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Career Planning and Counseling Strategies for Students with Mild Learning Disabilities

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**CAREER PLANNING AND COUNSELING STRATEGIES FOR
STUDENTS WITH MILD LEARNING DISABILITIES**

A Research Paper

**Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the
Department of STEM Education and Professional Studies
Old Dominion University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies**

By

Jeraldine Williams

Summer, 2012

APPROVAL PAGE

This research paper was prepared by Jeraldine Williams under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in SEPS 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies.

APPROVAL BY

Dr. John M. Ritz
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Counseling has long been an instrument for enhancing directions and providing guidance to individuals experiencing personal and life-altering decisions that impede their abilities to function successfully in everyday life. A conventional setting where life altering decisions are discussed and assessed on a daily basis is the high school counselor's office. Youth from the end of high school through their twenties are challenged with making many decisions regarding life, responsibility, education, and careers.

High school represents the final transition into adulthood. Students are exploring who they are, and what they will do when they graduate. They begin to evaluate their strengths, skills, and abilities for life. Career theorist, Donald Super, describes this stage (high school) of adolescence as a period of multidimensional self-concepts. Youth ages 15-24 are described as being in an "exploratory stage" of development (Super, 1990).

Traditionally, teachers, counselors, school administrators, and parents are instrumental in assisting students in finding their way. School counselors, in particular, play a pivotal role in helping to shape young lives by providing guidance, information, and encouragement. Counseling programs have become an integral part of a student's daily educational environment, and structured counseling can be beneficial to young adolescents as they set goals for the future. Some critics contend that not enough counseling is provided to students who are not planning to attend college and students with disabilities (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1995).

The American School of Counsel Association's National Model provides a framework for counseling and counselors. The American School of Counsel Association charges school counselors with providing academic, career, and personal/social interventions as a part of a comprehensive school counseling program used to meet the needs of all students. Under its School Counselor Performance Standard section, ASCA lists necessary school counselor competencies which include; school counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive, developmental, results-based counseling program (ASCA, 2011).

While high school counselors assume partnering and leadership roles and serve as advocates to all students, counselors are forced to recognize that not all students learn the same way, nor do students have the same interests or abilities. School counselors are called to serve an increasing number of special needs students as well as an increasing number of students with mild learning disabilities. Students with mild learning disabilities experience far greater challenges in readying themselves for the worlds of continuing education and life/work experience than non-disabled peers. In recognition of this gap, federal laws mandate that special educational and career programs are in place to meet the unique needs of these students.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities into functional career paths. Based on the challenges outlined above, this exploratory study is designed to determine what type of individual planning and

counseling strategies are used by local high school counselors to guide student with mild learning disabilities into functional career paths.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following research objectives were established to direct this research and to address the problem statement:

RO₁: Identify instructional plans used by counselors to enhance individualized career paths.

RO₂: Determine strategies used by counselors to aid students in exploring career paths and opportunities suited to their learning deficit.

RO₃: Assess collaborative counseling strategies used to complement realistic career planning.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Guidance and career emphasis has been linked to the development of secondary education, life, and work since the late 1800's (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). Through the ages, philosophers and scholars have recognized the importance of work and finding the right career. Sigmund Freud labeled work one of the cornerstones of our humanness (Schoulen, 2004). Frank Parsons, considered the father of career counseling, wrote about finding the "right" work, in his publication "Choosing a Vocation" (1909). Parson emphasized a relationship between a satisfying career and attaining harmonious balance in life. Donald Super, noted educator and career theorist, theorized and explained five different stages of career development in his life span, life space theory, and explained

that career development is a continuing process throughout life. Super's theory is relevant to this study because of the developmental stage perspective relative to the adolescent period, usually a time when most individuals are in high school.

Albert Bandura's personality theories include a social cognitive component, self-efficacy. It is very relevant to the school counselling field as self-efficacy influences academic achievement, learning, behaviour, motivation, and aspirations of young teens. Bandura's work provides a framework to aid school counsellors, parents, and students in understanding and changing behaviour to shape career/occupational choices and outcomes.

Historically, counselors have had difficulty describing and defining their roles to many. Due to the lack of a clear definition of professional counseling, much confusion has surrounded the role of a counselor (Romano, Paradise, & Green, 2009). Established career development perspectives, such as the ones mentioned earlier, provide a framework for counselors, educators, and psychologist to understand and implement career planning and development processes conducive to providing effective career guidance for both non-disabled and disabled students. Today high school counselors assume dual partnering and leadership roles in academic enhancement, career development, and advocacy to all students, including a growing number of students with mild learning disabilities.

According to the United States Department of Education (2007), the number of students with learning disabilities represents an increase of about one million students in the last ten years and that number continues to rise (Owens, Thomas, & Strong, 2003). Ensuring that learning disabled (LD) students have access to postsecondary education

opportunities is a key challenge at the secondary education level in order for learning disabled students to experience smooth transitions to life after high school. School counseling and career planning are essential to opening doors to postsecondary education and career opportunities for students with learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The National Occupational Information Committee (NOICC) (1994) recommends the adoption of an integrated approach to comprehensive career guidance and counseling (Cunanan, Esmeralda, & Maddy-Bernstein, 1995), and other federal legislation mandates that students with disabilities receive services to assist them in a smooth transition from high school to post-secondary life. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 emphasized career planning that facilitates smooth transition from school to work or further learning (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1995). The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006, referred to as Perkins IV, supports the need for special programs of study to enhance the relationship between aligned academics, technical content/skills relevance to attaining recognized credentials, or a degree and opportunities for postsecondary credits (NRCCT, 2008).

This study would provide information on counseling strategies and counseling interventions employed by high school counselors to support, guide, and empower students with learning disabilities to transition to postsecondary academics, life, and work pursuits. The results will also assist school personnel in identifying whether students with learning disabilities are attaining maximum equity and access to a mixture of educational and career development skills and experiences needed to succeed in current and future career opportunities. Finally, the results of this study will aid school systems in

assessing whether current counseling strategies used in guiding students with learning disabilities are aligned with theoretical practice and legislative mandates calling for comprehensive counseling and individualized career planning and development for students with learning disabilities.

LIMITATIONS

This research was limited to:

1. A small sample from one region in Southeast Virginia. The study population include one local high school each, in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, and Chesapeake.
2. The assessment period was the spring of academic school year 2012.
3. Guidance counselor(s) were surveyed who were assigned to students in 9th and 10th grade and who had been identified as serving students with a minor learning disability.

