more on reading level to decide placement than they do on I.Q. Similarly in a study by MacMillan & Forness it was also determined that I.Q. does not play a large role in determining placement, but that achievement levels did (1998).

Interestingly I.Q. was determined to be a normal curve in this study. The participants' I.Q.s had a mean of 94.43 as opposed to the standard 100 and a standard deviation of 9.49 as opposed to the standard 15 point standard deviation. This suggests that the population sampled, children with learning disabilities, did not reflect the same I.Q. curve as the general population of students.

English as a first language showed very little variance with placement. This may be because of the area that was studied. The majority of the students speak English as a second language, therefore it is may not be perceived in the same way as in other communities where it could be seen as more "disabling." The students also were in many different placements regardless of whether they were frequently in trouble or infrequently in trouble. Another reason English as a second language may not have been significant is that in the districts where the research was collected children are not often referred to Special Education until they have been in the country for a few years, so that the students in Special Education may not speak English as a first language, but they do not represent the full spectrum of children learning English.

Reading level and previous placement were found to describe 52% of the

variance, almost the total variance that was found when all the predictors in the study were included. This tells us that there is colinearity between these variables and the others because the variance described by these variables also describes most of the variance of the other variables. These variables work as predictors and allow us to see more or less where a person with certain characteristics would be placed. This shows parents, students and educators what is emphasized when determining placement. This does not show a causal relationship, but in the educational setting this could be interpreted in many ways and parents and educators alike may want to consider how to help students so that they can be considered for less restrictive settings. No one has control over I.Q., but certainly a parent might take into consideration what they agree to see that a previous placement may be a predictor of a future placement. It also shows the importance of reading in these placements, and may encourage people to work on helping the students achieve higher reading levels, in order to make a less restrictive setting possible for the student. Likewise, it would be important to know what other factors may be involved to try to manipulate them when trying to change placement.

Behavior showed no significant correlation to time in special education. Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas also found in their study that in-school and out-of-school suspensions were similar for children who were in resource rooms and for children who were in inclusive settings.

Implications for Practice

Teachers, parents and administrators can use the unstandardized regression equation to calculate the placement of a given child with a learning disability.

Knowing a student's reading level and previous placement would allow the calculation of time in special education. The unstandardized regression equation would be: Time= (5.50) reading level+(.40) Previous Placement-10.24. The standardized regression equation would be: Z time= (0.51) Z reading level+(.39) Z previous placement.

Calculating time in special education, based on a child's reading level and previous placement would help family and professionals determine the special education support time that will most likely be used for a child. It could also help people working with the children try to change the time that the child is in special education by manipulating the other variables. If the child's reading level improved then they should need less time in special education, according to this equation. Of course this study only accounted for 55% of the variance, so there are other factors that are unaccounted for in the equation.

Recommendations and Limitations of the Study

This study is in no way exhaustive of the possible predictors of placement of children with learning disabilities. There is more research needed to determine all the predictors and examine whether it seems to be the same across disabilities, grade levels, school districts, geographic areas and ethnic groups.

This study suggests that reading level is very important to decide how long a child is in a special education setting, but this does not show whether that is true of children with disabilities in the area of math or writing. Future studies could explore this area to see if reading level is important for placement of all the students. Because reading only accounts for 45% of the variance suggests that

there are other variables that are important, possibly levels in other academic areas.

Further studies need to be done to determine student needs cause the variance in previous placements. It is possible that the previous placements are dependant on school practices deciding where the majority of children receive services. More research needs to be performed to see if the placement factors are the same for children with other disabilities, such as emotional disturbances, as well.

Forty-five percent of the variance is unaccounted for in this study, showing that there must be other factors involved, but not in the study. The other possible factors could range from other academic areas (math and writing for example) to other simultaneous disabilities, to parental involvement, student work habits, student initiative, socio-economic factors, migrant status, attendance and others. More intensive research would have to be done to see if these were factors that accounted for the other 45% of the variance.

There were several limitations in this study. The research was done in two school districts in a very unique part of south Texas. Information may be different in other school districts that have other methods determining placement for children with learning disabilities. Research involving many school districts from different areas of the country would be able to determine if the trends were the same across the country, from district to district.

The majority of the students in these districts were Hispanic. Because of the homogeneity of the population, the researcher was not able to determine if ethnicity was a factor in determining placement. More research needs to be done in an area with ethnic diversity to determine whether it is a factor.

In the past parent preference was discussed as a possible factor in determining placement (Buysse & Bailey, 1994). Because this study was done using student files, information was not gathered to determine parent preferences. Further research needs to see if parent preference would prove to be a contributing factor along with the other factors studied.

