

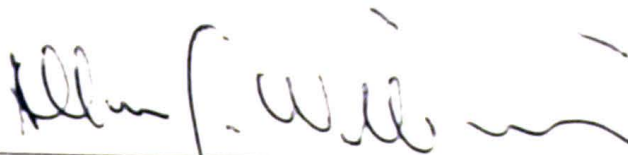
FIELD ST
LB
2322
.A9x
F-69

**A STUDY OF THE CORRELATION
BETWEEN LEARNING DISABILITIES
AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

WADE JEROME DANIEL

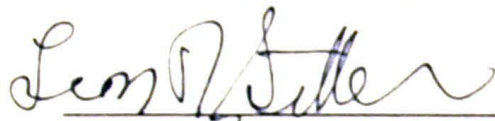
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a field study written by Wade Jerome Daniel entitled "A Study of the Correlation Between Learning Disabilities and Juvenile Delinquency." I have examined the final copy of this field study for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Education Specialist, with a major in Administration and Supervision.

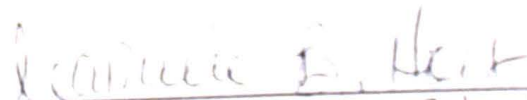


Dr. Allan Williams, Major Professor

We have read this field study
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Dean of the Graduate School

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an Ed.S. degree at Austin Peay State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this thesis may be granted by my major professor, or in his absence, by the Head of Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature Wade Daniel

Date 8/9/96

A STUDY OF THE CORRELATION
BETWEEN LEARNING DISABILITIES
AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

A Field Study
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Education Specialist

by
Wade Jerome Daniel

April 1996

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Allan Williams, for his guidance and patience. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Ron Groseclose and Dr. Leon Sitter, for their comments and assistance over the past two years. I would like to express my thanks to my wife, Kimberly, for her understanding and patience during those times when there was no light at the end of anything. She encouraged me and made me stick with it. I would like to thank my mother and father, Alicia and Noah Daniel, for their continued support and willingness to help in any way possible. I would like to give a special thanks to my typist and cousin, Tianna Taylor, without whom this would have been a never-ending project. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Camille Holt and Beth Seay for their patience and dedication and for making Austin Peay State University's Graduate Program a success.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were any correlations between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency. Information was gathered through the review of related professional literature and discipline records of Dickson County Senior High School students.

Related literature studies showed that at least 10 to 49 percent of all juvenile offenders have a learning disability. Students with a learning disability were also found to have lower self-esteem and motivation than their non-learning disabled peers. Early detection and intervention were found to be the most suggested strategies for dealing with these disabilities. Studies indicated early school failure and susceptibility to delinquency as contributors to poor self-esteem and motivation among learning disabled youths.

When discipline records of DCHS students were examined, 11.3% of all discipline problems were committed by learning disabled students. It was also established that of the more severe discipline problems, 6.6% were learning disabled students. DCHS studies did support past studies, but on the lower end of the scale.

Early intervention with educational programs was recommended as a means to aid learning disabled students.

A STUDY OF THE CORRELATION
BETWEEN LEARNING DISABILITIES
AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Education Specialist

by
Wade Jerome Daniel
April 1996

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	
I. Introduction	Page 1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of Study	2
Definition of Terms	3
List of Assumptions	3
List of Limitations	3
II. Review of Related Literature	5
Introduction	5
Children With Learning Disabilities Versus Non-Learning Disabled Children Who Commit Offenses	6
Self-Esteem and Motivation Among Learning Disabled Youths	8
School Failure, Susceptibility and Differential Treatment Hypotheses	9
Strategies of Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Among Learning Disabled Students	11
III. Methodology	14
Subjects	14
Procedure	14
Children with Learning Disabilities Versus Non-Learning Disabled Children Who Commit Offenses	14
School Failure, Susceptibility and Differential Treatment Hypotheses	15
IV. Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations	18
Summary	18
Conclusions	19
Implications	19
Recommendations	20
LIST OF REFERENCES	22
VITA	24

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Our society today is plagued with numerous problems. One that seems to be haunting our schools and justice system is that of juvenile delinquency. The old saying "Kids will be kids" was certainly not intended for youngsters who are selling drugs, committing sexual offenses, armed robbery, murder, and other crimes. These juveniles who offend often grow up to be repeat offenders, and eventually end up in our prison system. It is certain that many of these young offenders have special needs that are not being met.