ASSUMPTIONS

There are factors in this study that are assumed to be constant and true. The assumptions are as follows:

1. Administrative staff and school counselor(s) at Booker T. High School, I.C. Norcom High School, Grassfield High School, and Princess Anne High School provided essential counseling information through some type of comprehensive counseling model.
2. School counselors identified and documented students with learning disabilities.
3. Students with learning disabilities experienced greater achievement through unique counseling and differentiated educational strategies.

4. School counselors documented postsecondary endeavors of disabled students.

PROCEDURES

This study is a cross-sectional research design in which a non-probability purposive sample was administered to the study population and descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data. The investigator requested and received permission from the appropriate school administrator at Booker T. High School, I.C. Norcom High School, Grassfield High School, and Princess Anne High School to conduct the study in conjunction with school counselors. Subsequently, the investigator designed and conducted a structured survey which was administered directly to participants online at each high school listed in this review. After the survey was completed, data were compiled and analyzed to determine individualized planning and counseling strategies used to aid in career planning for students with learning disabilities.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms will provide the reader relative meanings applicable to this study.

1. School counselor – a professional trained to help people with challenges that they face day to day.
2. Counseling – a helping relationship which focuses on the physiological healing, growth, change, and development of an individual (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012).
3. Career - the progress and actions taken by a person throughout a lifetime, especially those related to that person's occupations. A career is often composed of the jobs held, titles earned, and work accomplished over a long period of time, rather than just referring to one position (www.businessdictionary.com, 2012).

4. Learning disabilities (LD) - based on definition provided by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, “Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities” (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1990, para. 7).
5. Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Federal legislation introduced in 1975 and originally titled Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) and later renamed IDEA. IDEA mandates that every student receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.
6. Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) – a written statement to define a special education program designed for a handicapped child.
7. Section 504 – Part of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1973 which prohibits the discrimination of students with disabilities and mandates special accommodations for all children with disabilities and provision of a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.
8. Individualized Career Plan – an instrument used by counselors and others to help youth and adults monitor their career development (www.ericdigests.org, 2012).
9. School-To-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 – a program implemented to aid students with educational and employment skill development while in school.

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

Research shows that more students with disabilities are pursuing higher education than before, while the retention rates in secondary education among students

with disabilities is considerably lower than their peers. As the number of school children with learning disabilities continues to rise, high school counselors are challenged with developing individualized instruction and individualized career plans for each students. Some critics contend that not enough attention is paid to student not planning to go to college and students with disabilities (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1995). Research also shows that students with learning disabilities fare poorly in the labor market and often result being a statistic in poverty rates (Department of Education, 1999).

This study describes the counseling preparedness of counselors at Booker T. High School, I.C. Norcom High School, Grassfield High School, and Princess Anne High School, and the ability to transition students with learning disabilities to postsecondary educational environments and appropriate career pathways and other adult life experiences.

Chapter II presented a review of literature related to this study, inclusive of the following topics: the framework of career counseling, current school guidance setting, counseling issues, and recommended counseling strategies in career education and career choice development. Chapter III outlines the methods and procedures used to collect the data. Chapter IV presented the findings for the study, and Chapter V provides the reader a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The problem goal of this study was to determine individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities into functional career paths. This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to promoting counseling and career guidance in order to ensure successful transition of non-disabled individuals compared to research on transitioning special needs and mild learning disabled students to postsecondary life or work. More research on career education and career development of disabled individuals began to appear in the 20th and 21st centuries, and it continues to grow. A review of the literature was conducted for Chapter II and information was collected from a variety of sources. Several themes emerged from the survey of the literature which include, framework of career counseling, current school guidance setting, counseling perceptions, and career education and career development. After the survey of literature is presented, a summary of the literature is provided, followed by a lead into the next chapter.

Information gathered included data on the history of career counseling, current school guidance environment, current school counseling issues, federal mandates for educating and transitioning special needs students to life and work environments, and recommended counseling strategies. However, information on counseling protocol for guiding learning disabled students and connecting education to career opportunities and career paths is the focus of the data collection.

FRAMEWORK OF CAREER COUNSELING

To understand and appreciate counseling as it is today, it is important to reflect back. In the late 1800's, education in the United States was considered reading and writing and command of these two fields were considered key components to achieving pious living (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). Education about life, learning about jobs, relationships, and community citizenship were primary concerns (Hine, 1999) considered to be concepts for which the family was responsible for developing. Organized education was more common at the elementary level than at the adolescent level mainly because older children went to work to help support the family (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012).

With the Industrial Revolution came the need for higher level skills. Skill development began to be articulated at the high school level, and the intent was to give a child an education that fit him or her for active life whether mercantile or mechanical (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). Along with the Industrial Revolution came social ills, including: poverty, ethnic slums, corruption, and moral decay. These social issues brought about a need for suitable interventions to address social reform. Schools were seen as the proper environment to introduce instruction about possible social remedies (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012), which meant that there was a need for someone to assume this task.

The emergence of school counseling, "known as vocational guidance", in the early 1900's is attributed to two individuals, Jesse B. Davis, who began a guidance program in his English composition class to help students develop character, avoid problem behavior, and relate vocational interests to curriculum subjects (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012), and Frank Parson, considered the father of guidance. Parson called for

vocational guidance to be administered by “trained” experts and be offered in all public high schools (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012).

Meeting the challenge posed by Parson often meant borrowing vocational counselors from school teaching staff. In addition to regular teaching responsibilities, vocational tasks assigned to the counselor included:

1. Gathering and maintaining occupational information
2. Arranging and presenting lessons in occupations
3. Encouraging teachers to connect curriculums to vocations
4. Using cumulative records and intelligence test to advise children
5. Encouraging students to stay in school
6. Coordinating parental conferences

As vocational guidance in schools grew, more emphasis was placed on secondary schools as preparatory to transitioning students to college and becoming productive citizens. The focus was career outcomes resulting from directive guidance and activities to guarantee desired outcomes (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). In the mid to late 1900’s society changed as a result of the great depression and World War II and counseling took a new direction. Problem centered advice giving counseling was minimized and more focus was placed on cognitive, behavioral, and psychological sensitivities involved in client-centered relationships as educators and theorist began to develop many new counseling theories. As a result of the American School of Counselor Association being formed in 1950, school counselors and guidance counselors began to experience greater accountability of services and counseling credentials (education.state.university.com,

2012). Counseling standards were established as national educational standards for special education improvement began to increase.

Exploration and research on career developments continue to evolve as scholars and career theorist examined many aspects of careers and how they related to children as they developed. A review of literature revealed that exploration and research in counseling and career development strategies and techniques continues to evolve as scholars and career theorist examine different aspects of the process: social diversity, technology, and the behaviors and reactions of the individuals affected by it. The literature also supports the theory that career development efforts have a long-term effect on aiding student transition to adulthood (National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, 2008).