Because of the scale of the study, it was not possible to study all the factors that could possibly affect the placement of students with learning disabilities. Other factors such as age, age placed in special education, math levels, other disabilities, teacher recommending placement, days missing school, migrant status, socio-economic levels, homework completion and others could all be factors that determine placement of children with learning disabilities. More intensive studies in the future, with more participants, would be able to see if these were predictors of placement. Replication of this study is also necessary to see that the same factors are found to be predictors.

Summary

This study found reading level and previous placement to be significant factors in placing children with learning disabilities. This is not surprising because reading is very important across the curriculum. Low reading level makes materials less accessible in all areas of school. With previous placement there are two possible reasons that it predicts placement. The first would be that the child was in the best placement. The other reason would be that I.E.P. teams tend not to change placements, but go with what is already in place. More research needs to be done to see if the predictors are the same for other disabilities

and if there are other predictors that were not studied. Because this study was done in an ethnically homogeneous community it would also be important that further research were done to see whether these are also relevant factors in other communities or if the predictors were to change in other districts and communities.

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APPENDICES

November 2, 2003

Arturo Guajardo, Superintendent
Pharr, San Juan, Alamos Independent School District

I am a special education teacher at Liberty Middle School. I am also a Master's student at University of Texas-Pan American. In order to complete my Master's degree I will be conducting research in the area of special education. My study will focus on the factors that determine the placement of students with learning disabilities. In order for me to conduct this study I will need to gather information from student folders in the special education office.

The research I am doing will be solely based on archival data found in student folders. I will not need to interact with any children or families directly for this study. The goal of my studies is to determine what is a factor in the ARD process when a determination is made about the placement of a child with a disability. This information will give teachers a better understanding of a process that is very important in a child's life. This study will not affect anyone's placement or interfere with any services that are being provided to students.

Further information will be given to you once I receive permission from he Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects and Research.

I am asking your permission for the research to be conducted in your school district. Please mark the appropriate blank below and return this to me by Friday, November 7, 2003.

I realize that you are very busy and I thank you for the assistance that you are giving me.

Sincerely,

April Yetsko

P.S. I have enclosed a second copy of this letter for your records.

_____Yes, April Yetsko has my permission to perform her study in PSJA ISD.
_____No, April Yetsko does not have permission to perform her study in PSJA ISD>
_____April Yetsko, I would like more information before making a decision. Please contact me at _____ to set up an appointment.

_____ _____
Signature Date

November 7, 2003

Carmen Phillips
Director of Special Education at PSJA ISD

I am a special education teacher at Liberty Middle School. I am also a Master's student at University of Texas-Pan American. In order to complete my Master's degree I will be conducting research in the area of special education. My study will focus on the factors that determine the placement of students with learning disabilities. In order for me to conduct this study I will need to gather information from student folders in the special education office.

The research I am doing will be solely based on archival data found in student folders. I will not need to interact with any children or families directly for this study. The goal of my studies is to determine what is a factor in the ARD process when a determination is made about the placement of a child with a disability. This information will give teachers a better understanding of a process that is very important in a child's life. This study will not affect anyone's placement or interfere with any services that are being provided to students.

Further information will be given to you once I receive permission from he Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects and Research.

I am asking your permission for the research to be conducted. I have already received permission from Arturo Guajardo, the district's superintendent. Please mark the appropriate blank below and return this to me by Friday, November 14, 2003.

I realize that you are very busy and I thank you for the assistance that you are giving me.

Sincerely,

April Yetsko

P.S. I have enclosed a second copy of this letter for your records.

_____Yes, April Yetsko has my permission to perform her study in PSJA ISD.
_____No, April Yetsko does not have permission to perform her study in PSJA ISD>
_____April Yetsko, I would like more information before making a decision. Please contact me at _____ to set up an appointment.

_____ _____
Signature Date

University of Texas- Pan American
Factors of Placement Decisions of Students with Learning Disabilities

Informed Consent Letter

April 9, 2004

Dear Parent:

I am a teacher at Liberty Middle School in Pharr. I am also a graduate student under f Dr. JoAnn Mitchell at The University of Texas- Pan American. I am doing a study to see what is important in deciding the classroom setting of a child with a learning disability in special education.

Permission to be in this study will permit me to look at your child's district special education folder and P.E.I.M.S. data. Your decision to be in this study in this study, as well as that of your child, is your own choice. If you or your child chooses not to be in the study or to stop after the study begins, there will be no penalty. It will not change your child's grade, services, or care. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

There may be no direct benefit to your child. The possible benefit of your child's being in the study is to give more information about what decides which classroom setting your child and other children will be in. The only risk to your child will be that I am looking at personal information. Your child's name will not be in the study, nor will anything that identifies your child. After the study all research will be stored in Dr. Mitchell's office at UTPA. Dr. Mitchell and I will be the only ones with access to the research.