Juvenile delinquency has always been present. The population of offenders may be increasing with more learning disabled juveniles getting involved. Any attempt to understand the increase in delinquency in the past half century must take into account the transitional ways of life, the norms of conduct, the behavior patterns, and the lack of social cohesion and solidarity in our communities.

Learning disabled students are found throughout our judicial system. If the plight of these youngsters is not dealt with at an early stage in their lives, they may continue down a narrow road with little help.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation between juvenile delinquency and learning disabilities. This study focused on the students of Dickson County Senior High School in Dickson, Tennessee and the review of related literature.

The correlation of learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency of DCHS students was determined by examining cumulative discipline records held in the school office. Along with the review of related literature, the following research questions guided this study:

1. Do students with learning disabilities commit more offenses than those non-learning disabled students?
2. How does having a learning disability affect self-esteem and motivation?
3. Are learning disabled students more likely to become juvenile delinquents because of school failure, susceptibility to delinquency, and differential treatment?
4. Are there strategies that could be used to prevent juvenile delinquency among learning disabled students?

These questions were answered through a review of related literature. Questions 1 and 3 were also answered through a comparison study through the examination of discipline records at Dickson County Senior High School.

Definition of Terms

Learning Disabilities: Specific learning disabilities is a distinct handicapping condition of presumed neurological origin, which throughout life selectively interferes with the acquisition, processing, retrieval, and usage of information.

Delinquency: A juvenile under age 18 must have committed an act held to be illegal, and that the act must have come to the attention of some authority, police, school, parents or others who report this misconduct, and some official records or entry must be made of the details. Delinquency in this sense implies apprehension. If no report has been made, there is in reality no delinquency from a legal point of view.

Hypothesis

There is a relationship between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency.

List of Assumptions

The following have been assumed for this research:

(1) The tests for categorizing learning disabilities are valid and reliable.

(2) Subjects were judged by the same criteria when determining juvenile delinquency.

List of Limitations

(1) This study was directed predominantly toward the correlation between learning disabilities and male juvenile delinquents.

(2) Subjects of the study were juveniles, therefore creating a wide range of maturation.

(3) Samples were not controlled for an equal representation of traditional and non-traditional families.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

The existence of a link between juvenile delinquency and learning disabilities has been discussed in vast areas. There is little research, and seemingly little consensus, among those who conducted their studies (Meltzer, L., Roditi, B., Fenton, T., 1986). Recently, investigators have emphasized that delinquents often display educational traits that are similar to learning disabled students (Meltzer, L., Levine, M., Karniski, W., Palfrey, J., Clarke, S., 1984). McMahon (1986) stated, "Increasing numbers of special needs offenders reflect the proportionate growth of the general incarcerated population" (p.1).

A review of literature was organized around these four basic questions:

- (1) Do children with learning disabilities commit more offenses than those non-learning disabled children?
- (2) How does having a learning disability affect self-esteem and motivation?
- (3) Are learning disabled students more likely to become juvenile delinquents because of school failure, susceptibility, and differential treatment?
- (4) Are there strategies that could be used to prevent juvenile delinquency among learning disabled students?