CURRENT SCHOOL GUIDANCE SETTING

A review of literature shows that the current role of the school counselor has changed. Unlike the past, school counseling now involves more than course scheduling, college placement, and academic record-keeping. The role of the school counselor is reactive to state, national, and world happenings relative to education and social trends (Schmidt, 2003).

Richard Parson, a professor in the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, provides a worthy description of the current counseling environment in his introduction to “Thinking and Acting Like A Solution Focused School Counselor” (Parson, 2009). Parson described an environment where the severity and complexity of problems being presented to today’s counselors as varied, including: different forms of depression, debilitating anxieties, energy draining

obsessions, damaged self-concepts, and self-destructive behaviors counselors (Parson, 2009). The task of responding to these complex issues requires that counselors be adequately prepared to intervene.

While trained to be good listeners, to respect confidentiality, and to advocate for the student, counselors must develop an understanding of what the problem is before they can formulate helping strategies to engage multiple students experiencing different situations throughout the day. They must be able to decipher the real story embedded in the student's mind and then take action (Parson, 2009). Counseling and guiding adolescents often entail considerable problem-centered, crisis oriented matters, as adolescents deal with many pressing concerns including: peer pressure, dropout, teen suicide, pregnancy, drug use, and sexual issues (Schmidt, 2003). Observing, regulating, and modeling environment and behavior is a counseling concern.

In addition to the addressing common everyday adolescent issues and aiding in remediation of the problem, counselors are called upon to provide career education and career guidance services to a larger number of non-traditional students, including students with mild learning disabilities.

According to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1990), learning disability is: "the general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to some type of central nervous system dysfunction" (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1990, para. 7).

Typical learning disabilities include dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. Dyslexia refers to reading and language based learning disability. Dyscalculia refers to mathematical deficiencies, and Dysgraphia refers to writing and fine motor skill deficiencies. Learning disabled (LD) students usually fall into three categories: (a) those labeled gifted/exceptional; (b) average/mild LD, and (c) severe LD with cognitive deficiencies. Average or mild LD students represent the largest population of overall students with learning disabilities. Many learning disabilities continue through adolescent and adulthood. Secondary level assessment of LD students should provide a realistic view of their strengths and weaknesses, and how they can impact their academic achievement, performance, and choice of careers as they transition throughout life, and not just during the secondary school years (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2004).

The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSEER)'s National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) which documented adolescents transitioning from secondary school to adult roles reported that postsecondary institutions are experiencing a significant increase in the number of student enrollees with learning disabilities. The report attributes the enrollment increase to the progressive knowledge based economy where education is critical. Enrollment for the general population has always been prevalent. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2002), funder of the NLTS2 study, the average individual with a college degree earns more than an individual with only a high school diploma. Ensuring that students with learning disabilities have access and fully participate in postsecondary education is the new challenge of secondary education and transitioning (NCSEER, 2010).

Federal legislation mandates that children with learning disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. The 1990 American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all call for special education and access to services and accommodations for the learning disabled (LD) child. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which requires that all students reach reading and math proficiency by 2014, also aligns with other legislation regarding the inclusion and participation of students with learning disabilities. Even though some of NCLB's provisions are counter to IDEA regulation (e.g., assessment standards and adequate yearly progress (AYP) ratings), NCLB has had a positive influence on special education because of its accountability requirement for the performance of learning disabled students. Most LD students are held to the normal grading standards although special accommodations, modifications, or alternate assessments may be needed to gauge true student achievement (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). Alignment of counseling responsibilities and interceptive strategies is important to ensuring that students receive the educational skills needed to transition to the postsecondary stage of life and work. School counselors are often the only individual in a position to fairly advocate for the student.

COUNSELING PERCEPTIONS

A review of the literature revealed differences in perception of the guidance counselors' role, failure on the part of counselors to properly diagnose students with learning disabilities, and faulty engagement of students in planning and services critical

to their appropriate career education, and development of occupational skills needed to transition into appropriate career paths after high school.

Parents, counselors, administrators, and the community share a consensus that program development, counseling, student appraisal, educational and occupational planning, referral, placement, parent involvement, consultation among staff, research, and public relations have a place in services provided to students. These functions are services identified as part of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2011).

Teachers view the function of the school counselor as individual counseling, providing career information, administering and interpreting tests, college advising, and group counseling and guidance. Secondary counselors acknowledged the importance of individual personal counseling, academic counseling, group counseling, and career planning as the four most important functions of counseling services. The student perception of counseling services rank career counseling and college information, as the most important order for counseling services, yet students are often unprepared for succeeding in postsecondary and workplace settings in the end (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986).

In the literature review, consideration of proper diagnosis and provisions of special accommodations for special needs (learning disabled) students was assessed. One study in particular that investigated this concern was conducted by the Canadian government. The Ontario government established a task force in 1997, the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOFT), to collect and analyze data regarding the most effective ways to improve the transition of learning disabled students to postsecondary schools and how to best identify what support, services, and accommodations best aided

learning disabled students (Harrison, Larochette, & Nichols, 2007). The Ontario study aimed at improving the postsecondary experience of learning disabled students. The study included 12,042 students from six Canadian colleges and four Canadian universities followed over a four-year period to evaluate personal and academic experience prior to attending a postsecondary institution as well as their progress in the pilot program (Harrison et al., 2007). Nine hundred and sixty-nine students, diagnosed as LD after secondary school, responded to a specially designed intake questionnaire. Results from the study revealed deficiencies in secondary experience and a lack of access to special education. Most of the students had never been formally diagnosed as having a learning disability, half had received little or no special education in primary or secondary school, one third had repeated a grade and many reported low self-esteem as a result of their learning disability (Harrison et al., 2007). One of the limitations to the research was that all of the data gathered relied on self-report and subjective opinion of experiences (Harrison et al., 2007).

Regarding student involvement and engagement, a literature review of the K-12 setting revealed that there is some concern as to whether development efforts in high school are “hit or miss” efforts rather than incorporating comprehensive guidance and career planning activities particularly for students considered special needs or at risk. Wimberly and Noeth (2005) reported on a study conducted by ACT, which examined issues related to programming, class selection, and support systems (family, friend, school personnel) in education planning and decision making. Findings from the study indicated a discrepancy between career guidance, program choices, and actual engagement in planning activities that result in poor implementation of set goals.

