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Depression and Learning Disabilities:
A comparison of the
emotional status of normal achieving
and learning disabled fifth formers.

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Abstract

This study was part of a follow-up project on a cohort of school students. Achievement data had been collected since 1982 and measures on affective variables had been made in 1982 and 1983. Part of the sample had been identified in 1982 as having learning disabilities in one or more academic areas. The students who were defined as learning disabled (LD) were displaying persisting negative responses on an academic self-concept scale in 1982 and 83. The present study was designed to compare the emotional status of these students in 1986, when they were now in their third year of secondary schooling and were faced with the first national examination, with a group of students who were defined as normally achieving (NA). General self-concept, academic self-concept and depression were assessed. Students were also questioned about the amount and type of remediation they had received. Although it was hypothesised that more LD students than NA would be depressed because of their history of school failure, this was not the case. Fourteen out of 104 students were identified as having been depressed with the number of LD and NA students being nearly equal. The reasons given for their depression related more to family and social problems than to school performance. Depressed students had lower self-concept scores as predicted, but academic self-concept was not significantly associated with depression. The relationship between depression and School Certificate marks was non-significant. With this sample the type of remediation did not seem to have a measured effect on self-concept, or academic self-concept. Very few of the depressed students had received remediation

and the interaction was not able to be clarified. The results of the study show that depressed students do exist in our secondary schools and it may be necessary for teachers to learn to recognise the symptoms so that intervention is arranged. The generalisability of the information gained here on the precipitating reasons and the effects of depression is decreased by the small number of depressed students. While there is no reason to presume that these students differ from other students of a similar age, further research is necessary to confirm these findings.

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