Children With Learning Disabilities Versus Non-learning Disabled Children Who Commit Offenses

There is reason to suspect that children with learning disabilities may be more likely to lack the social knowledge and skills that could help keep them from participating in undesirable behaviors than their nondisabled peers (Pearl, R., Bryan, T., 1994). Meltzer et al. (1986) cited a 1984 study by Offord which stated, "The relationship between juvenile delinquency and psychopathology has been examined within the context of socioeconomic status, temperament, school success, and peer relationships" (p. 581). Meltzer also cited a 1974 study by Krotoville, stating that the hypothesis that all forms of delinquency are caused by emotional disorders has been refuted. In fact, there has been increasing emphasis on the importance of academic difficulties as possible precursors of delinquency. According to Meltzer, there were epidemiological studies indicating that 50 percent of juvenile delinquents showed prior evidence of specific learning disabilities. Crawford (1982) discussed how incidence of the learning disabled child in our juvenile system compared to non-learning disabled children. Table I shows a relationship between the handicaps and delinquency. Crawford cited studies by Morgan (1979) which showed a comparison of prevalences of handicapping conditions among juvenile offenders and a general student

Table I

Comparison of Prevalences of Handicapping Conditions Among
Juvenile Offenders and Among the General Student Population
Drawn from Surveys and Prevalence Estimates

<u>HANDICAP</u>	<u>Percent Among Juvenile Offenders</u>	<u>Percent in General Population</u>
Emotionally Handicapped	16.2	2.0
Specific Learning Disabled	10.6	1.5
Educable Mentally Retarded	7.7	1.5
Trainable Mentally Retarded	1.8	.8
Speech Impaired	1.7	3.5
Visually Impaired	1.6	.0
Hard of Hearing	1.4	0.6
Other	1.1	0.6
Total	42.1	10.6

Note: From Prevalence of Handicapped Juveniles in the Justice
System: A Survey of Literature (p.24) by Dorothy
Crawford, 1982.

population. These figures were taken from a survey of fifty states. Crawford said that the figures may not be reliable since many juvenile offenders are not incarcerated. Brier (1989) stated that a recent study indicated that learning disabled youths are more than twice as likely to be judged delinquent by the courts than non-learning disabled youths. For the same offenses, learning disabled youths have higher rates of arrests and adjudication. According to the study, 36 percent of all incarcerated juveniles had learning disabilities.

Crawford (1982) cited studies by Swanstrom of Randle and Offord (1979), where 56 percent of 105 adjudicated 12 to 17 year old boys in Rochester, Minnesota were found to be learning disabled. Crawford also cited Podboy and Mallory (1978) whose study of 250 youths held at a juvenile detention facility in Sonoma County, California, found 49 percent to be learning disabled.

Self-Esteem and Motivation Among Learning Disabled Youths

Meltzer et al. (1984) indicated that the association between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency may result when early school failure leads to low self-esteem, which in turn provokes anti-social behavior. Sikorski (1989) found that substance abuse was a significant factor in 60 to 90 percent of all cases referred to the Juvenile and Family Court. Reliable studies indicated

that five to eight percent of the current school age population are affected by learning disabilities. Waldie and Spreen (1993) cited Murray (1976) suggesting that learning disabled children perceived as socially awkward and unattractive develop negative self-images. Meltzer et al. (1986) cited conclusions by Offord (1983). Offord found that in some children, learning problems and behavioral disorders may occur simultaneously. In others, there may be some common factors leading to the development of both learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency. The learning problems may often lead to school failure and low self-esteem. The negative image, which is often a consequence, may contribute to the development of juvenile delinquency.

School Failure, Susceptibility, and Differential Treatment Hypotheses

Larson (1988) stated that learning disability leads to school failure, which leads to a negative or low self-image, which in turn results in school dropout. This is consistently reported to be a strong and persistent correlate of delinquency. Broder, P., Dumvant, N., Smith, E., and Sutton, P. (1981) supported this explanation in proposing that learning disabilities lead to poor academic achievement and cause the student to engage in delinquency. According to Brier (1989), a learning disability does not

seem to be a sufficient condition in and of itself to cause a delinquent outcome. However, school failure is a first step in a sequence experienced by children with learning disabilities that culminates in delinquency. Meltzer et al. (1984) found results indicating a higher prevalence of school problems among the delinquents as early as kindergarten. Grande (1988) stated that school failure and the effects on our youth have been a concern of educators since as early as 1933. It was reported that school maladjustment and dissatisfaction were at the root of a considerable number of delinquent behaviors.