CAREER EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 was established and emphasized the importance of career planning that facilitates smooth transition from school to work or further learning. As student advocates, school counselors collaborate with teachers, school administrators, colleagues, students, parents, and community experts to evaluate student abilities, interest, talents, and personality in order to develop and assess realistic academic and career goals for students. Counselors use interviews, counseling sessions, interests, and aptitude assessment test to evaluate and counsel students. Table 1 recaps typical career assessments strategies.

Table 1

Typical Career Assessments

Type of Assessment	Definition
Achieve	Current levels of performance, usually on cognitive skills found in school such as reading and mathematics ability.
Interests	In-depth analysis of individual patterns of occupational likes and dislikes (preferences) resulting in (a) scores linked to specific occupations, or (b) score profiles in occupational areas. Designed to suggest current areas of preferences (likes) that can open a variety of options for exploration and experience.
Aptitudes	Abilities, the readiness or capacity to learn. An aptitude test provides information about current performance and predicts success on performance in future.
Temperament	Worker style preferences (e.g., preference to work with data, people, or things)
Learning styles	Preferred method(s) of receiving and processing information and experiences.
Background information	Factors that influence work performance

	(e.g., type of disability).
Work characteristics	Traits, attitudes, employability skills, work habits, and social (communication) skills.
Vocational/occupational skills	Assessment of performance on actual job skills either as work samples or on-the-job evaluation.
Functional life skills	Independent living skills in a variety of areas such as communication, transportation, self-care, money and budgeting recreation and leisure activities, and employment.

Source: Clark (1996); Gottfredson (1986); Herr & Cramer (1996); Kapes, Mastie, & Whitfed (1994); Klein, Wheaton, & Wilson (1997); Rothenbacher & Leconte (1990).

Career assessment and successful transition involves consideration of students' current level of performance in cognitive skills, an analysis of individual occupational interest, the student's ability and readiness to learn, differentiated learning style, work characteristic skills, and occupational and interpersonal skills (Rojewski, 2002). Kapes and Vacha-Haase (1994) identified 86 career assessment instruments appropriate for individuals with disabilities. The Employment Barrier identification Scale (EBIS) was the only instrument designed specifically for individuals with disabilities (Rojewski, 2002). Career assessment is increasingly important to adolescents and young adults, particularly adolescents with mild learning disabilities (Rojewski, 2002). Table 2 shows some selected instruments considered appropriate for individuals with mild learning disabilities.

Table 2

Career Assessment Instruments Considered Appropriate for Individuals with Mild LD

	Achievement	Aptitude	Interests	Work Values	Career Development	Personality
Apticom	X	X	X			
Career Ability Placement Survey		X				

Table 2 - continued

Career Assessment Instruments Considered Appropriate for Individuals with Mild LD

	Achievement	Aptitude	Interests	Work Values	Career Development	Personality
Career Occupational Preference System			X			
Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)		X				
McCarron-Dial System (MDS)		X				X
Occupational Aptitude Survey & Interest Survey (OASIS)		X	X			
Pictorial Inventory of Careers (PIC)			X			
Prevocational Assessment Screen (PAS) Reading-Free Vocational Interest Inventory		X				
Social & Prevocational Information Battery	X				X	
Talent Assessment Program (TAP)		X				
Wide Range Interest-Opinion Test			X			
Center for Innovative Teaching Experiences Learning Styles Inventory						X
Life-Centered Career Education Battery	X	X	X	X		X
Self-Directed Search Transition Planning Inventory			X			
Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery	X	X	X			X
Career Exploration Program	X	X	X			

To address cognitive development, counselors devise individual and group strategies and interventions that are practical, applicable, and specific to the learning disabled population. The concept of individual student planning as a component of school guidance and counseling emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Kalchik & Oertle, 2011). Like the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) mandated in 1975 by IDEA to support the educational progress of learning disabled students, the Individual Career Plan (ICP) incorporates four basic characteristics: (1) comprehensive to accommodate multiple life roles, (2) developmental allowing flexibility to build upon and with maturation, (3) ICP's are person-centered and person directed, and (4) ICP plans are competency based focusing on known and potential skills. According to Gysbers (1983), the Individualized Career Plan is both a tool and a procedure which can be used individually or with others. An ICP is characteristic of a comprehensive, developmental, person-centered, and competency based plan (Eric Digest No.71, 1988). The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) introduced another individual student plan, the Individual Learning Plan (ILP), designed to support K-12 instruction (Kalchik & Oertle, 2011). Should neither of the fore mentioned plans be suitable to a given student situation, the Section 504 would likely apply as long as the student was deemed disabled.

One of the most comprehensive efforts taken towards rationalizing individualization of education involved a project called Program of Learning in Accordance with Needs (PLAN), an outgrowth of findings undertaken in the largest national assessment of the abilities, interests, and aspirations of American youth sampled

under the 1960 Talent Project which consisted of a nationally representative sample of over 400,000 high school youth (Dunn, 1972). Review of PLAN focused on the guidance and career components. The guidance component of PLAN identified components necessary to a comprehensive guidance system: (1) the facilitation of normal growth and development in all or at least a majority of students, (2) the prevention of abnormal or atypical problem development in children, and (3) assuming problems already existed, differential diagnosis of the problem and development of a program to improve those problems (Dunn, 1972). This study supports the importance of individual career planning. It is another career assessment tool for helping students to identify individual occupational interests and goals.

The National Occupational Information Committee (NOICC) (1994) recommends the adoption of an integrated approach to comprehensive career guidance and counseling (Cunanan & Bernstein, 1995). In a report on Improving Student Awareness through a Variety of Strategies, Hoyt (1995) explained the purpose of career education as a promoter for change in people, not a program add on, rather it focuses on jobs and being able to provide people with employability skills rather than specific occupational job skills (Benning, Bergt, & Sausaman, 2003).

Occupational career planning and counseling strategies include: outreach, instruction, student assessment, parental involvement, intra-interagency collaboration, Individual Career Plan (ICP) implementation, and ICP updates (Cunanan & Bernstein, 1995). Students should understand the connection between education and work. This includes engulfing the concept of firsthand knowledge of basic work skills through experiential learning, development of productive work habits, the use of private sector

resources to promote positive work values, and reduced occupational bias and stereotyping skills (Benning, Bergt, & Sausaman, 2003). The following study provided some insight on strategies for improving occupational education.

A review of the career component under the Program of Learning in Accordance with Needs (PLAN) study revealed some student strategies for occupational enhancement that may be useful to current counseling professionals. PLAN's career component at the secondary level stressed means of occupational information seeking and exploratory activities outside of school. Information seeking included: (1) observing films; (2) reading occupational text literature and pamphlets; (3) listening to audio presentation of occupations; (4) talking to teachers, counselors, and visiting speakers; (5) writing letters to admission offices at different schools; and (6) exploratory activities outside of school including : (1) visiting places of employment to observe on-the-job workers; (2) college campuses and/or vocational training schools; (3) looking into work-study opportunities; (4) interviewing for part-time or summer jobs, and (5) exploring part-time non-paying work opportunities (Dunn, 1992). Cognitive development and occupational education are important, as is development of interpersonal skills.