If you have any questions about this study or about your child being in this study, please call me at 702-5826 or Dr. JoAnn Mitchell at (956) 381-3466, ext.3465. Please return this letter in the attached postage-paid envelope.

Sincerely,

April Yetsko

* * * * * * *

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas- Pan American. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, Dr. Mark Granberry, at 956-292-7309.

___ I give consent for my child,_____to participate in the above study.

___ I **do not** give consent for my child, to participate in the above study.

Parent's Name: _____

Parent's Signature _____

University of Texas- Pan American
Factors of Placement Decisions of Students with Learning Disabilities

Informed Consent Letter

9 de abril, 2004

Estimado Padre:

Yo soy maestra en Liberty Middle School en Pharr. También soy estudiante de Dr. JoAnn Mitchell en la Universidad de Texas- Pan Americana. Estoy haciendo un estudio para ver que determina las clases de estudiantes con problemas de aprendizaje en educación especial.

Permisión en este estudio me dará acceso al portafolio cumulativo de su hijo/a del distrito y a los datos de P.E.I.M.S. Su participación, y también la participación de su hijo/a, en este estudio es su decisión. Si Ud. o su hijo no quiere estar en el estudio o quiere retraer su permiso en cualquier momento. No habrá ningún tipo de consecuencia. No afectará a las notas o servicios de su hijo/a. Es posible que los resultados del estudio sean publicados, pero no se usará el nombre de su hijo/a.

No hay un beneficio directo para su hijo/a. Los posibles beneficios de estar en el estudio son dar más información sobre las decisiones de determinar clases de estudiantes con problemas de aprendizaje. El único riesgo en el estudio es que yo tendré acceso a datos personales de su hijo/a. Ni el nombre ni otra forma de identificación de su hijo/a estará en el estudio. Después del estudio todos los datos se guardarán en la oficina de Dr. Mitchell en UTPA. Las únicas personas con acceso a los datos seremos Dr. Mitchell y yo.

Si Ud. tiene preguntas sobre el estudio o la participación de su hijo/a en este estudio, por favor llámeme al 702-5826 o a Dr. JoAnn Mitchell al (956) 381-3466, ext.3465. Por favor devuelve esta carta en el sobre acompañando la carta.

Sinceramente,

April Yetsko

* * * * * * *Este estudio fue revisado y aprobado por el Comité de los Sujetos Humanos en la Universidad de Texas- Pan Americana. Si Ud. Tiene preguntas sobre su derecho en este estudio, o si Ud. Se siente que haya un riesgo, contacte al director del Comité de los Sujetos Humanos, Dr.Mark Granberry, al 956-292-7309 .

Yo doy permiso que mi hijo/a, _____, participa en el estudio mencionado arriba.

Yo **no doy** permiso que mi hijo/a, _____, participa en el estudio mencionado arriba.

Nombre del padre: _____

Firma del padre _____ (Fecha) _____

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - PAN AMERICAN

1201 West University Drive • Edinburg, Texas 78541-2999 • (956) 384-5004 Office • Fax (956) 381-2940

COPY

MEMORANDUM

TO: **April Yetsko**

FROM: **Dr. Mark Granberry**
Chair, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research

DATE: **April 19, 2004**

SUBJECT: **Protocol for "Factors of Placement Decisions of Students with Learning Disabilities" IRB #317**

The above referenced protocol has been:

_____ Approved (committee review)
_X___ Approved (expedited review)
_____ Conditionally approved (see remarks below)
_____ Exempt from IRB review
_____ Tabled for future consideration – re-submit with corrections **(submit 2 copies of your protocol)**
_____ ~~Disapproved (see remarks below)~~

by the Institutional Review Board Federal Wide Assurance Number (FWA 00000805).

As stipulated in the guidelines of the IRB, this protocol will be subject to annual review by the IRB and any deviations from the protocol or change in the title must be resubmitted to the Board.

For additional information you can contact the IRB University website at http://www.panam.edu/dept/sponpro/Policies/Policies.html

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY, YOU MUST FILL OUT THE ENCLOSED REPORT FORM

cc: **Dr. Wendy A. Lawrence-Fowler, AVPR.**
Dr. JoAnn Mitchell
Dr. Terry Overton

VITA

April Yetsko attended George Mason University as an undergraduate, graduating in 2001. She majored in Psychology and Spanish Literature. She is presently a student at the University of Texas-Pan American seeking her Masters degree in special education for the culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learner. Her intended date of graduation is 2005. April resides at 3021 Hummingbird Avenue, McAllen, Texas 78504. She is a special education teacher in a middle school.