"According to the susceptibility theory, children with learning disabilities possess certain personality characteristics that make them more susceptible to opportunities for engaging in delinquent activities" (Waldie et al., 1993, p. 417). Brier (1989) proposed that the neurological and intellectual difficulties of learning disabled children directly contribute to anti-social behavior. Brier also stated that in a longitudinal study of individuals who had an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), near half of the individuals studied became delinquent. The susceptibility rationale proposed that children with learning disabilities were more susceptible to delinquency as a result of the personality and cognitive characteristics associated with learning disabilities (Broder et al., 1981).

Broder et al. (1981) cited Zimmerman (1981) pertaining to the differential treatment theory, which stated that learning disabled and non-learning disabled children engage in the same behaviors, but the juvenile justice system treats learning disabled children differently from non-learning disabled children. Brier (1989) found that learning disabled youth were approximately 200 percent more likely to be arrested for the same offenses as their counterparts and had a higher probability of being officially adjudicated delinquents. Based on the learning disabled and juvenile delinquent link, Lane (1980) stated some possible implications for the treatment of juveniles shown in Table II.

Strategies of Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Among Learning Disabled Students

According to the General Accounting Office in Washington, D.C., Dodaro and Salvemini (1985), a juvenile offender's mental disabilities or handicaps only exacerbate the problems of placement. Often the handicapped juvenile falls between the cracks of the system. In a report to the local Board of Education, suggestions were made to require public schools to refer all juveniles for testing who need to do so, and to make sure the public schools develop complete IEP's (Individualized Educational Program). This report also recommended that the schools coordinate

TABLE II

Possible Implications of the LD-JD link for the Treatment of Juveniles

<u>Type of Child</u>	<u>Susceptibility Rationale</u>	<u>School Failure Rationale</u>	<u>Differential Treatment Rationale</u>
Learning Disabled, not juvenile delinquent.	Prevention through early identification of learning disability and personality attributes that may cause difficulty. Counseling and academic intervention are appropriate.	Prevention through early identification of learning disability. Academic intervention with special curriculum and teaching methods is appropriate.	Attempt to prevent different treatment in all areas by building social skills, communication skills, and academic skills.
Learning Disabled and juvenile delinquent.	Rehabilitation with focus on guidance and supervision aimed at helping child self-monitor behavior that results from personality attributes that cause difficulty.	Rehabilitation focusing primarily on academic remediation of learning disabilities. Guidance and supervision related to delinquent behavior also necessary.	Child requires reformed advocate in the court to assure that different treatment does not occur. Social communication and academic skill improvement is also appropriate.
Juvenile Delinquent, not learning disabled.	May apply to some other characteristic of the delinquent who is not learning disabled. Same focus as above.	May apply for reasons other than learning disability. Focus is academic assistance to improve school performance. Guidance and supervision also indicated.	May apply for reasons other than learning disability, e.g., working class behavior (West 1975). Same implications as above.

Notes: From The Relationship of Learning Disabilities to Juvenile Delinquency (p.431) by B.A. Lane, 1980.

some type of service that would exchange records with the court system. These types of records would be IEP's, test results, and educational histories.

Classroom instruction and small group tutoring were educational interventions recommended by Olin (1987) in the "Churchill forum" (1988). Olin went on to recommend individual and family counseling and job training as vocational interventions. Olin expressed a great concern that if we do not address these problems of our youngsters, it will be a continuous cycle of frustration, rage, and hopelessness. Olin stated that a lack of basic skills can condemn one to a life of failure, frustrations, and crime. The troubles that develop during a youth's school years, can become seriously aggravated in adult years if not addressed.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study were all students from Dickson County Senior High School during the 1994-1995 school year. The sample of students chosen was provided by an examination of school discipline records. The students were categorized as regular education and consulting students. The consulting students were students who had been labeled as learning disabled or severely emotionally disturbed.