In additional to special and individualized instruction, research has demonstrated that social skills and behavioral habits have an impact on the academic success of students with learning disabilities. Review of a study conducted by faculty at the University of Memphis provided data describing teacher counselor's perceptions regarding collaboration endeavors. Social and Educational Competency (SEC) education was implemented as part of this study. Social and Emotional Competency (SEC) education is a model that encourages collaborative planning, teaching, and counseling

between teachers and counselors to promote social and emotional competency needed for a nurturing environment (Marlow, Bloss, & Bloss, 2000). The study concluded that Social and Emotional Competency (SEC) integration provided practical assistance to both teachers and counselors (Marlow, Bloss, & Bloss, 2000). Even though the population of the study consisted of elementary and middle school students, the findings were relevant to this study as well. Counselors must consider interpersonal skills and habits of individual students in order to encourage engagement.

SUMMARY

High school represents the final transition period into adulthood. High school students, young adult's ages 14 to 24 years, are representative of this life-span, life-space exploration stage, characterized by pursuing opportunities to find careers through education and work experiences. They begin to evaluate their strengths, skills, and abilities for life. School counselors are particularly important during this period. A counselor's work is distinguished from that of other school professionals in that counselors attend to the development stages of student growth. School counselors assist learning disabled students with academic achievement, personal and social development, and well as career development and planning (Owen, Thomas, & Strong, 2011).

Chapter II provides literature on the framework of career counseling relative to transitioning young adolescents from secondary to postsecondary education, work, and life. Information on the multi-layered role of the school counselor and the changing counseling environment and clientele that counselor have to serve was described. The literature provides a generic description for learning disabled individuals, shared literature on effective ways to support smooth transition of learning disabled students to postsecondary settings, and responsible roles and social behavior conducive to individual

independence and good citizenry. Consensually, the literature revealed that school counselors are responsible for the implementation of comprehensive programs to promote student achievement distinguished by the developmental components addressed as part of an overall transitional plan for students. Chapter III delineates the research methodology used to carry out this research project. A structured survey was used to collect data from Booker T. High School, I.C. Norcom High School, Grassfield High School, and Princess Anne High School counselors. Chapter IV presented the reader the data collected for the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A cross-sectional research design and non-probability purposive sampling technique were used to determine individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school guidance counselors to aid 9th and 10th grade students diagnosed with a learning disability in exploring realistic career paths. This chapter will present the population for the study, instrumentation, data collection techniques, and the procedures for analyzing the data.

POPULATION

Subjects for this study consisted of twenty-four guidance and career counselors from four schools which include, Booker T. High School, I.C. Norcom High School, Grassfield High School, and Princess Anne High School. The subjects were assigned to service students identified as learning disabled student, and students in either the 9th or 10th grade level. The school administrator/principal of each school agreed to provide names of a select group of career/guidance counselors assigned to counsel students with mild learning disabilities at random. From the listing, a total of twenty-four counselors were randomly selected to participate in this exploratory study.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

Based on the review of the literature, a twenty-question survey was developed to address the research objectives established for this study. The survey contained both opened-ended and closed-ended questions that allowed respondents multiple response options for each question related to planning for students with mild disabilities: strongly

disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, or strongly agree. Some questions allowed for participant comment. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix A.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Research data for this study was collected through a survey delivered and administered through Survey Monkey. The survey was available to each participant for completion on June 28, 2012. Respondents were provided a cover letter which explained the purpose of the study, advised that their participation was completely voluntary and that the responses were anonymous, and would be held in confidence. The participants were also informed that the finding would be reported as aggregate data. Participants were also advised of the incentive for participation, and the importance of timely feedback. Participants were given a ten day time frame as the required response time to complete and return the survey. A Survey Monkey reminder email was sent each participant, at the end of the fifth day, as a reminder to the participant of the response deadline. At the end of the ten day period the researcher collected and analyzed the data. See Appendix B for a copy of the cover letter.

DATA ANALYSIS

After the surveys were collected, the data was organized and tabulated reflective of frequency and the median of responses from the population group.

SUMMARY

The chapter outlined the sample population, instrument design, methods for collecting data, and how data were analyzed statistically. The population sample described as high school career counselors consisted of a random sample of twenty-four counselors selected from Booker T. High School, I.C. Norcom High School, Grassfield

High School, and Princess Anne High School. A survey was administered to this sample group of high school career and guidance counselors to assess the use of individual planning and counseling strategies used to guide learning disabled students. The instrument used for collecting data was detailed in this chapter. Data collected from the surveys will be reported in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results from the descriptive analysis. The purpose of this study was to determine counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities in developing and pursuing functional career paths after high school. The study was guided by the following research objectives:

RO₁: Identify instructional plans utilized by counselors to structure individualized educational guidance.

RO₂: Determine strategies used by counselors to aid students explore career paths suited to his or her cognition, behavior, and skill sets.

RO₃: Assess collaborative counseling strategies used to complement realistic career planning.

The findings are based on data collected from a twenty question survey distributed to participants through Survey Monkey. The survey consisted of questions aimed at answering the research goals. This attitudinal survey was made up of different types of questions, including: five point Likert scale questions (Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, and Undecided), True/false format questions, and multiple response questions. Data are reported as frequencies, percentages, and median where appropriate. The population size was 24 high school career/guidance counselors at local

high schools in Southeastern Virginia who were asked twenty questions. Out of twenty-four survey invitations, seven participants responded, resulting in a 29% response rate.

RESULTS

The survey instrument addressed the three research objectives established to guide this study. The twenty question survey was divided into three sections: Individualized Student Planning Strategies for LD Students (Questions 1-3), Counseling Strategies Used to Explore Career Paths (Questions 4-15), and Collaborative career strategies (Questions 16-20). Following are the findings for each of the research objectives.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PLANNING

Question 1: Are school guidance and career counselors were familiar with and interact with multiple individualized student plans? The data suggest that all of the respondents were familiar with and interacted with one or more individual student plans and Section 504. Nearly two-thirds (71.4%) were familiar with Individual Career Plan (ICP), followed by 43% who were familiar with the Individual Learning Plan (ILP), and 29% indicated familiarity with other student plans. This indicates that local guidance and career counselors use individualized student plans for student development in LD students.

Question 2: Are ICP's advocated for students diagnosed with mild learning disabilities? Slightly, more than half the respondents indicated that ICP's are advocated for students diagnosed with mild learning disabilities. However, 43% of the respondents indicated that ICP's are not advocated for students diagnosed with mild learning

disabilities. The median score for this question was 4. This indicated that the average respondent agreed that ICP's were advocated for LD students by their school.

Question 3: Is there an Individualized Career Plan in place for students with mid learning disabilities at your school? Nearly all respondents (86%) disagreed with this statement; "no individualized Career Plan is in place for students with mid learning disabilities at my school"; 14% of the respondents agreed with this statement. Refer to Table 3.

Table 3

Individualized Student Planning Strategies for LD Students

Question 1	Individual Education Plan (IEP)	Individual Learning Plan(ILP)	Section 504	Individual Career Plan (ICP)	Other
At my school guidance and career counselors are familiar with and interact with multiple individualized student plans:	7 100%	3 42.9%	7 100%	5 71.4%	2 28.6%
Question 2	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
At my school individual career plans are advocated for students diagnosed with mild learning disabilities.	1 14.3%	3 42.9%	0 0%	3 42.9%	0 0%
Question 3	True	False			
Percentile	14.3%	85.7%			
No individual career plan is in place for students with learning disabilities at my school.	1	6			

COUNSELING STRATEGIES TO EXPLORE CAREER PATHS

Question 4: Do guidance and career counselors provide social and interpersonal counseling to learning disabled students? More than half the respondents agreed that guidance and career counselors provide social and interpersonal counseling to learning disabled students. Moreover, 14% strongly agreed that counselors provided social and interpersonal counseling to LD students, 43% agreed, and 43% disagreed. The median score for this question was 4.

Question 5: Are combined individual plans used to enhance academic and career growth and development for the learning disabled student? This question produced mixed results, 57% of the respondents stated that combined individual plans are used to enhance academic and career development for the learning disabled student, while 43% noted that the combined plans are not used at their school.

Question 6: Do career counselors collaborate with teachers on instruction and intervention in order to connect education to work for the learning disabled student? More than half of the respondents (57%) stated that guidance and career counselors do not collaborate with teachers on instruction and invention for the learning disabled students. The data also reveal that 28% strongly agreed that counselors and teachers collaborated on instruction and intervention to connect education and work for LD students, and 14 % agreed. The median score for this question was 2. These results suggest that a minimal support is provided to connect education to work for the learning disabled students.

Question 7: Do career counselors use standardized batteries of tests to assess individual patterns of occupational interest in LD students in order to support individualized career planning? Slightly more than half of the respondents reported that their school used a standardized battery of tests to determine patterns of occupational interest for students with learning disabilities, while the other 43% of the respondents noted that their school did not use standardized tests to determine the student's occupational desires. These results indicate that most schools use standardized tests to access individual occupational interests for students with learning disabilities.

Question 8: Does your school emphasize maximum achievement and success for students with learning disabilities? Eighty-six percent of respondents noted that their school emphasizes maximum achievement and success for LD students; and 14% responded that their school did not. These results suggest that the majority of the schools emphasized achievement and success for LD students.

Question 9: Which of the following career assessment instruments are considered appropriate for individuals with mild learning disabilities are you knowledgeable of? Respondents were asked which of the following instruments they were knowledgeable of: Career Ability Placement Survey, Life Centered Career Education Battery, Transition Placement Inventory, Career Maturity Inventory, and to identify any other instruments not mentioned. Both the Career Ability Placement Survey and Transition Planning Inventory were the most known instruments among the respondents. The Life Centered Career Education Battery and other assessment instruments identified by the respondents were the next popular response, approximately 29% respectively, followed by 14% of the respondents being familiar with the Career Maturity Inventory. These results indicate

that most guidance and career counselors tend to be knowledgeable about appropriate career assessment instruments for LD students.

Question 10: Do you maintain current occupational and labor market information resources for LD students? Forty-three percent stated that their school maintained current occupational and labor market resources for LD students, 29% were not sure, and 29% noted that their school did not maintain current occupational and labor market resources for LD students. The median score for this question was 3. While close to half of the schools maintained resources, these data suggest that nearly a third of the schools do not maintain current occupational and labor market resources.

Question 11: Do you use current technology based career development tools, including computer assisted career guidance and information systems to enhance career awareness for learning disabled students? Slightly more than half of the respondents stated they use current technology based career development tools. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 29% agreed; and 43% disagreed. The median score of this question was 4. These results indicate that most guidance and career counselor use current technology to improve career awareness for the learning disabled.

Question 12: Which of the following exploratory activities does your school participate in outside of the school setting? All of the schools visited college campuses, while two-thirds (71%) participated in observance of on-the-job workers; slightly more than half (57%) participated in work-study opportunities; and close to one-third (29%) visited vocational training facilities. These results suggest that the school systems

provided numerous different types of participatory opportunities for students with learning disabilities to explore their career options.

Question 13: Do career counselors provide individual and group self-efficacy counseling for LD students? Approximately forty-five percent of the respondents agreed and disagreed that their school provided individual and group self-efficacy counseling (respectively), while 14% of respondents were not certain. The median score for this question was 3. Results are mixed about individual and group self-efficacy counseling for LD students in relationship to advocating ownership and acceptance of their individual disability.

Question 14: Do you remain current on topics related to special needs students and issues relative to career transitioning LD students? Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that they remain current on topics related to special needs students and issues relative to career transitioning LD students. For example 29% of the population strongly agreed that they remain current on topics related to career transitioning of LD students; 29% agreed; and 43% disagreed. The median score for this question was 4.

Question 15: Does a comprehensive person centered counseling approach moves students with learning disability toward self-actualization and provides greater potential human growth and development, personally, socially, and culturally? All of the respondents agreed that a comprehensive person centered counseling approach moves students with learning disability toward self-actualization and provides greater potential human growth and development, personally, socially, and culturally. Specifically, 14% of

the population strongly agreed with the statement, and the other 86% agreed. Table 4 shows individual question responses.