Procedure

During the 1994-1995 school year at DCHS, of over 1700 students, there were 212 different students reported to the principal's office for disciplinary action. All discipline problems were categorized into minor and major offenses. Discipline problems resulting in an out of school suspension or transfer to an alternative learning center were considered major offenses. All other offenses were categorized as minor.

Children With Learning Disabilities Versus Non-Learning Disabled Children Who Commit Offenses

The DCHS study showed a correlation between learning

disabilities and juvenile delinquency. Of the 212 students who committed school offenses, 11.3% were learning disabled. However, it was also interesting to note that of these 24 learning disabled students, the majority (58.3%) were involved in major offenses. A comparison study, shown in Table 3, indicates that 88.7% of school offenders were regular education students, but of those 188 students, only 27% were involved in major offenses.

School Failure, Susceptibility, and Differential Treatment Hypotheses

Table 4 shows a more interesting correlation in the number of students in each category who failed the school year. There was a high correlation of both regular education students and consulting students, 44.7% and 62.5% respectively, who committed the school offenses and failed. A study such as this can only indicate that students who experience more school success will experience less school discipline.

TABLE III

Discipline Comparison of Dickson County Senior High School Learning
Disabled vs. Non-Learning Disabled Students

	MINOR OFFENSES		MAJOR OFFENSES		TOTAL	
	No. of Students	Percentage	No. of Students	Percentage	No. of Students	Percentage
Regular Education Students	148	69.8%	40	18.9%	188	88.7%
Consulting Students	10	4.7%	14	6.6%	24	11.3%
Total	158	74.5%	54	25.5%	212	100.0%

TABLE IV

Academic Comparison of Dickson County Senior High School
1994-1995 Disciplined Students

	<u>Total # of Students</u>	<u># of Students Passed(%)</u>	<u># of Students Failed(%)</u>
Regular Education Students	188	104 (55.3%)	84 (44.7%)
Consulting Students	24	9 (37.5%)	15 (62.5%)
Total	212	113 (53.3%)	99 (46.7%)

CHAPTER IV

Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if learning disabled youths make up a large proportion of our juvenile delinquent youths, how self-esteem and motivation are effected by learning disabilities, how school failure, susceptibility, and differential treatment of learning disabled children attribute to delinquency, and strategies that may be used to help them. The research of literature related to the links between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency, along with an independent study of Dickson County Senior High School, furnished the foundation for this study.

The research focused on the links between juvenile delinquency and several types of disabilities. Concentrating mainly on learning disabilities, the studies showed a moderate to high correlation of the two factors. Solutions for the ties between these two were few in number.

The DCHS study showed a moderate correlation in learning disabilities and school discipline. However, the study showed a much higher correlation in school failure and school discipline, further supporting the learning disability and juvenile delinquency link.

Conclusions

(1) Results of the studies researched showed that 10 to 56 percent of juvenile delinquents have a learning disability. This was further supported by the DCHS study that 11.3% of discipline offenders were learning disabled.

(2) Self-esteem and motivation are affected greatly by learning disabilities.

(3) Learning disabled youths are more likely to be arrested than their non-learning disabled peers.

(4) The odds of becoming adjudicated are 220 percent greater for adolescents with learning disabilities than their non-learning disabled peers.

(5) Thorough testing of all students at an early age for the detection of learning disabilities would greatly aid in early identification.

(6) Quick and appropriate remediation for each individual's problem would aid in that student being more successful in school. According to the DCHS study, the unsuccessful student was the discipline problem.

Implications

The following implications were drawn as a result of the conclusions and correspond by numbers:

(1) A significant amount of our juvenile offenders has learning disabilities.