Table 4

Counseling Strategies to Explore Career Paths

Question 4	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
Career counselors at my school provide social and inter-personal counseling to learning disabled students.	14.3% 1	42.9% 3	0% 0	42.9% 3	0% 0
Question 5	True	False			
At my school combined individual plans are used to enhance academic and career growth and development for the learning disabled student.	57.1% 4	42.9% 3			
Question 6	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
At my school career counselors collaborate with teachers on instruction and intervention in order to connect education to work for the learning disabled student.	28.6% 2	14.3% 1	0% 0	57.1% 4	0% 0
Question 7	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
In order to support individualized career planning, career counselors at my school use standardized battery test to assess individual patterns of occupational interest of students with LD.	14.3% 1	42.9% 3	0% 0	42.9% 3	0% 0

Table Continued

Question 8	True	False			
My school emphasized maximum achievement and success for students with learning disabilities.	85.7% 6	14.3% 3			
Question 9	Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS)	Life Centered Career Education Battery	Transition Planning Inventory	Career Maturity Inventory	Other
I am knowledgeable of the following career assessment instruments considered appropriate for individuals with mild learning disabilities.	57.1% 4	28.6% 2	57.1% 4	14.3% 1	28.6% 2
Question 10	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
My school maintains current occupational and labor market information resources for students with mild LD.	0% 0	42.9% 3	28.6% 2	28.6% 2	0% 0
Question 11	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
Career counselors at my school use current technology based career development tools, including computer assisted career guidance and information systems to help broaden career awareness for LD students.	28.6% 2	28.6% 2	0% 0	42.9% 3	0% 0

Table 4 Continued

Question 12	Observance of on-the-job workers	Visiting college campus	Visiting vocational training facilities	Participating in work-study opportunities	
My school participates in exploratory activities outside of the school including.	71.4% 5	100% 7	28.6% 2	57.1% 4	
Question 13	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
Career counselors at my school provide individual and group self-efficacy counseling sessions for learning disabled students in order to advocate ownership and acceptance of their individual	14.3% 1	28.6% 2	0% 0	28.6% 2	14.3% 1
Question 14	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Scale	5	4	3	2	1
Career counselors at my school remain current on topics related to special needs students and issues relative to career transitioning of students with learning disabilities.	28.6% 2	28.6% 2	0% 0	42.9% 3	0% 0

Table 4 Continued

Question 15	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Scale	5	4	3	2	1
15. A comprehensive person centered counseling approach moves students with learning disability toward self-actualization and provides greater potential human growth and development, personally, socially, and culturally.	14.3% 1	85.7% 6	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0

COLLABORATIVE COUNSELING STRATEGIES

Question 16: Do career counselors at your school exert a high degree of collaborative efforts to organize community involvement activities to support student needs of LD students? More than half of the respondents indicated that career counselors at their school exerted a high degree of effort to organize community involvement activities to support the needs of LD students. Here, 14% of the sample population strongly agreed that counselors at their school exerted a high degree of collaborative efforts to organize community activities to support student needs of LD students; 43% agreed; 29% disagreed; and 14% strongly disagreed. The median score for this question was 4.

Question 17: Do career counselors advocate for students to navigate paths to progressive and productive roles in the work place? The data reveal that slightly more

than half (57%) of the career counselors advocate on behalf of the students with learning disabilities to navigate paths to progressive and productive roles in the work place, while 43% of the career counselors do not.

Question 18: Do counselors maintain updated records on family backgrounds and work with parents to meet each child's special needs? The results indicate that 57% of the counselors maintain updated records on family and parents of LD student, while 43% do not.

Question 19: Are regular meetings, activities, and services coordinated between parents, teachers, and counselors to allow feedback to assist students in monitoring career development and directing academic achievement and personal growth for the learning disabled student. Close to two-thirds (71%) of the respondents noted that regular meetings, activities, and services are coordinated between parents, teachers, and counselors to allow feedback to assist LD students in career development, academic achievement, and personal growth; 29% stated that there was no regular meetings. These findings indicate that most guidance and career counselors participate in various outside collaborative efforts.

Question 20: Do career counselors at your school currently participate in developing specific individualized career plans for each learning disabled student? The results reveal that less than one third of the career counselors (29%) do not participate in developing specific individual career plans for each LD student, and 71% do not.

Table 5

Collaborative Counseling Strategies Used in Career Development of LD Students

Question 16	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Score	5	4	3	2	1
16. Career counselors at my school exert a high degree of collaborative efforts to organize community involvement activities to support student needs of the learning disabled student.	14.3% 1	42.9% 3	0% 0	28.6% 2	14.3% 1
Question 17	True	False			
Career counselors advocate for students to navigate paths to progressive and productive roles in the work place.	57.1% 4	42.9% 3			
Question 18	True				
Counselors maintain updated records on family backgrounds and work with parents to meet each child's special needs.	57.1% 4	42.9% 3			
Question 19	True	False			
Regular meetings, activities, and services are coordinated between parents, teachers, and counselors to allow feedback to assist students in monitoring and career development, and directing the academic achievement, personal growth for the learning disabled student.	71.4% 5	28.6% 2			
Question 20	True	False			
Career counselors at my school currently participate in developing specific individualized career plans for each learning disabled student.	28.6% 2	71.4% 5			

SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings from the survey of high school career guidance counselors in the local Tidewater area. The data collected were used to determine individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities into functional career paths. Data were collected from seven out of 24 career/guidance counselors surveyed, resulting in a 29% response rate. The next chapter presents a discussion of the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the research findings, followed by the conclusions, and then recommendations for future research. Recommendations for implementing these findings and ideas for further research are presented.

SUMMARY

This study was designed to determine individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities into functional career paths. The following research objectives were established to direct this study:

RO₁: Identify instructional plans utilized by counselor to structure individualized educational guidance.

RO₂: Determine strategies used by counselors to aid students explore career paths suited to his or her cognition, behavior, and skill sets.

RO₃: Assess collaborative counseling strategies used to complement realistic career planning.

A review of literature indicated that high school career/guidance counselors are called to serve an increasing number of special needs and learning disabled students. As these numbers continue to rise, high school counselors are challenged with developing special individualized guidance and career planning strategies. There is a need for a study

in this area because LD students tend to encounter greater challenges in mapping out suitable career paths. The limiting factors of the study included: 1) only counselors from one local high school from Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, and Chesapeake were inclusive in the study, 2) the assessment period was limited to the summer of academic school year 2012, and 3) guidance counselor(s) were assigned to students in 9th and 10th grade who were identified as students with a minor learning disability. In an effort to determine the types of individual planning and counseling strategies used to guide career aspirations of local LD students, a counseling strategies survey was constructed. Data were collected from a population of 24 counselors resulting in a 29% response rate. The instrument used was a twenty question attitudinal survey that asked counselors questions to identify individualized plans used by counselors to enhance career develop, assess different types of counseling strategies used, and identify collaborative counseling strategies. Based on these findings, the researcher was able to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to determine individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities, into functional career paths.

RO₁: Identify instructional plans utilized by counselor to structure individualized educational guidance. Feedback from the local high school guidance and career counselors revealed that the schools used a variety of counseling strategies to support career development for LD students including. All respondents were familiar with at

least two different types of individualized plans, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Section 504. Seventy-one percent were familiar with the Individual Career Plan (ICP), and 43% were familiar with the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). However, half of the counselors do not collaborate with the school teachers regarding instruction and appropriate interventions to assist students with learning disabilities to help with their career development. Another area of concern was that approximately one-third of the counselors were not abreast of current labor market information, and another 43% do not use technology-based career development tools to work with students with learning disabilities. Likewise was the underutilization of individual and group self-efficacy counseling sessions by 45% of the counselors in order to advocate ownership and acceptance of the students with learning disabilities. Finally, the results suggest that about 43% of the counselors do not remain current on issues related to special needs students.

RO₂: Determine strategies used by counselors to aid students explore career paths suited to his or her cognition, behavior, and skill sets. It was clear that many high school guidance and career school counselors used multiple strategies to aid in exploring and presenting career opportunities to enhance career development efforts of LD students, including:

1. Provide social skills and interpersonal counseling for LD students.
2. Combining individual plans to enhance academic and career growth.
3. Use standardized battery tests to assess individual patterns of interest.
4. Participate in exploratory activities outside of their school.
5. Use current technology based career development tools.

RO₃: Assess collaborative counseling strategies used to complement realistic career planning. Over half of local guidance and career counselor's worked with, and met regularly with parents, teachers, and community leaders to discuss issues and activities related to supporting paths to progressive and productive work place roles for LD students. However, about 40% did not exert a high degree of collaborative efforts to organize community involvement activities; did not advocate for students to navigate paths to progress; or failed to maintain updated records on family background, or work with parents to meet the child's need. Similarly, close to one-third of the counselors did not coordinate regular meetings with the parents. Finally, the findings revealed that a significant number of counselors did not develop individualized career plans for each of the students with learning disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that local guidance and career counselors are familiar with and support the concept of individualized planning, and they utilize different counseling strategies to enhance the academic and career advancement of learning disabled students. The study also revealed a lack of collaboration between counselor and teachers to connect education to work for LD students, and a lack of advocacy and provision of self-efficacy counseling to encourage individual ownership of individual learning disability. Further study is needed in the area teacher/counselor collaboration on combined education and career development, and further study is needed on individual self-efficacy counseling.

The following are recommendations for further study:

1. Public schools should implement an individual career development plan for LD students, inclusive of teacher/counselor collaboration.
2. Further study of the hindrance and benefit of self-efficacy in career planning for learning disabled students is needed.
3. It is suggested to open the study to a larger sample to get a better representation of the population of learning disabled students.
4. Interview disabled students to understand their perceptions of counseling received as a learning disabled student.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A	Research Survey
Appendix B	Cover Letter for Survey

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH SURVEY

**CAREER COUNSELING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH MILD LEARNING
DISABILITIES:**

SECTION I: Questions 1 through 3 (Individualized Student Planning).

1. At my school guidance and career counselors are familiar with and interact with multiple individualized student plans. Please check all that apply.
2. At my school individual career plans are advocated for students diagnosed with mild learning disabilities. Select one answer.
3. No Individualized Career Plan is in place for students with mid learning disabilities at my school. Select one answer.

SECTION II: Question 4- 15 (Counseling Strategies Used to Explore Career Paths).

4. Career counselors at my school provide social skills and interpersonal counseling to learning disabled students. Select one answer.
5. At my school individual plans are used to enhance academic and career growth and development for the learning disabled student. Select one response.
6. At my school career counselors collaborate with teachers on instruction and intervention in order to connect education to work for the learning disabled student. Select one response.
7. In order to support individualized career planning, career counselors at my school use standardized battery test to assess individual patterns of occupational interest of students with learning disabilities. Select one response.

8. My school emphasizes maximum achievement and success for students with learning disabilities. Select one response.
9. I am knowledgeable of the following career assessment instruments considered appropriate for individual with mild disabilities. Please check all that apply.
- ✓ Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS)
 - ✓ Life Centered Career Education Battery
 - ✓ Transition Planning Inventory
 - ✓ Career Maturity Inventory
 - ✓ Transition Planning Inventory
 - ✓ Other (please identify):_____
10. My school maintains current occupational and labor market information resources for students with mild learning disabilities. Select one response.
11. Career counselors at my school uses current technology based career development tools, including computer assisted career guidance and information systems to help enhance career awareness for learning disabled students. Select one response.
12. My school participates in exploratory activities for learning disabled students outside of the school including: observance of on-the-job workers, visiting college campuses and vocational training facilities, participating in work-study opportunities. Please select all that apply.
13. Career counselors at my school provide individual and group self-efficacy counseling session for learning disabled students in order to advocate ownership and acceptance of their disability. Select one answer.

14. Career counselors at my school remain current on topics related to special needs students and issues relative to career transitioning for students with learning disabilities.
15. A comprehensive person centered counseling approach moves students with learning disabilities toward self-actualization and provides greater potential human growth and development, personally, socially, and culturally. Select one response.

Section III - Questions 16 – 20 (Collaborative Counseling Strategies)

16. Career counselors at my school exert a high degree of collaborative efforts in organizing community involvement to support student needs of the learning disabled student. Select one response.
17. Career counselors advocate for students to navigate paths to progressive and productive roles in the work place. Select one response.
18. Counselors maintain updated records on family backgrounds and work with parents to meet child's needs. Select one response.
19. Regular meetings, activities, and services are coordinated between parents, teachers, and counselors to allow feedback to assist students in monitoring and directing the academic achievement, career development, and personal growth for the learning disabled student. Select one response.
20. Career counselors at my school currently participate in developing specific individualized career plans for each learning disabled student. Select one response.

APPENDIX B
COVER LETTER

Dear Counselor:

As partial fulfillment to completing my master's program at Old Dominion University, a research study must be presented to the Graduate Review Committee. The survey included with this cover letter is designed to gather information on individual planning and counseling strategies used by local high school counselors to guide students with mild learning disabilities into functional career paths.

I invite you to participate in this study by completing the attached survey. Your expertise in individual planning and career guidance is critical to providing information for this study. Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to participate. It is a quick survey and there is no risk involved in responding to the survey. Information you share will remain anonymous and the results will be reported in aggregate form.

We would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to review and complete our survey. If you elect to participate in this survey, please answer all questions honestly, and return the completed questionnaire promptly. For your convenience, go to [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) to access and submit your completed survey.

If you have any questions, or need additional information, please contact me at the number listed below.

Sincerely,

Jeraldine D. Williams
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