(2) Early school failure may contribute to low self-

esteem and poor motivation. The latter evolves into dropping out of school and delinquency.

(3) Learning disabled youths do not always have the judgment needed to make the best decisions for themselves in certain given situations. This poor ability to make sound judgments may lead to their delinquency and even adjudication.

(4) The justice system does not know all they should know about youths with learning disabilities in order to best serve them.

(5) There is not enough testing being done at the present time. Too many students go unnoticed and not helped until it is too late.

(6) Early intervention with plenty of programs in our schools for the learning disabled students would increase their success as students and perhaps help to keep them in school.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are in response to the research findings:

(1) Detection of learning disabilities should be a priority in our early school programs.

(2) Quick intervention should be given for the at risk students.

(3) School systems and court systems should work together to gather and distribute accurate information about juvenile delinquents.

(4) Change must first occur in our schools in order to see a change in the future of our youth.

REFERENCES

- Brier, Norman, (1989) The Relationship Between Learning Disability and Delinquency: A Review and Reappraisal Journal of Learning Disabilities, 22, 546-552.
- Broder, P., Dunivant, N., Smith, E., and Sutton, P., (1981) Further Observations on the Link Between Learning Disabilities and Juvenile Delinquency. Journal of Educational Psychology, 73, 838-850.
- Crawford, Dorothy, (1982) Prevalence of Handicapped Juveniles in the Justice System: A Survey of the Literature. Phoenix, Arizona: Research and Development Training Institutes. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 256 146)
- Dodaro, G., and Salvemini, A., (1985) Implementation of Public Law 94-142 as it Relates to Handicapped Delinquents in the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office (Eric Document of Reproduction Service No. ED 265 717)
- Grande, Carolyn, (1988) Delinquency: The Learning Disabled Students Reaction to Academic School Failure? Adolescence, 23, 209-219.
- Lane, B.A., (1980) The Relationship of Learning Disabilities to Juvenile Delinquency: Current Status. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 13, 20-29.
- Larson, Katherine, (1988) A Research Review and Alternative Hypothesis Explaining the Link Between Learning Disability and Delinquency. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 21, 357-362.
- McMahon, William, (1986) Learning Disabilities and Criminal Involvement: Prevention, Advocacy and Training. Albany, New York: New York State Commission of Correction. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 274 131)
- Meltzer, L., Levine, M., Karniski, W., Palfrey, J., Clarke, S., (1984) An Analysis of the Learning Styles of Adolescent Delinquents. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 17, 600-608.
- Meltzer, L., Roditi, B., Fenton, T., (1986) Cognitive and Learning Profiles of Delinquent and Learning - Disabled Adolescents. Adolescence, 21, 581-591.

- Olin, Thomas, (1987) Educational Outreach Through the Power of the Courts. Churchill Forum (1988), 10 (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 308 638)
- Pearl, R. and Bryan, T. (1994) Getting Caught in Misconduct: Conceptions of Adolescents With and Without Learning Disabilities. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 27, 193-197.
- Sikorski, John, (1989) Some Reflections on Vulnerable Youth: Learning Disabilities and Substance Abuse. Their World. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 316 960)
- Waldie, K. and Spreen, O., (1993) The Relationship Between Learning Disabilities and Persisting Delinquency. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 26, 417-423.

Vita

Wade Jerome Daniel was born in Dickson, Tennessee on August 10, 1962. He attended elementary and junior high schools in the Dickson County School System and graduated from Dickson County Senior High School in May, 1980. In January, 1982, he entered Austin Peay State University and in June 1986, received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Secondary Mathematics Education. He re-entered Austin Peay State University in September, 1989, and in August, 1994, he received a Master of Arts in Education degree in Administration and Supervision. He continued in September, 1994 to work toward an Education Specialist degree.

He is presently employed by the Dickson County Board of Education as a mathematics teacher.