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**A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL EXPERIENCES FOR SUCCESSFUL
YOUNG ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES**

By

Stephanie Fullarton

**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research of the
University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters of Arts in Education.**

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Dedication

As much as the life histories given by the participants in this study reflect their true experiences in many ways their experiences resemble my own and their stories could have been mine. I understand their feelings, their struggles, their doubts, their turning points, their aspirations, their perseverance, and their successes. I decided to write about learning disabilities in terms of success, believing that every child 'can' learn and 'can' succeed. This belief was a philosophy which I borrowed from my mother who when told that I had a learning disability decided that I could and would "one way or another" achieve my dreams. Like Van Gogh's struggle to create priceless works of art, she created me with her love and self-sacrificing support. She stretched the canvas, she wet the brush, and she painted the landscape for my future. Now, I have met and surpassed the expectations that she had for me but I will continue to reach for a higher goal because I strive to make her proud. When I was young, I was always late for the school bus and as she would hurry me out the door she would kiss my cheek and say "you're perfect, you're wonderful, you're special, run like the wind" as a child I needed those words to get me through the day, as an adult I remember those words and I still try to run like the wind.

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The four young adults who participated in this study deserve special thanks. Their generosity in describing for me their life histories created the essence of this thesis. They were willing to participant in this study, even though it meant sharing some painful experiences, because they wanted to help others who have learning disabilities.

My father deserves a special mention because I am an extension of him; we see the world in the same abstract way. We think the same way but there was one time when our thoughts were very different. I told him that I was going to college after high school to pursue a career in jewelry design. His response was no, he wanted me to get a university education, there was no doubt in his mind that I could achieve a university degree. Thanks to his interference, I did.

Abstract

The results of recent research show that post-secondary school outcomes of individuals with disabilities lag behind those of non-disabled individuals in employment, residential independence, and post-secondary education (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Benz et al., 1997; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Reis et al., 1997; Madaus et. al., 2003; & Baer et al., 2003). Despite the disappointing outcome results among individuals with disabilities, those with learning disabilities (LD) as opposed to other disabilities tend to achieve higher post-secondary school education and employment outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

Some studies show that for those with learning disabilities, involvement in academic programs in high school is related to post-secondary academic success (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Baer et al. 2003). Likewise, involvement in school-to-work programs while in high school increased the opportunities for attainment of competitive employment (Benz et al. 1997; Baer et al. 2003). However, there are also some studies that have shown that school programs did not contribute to successful adult outcomes and that factors related to the environment and to the individuals themselves were better predictors of post-secondary school success for those with learning disabilities (Raskind et al. 1999; Gerber et al. 1992). Gerber et al. (1992) created a 'Model of Success' which states that success is a function of the degree of control attained by the person with learning disabilities and that individual and environmental factors predict success for individuals with learning disabilities.

This qualitative study used a constructivist conceptual framework. A constructivist conceptual framework refers to the social construction of knowledge by

participant and researcher. To understand the participants experience through their own perspective, it becomes the researcher's responsibility to dissolve personal preconceptions and to try to understand the experience from the participants' point of view. A phenomenological strategy was used with a case study method. The phenomenon under investigation was the experience of living with a learning disability and four case studies were employed to investigate this phenomenon.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of individuals who have learning disabilities who received accommodations while in school. Emphasis was placed on the participants' school experiences and reflections on those experiences as well as the individual characteristics and environmental conditions, all of which have acted as facilitators or barriers to their post-secondary school outcomes. Specifically, inquiries into employment opportunities, post-secondary education and independent living outcomes helped to determine the conditions related to success among individuals with learning disabilities in adult life.

The findings from this study show that early identification and remediation are important in enabling the individual: time for advocacy, remediation, accommodations and general adjustment to their learning disability. Progress was made during elementary school but the lack of services offered in secondary school produced negative experiences for the participants. University offered the individuals control over what and how they learned. As well, the support available to them enhanced their university experiences and facilitated successful outcomes. Being advocated for, led the individuals to advocate for themselves, an important factor in achieving success at the university level. All of the

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When I was young I would dream that I could fly. I knew how to glide and soar, to go fast and to rise above difficulty. In reality my wings were broken. The learner who experiences difficulty has wings that are too heavy to allow flight, we bobble along the ground, trying to lift our wings, sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail, but we never really give up.

My interest in the topic of learning disabilities stems not only from my experiences in education as an educator, but mainly from my experiences as a student with a learning disability. I have experienced great success as a learner, but my greatest success comes from understanding that the term success is a subjective measurement, which can be achieved when one accomplishes a personal set of goals. My wing was mended and I found out that I could fly. Here I ask, why do some birds with broken wings learn to fly while others never leave the ground?

The results of recent research show that post-school outcomes of individuals with disabilities lag behind those of non-disabled individuals in employment, residential independence, and post-secondary education (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Benz et al., 1997; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Reis et al., 1997; Madaus et. al., 2003; Baer et al., 2003). In addition, students with disabilities are not expected to achieve at a rate equivalent to their non-disabled peers. They are expected to fall below the mean on all accounts of success (Rojewski, 1996). Despite the disappointing outcome results among individuals with disabilities, those with learning disabilities (LD) as opposed to other disabilities tend to achieve higher post-school education and employment outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Other studies have shown that for those with learning disabilities, enrolment in academic programs in high school is related to post-secondary academic success (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Baer et al. 2003). Likewise, involvement in school-to-work programs while in high school increased the opportunities for attainment of

competitive employment (Benz et al. 1997; Baer et al. 2003). However, there are also some studies that have shown that school programs did not contribute to adult outcomes and that factors related to the environment and to the individuals themselves were better predictors of post-school success for those with learning disabilities (Raskind et al. 1999; Gerber et al. 1992).

Presently, none of the research involves Canadians, and none uses qualitative methods. Moreover, some of the previous studies, particularly those showing that school programs made no contribution were conducted on subjects who were too old to have benefited from special education programs provided to those with disabilities in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative research was to examine the school experiences of individuals with learning disabilities, the individual characteristics of the participants, and environmental factors and post-secondary school outcomes to determine the variables related to success among individuals with learning disabilities in adult life. In this study, success is defined as enrollment in or completion of a post-secondary program.

My interest in this area of research stems from my own personal experiences coping with a learning disability. As I work in the field of education as a teacher and a researcher, I see that learning and behaviour problems are very common in the classroom. Over the last thirty years the number of students identified with learning disabilities has increased 150%. Between 2.36% and 7.10% of students in school between ages 6-21 have learning disabilities (Students with Learning Disabilities: A National Review, 2002). With this growing number of students, planning for their success becomes an important endeavor. Studies like this one attempt to discover what factors are related to

successful post-secondary school outcomes for student with learning disabilities, contribute to the field of education. They bring emphasis to the issue of learning disabilities, analyzing best practices in achieving success, and looking at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education facilities and how these facilities contribute to post-secondary school success among those with learning disabilities. Practically, the findings from this study will lead to recommendations for schools regarding types of programs and accommodations that facilitate positive outcomes. In addition, adults, adolescents and children with learning disabilities, as well as their parents can gain knowledge and insight as to strategies, accommodations, technology, programs, advocacy, transitions, and future planning that can also contribute to successful outcomes.

As a professional, I entered a career in education with the aim of making a difference in the lives of children, and as a person with a learning disability I intend for that difference to be made in the field of special education research. Advocacy is essential when examining outcomes for students with learning disabilities (Mull, Sitlington & Alper, 2001). Moreover, being advocated for and learning to advocate for oneself has emerged as an essential theme in promoting successful outcomes (Lock & Layton, 2001). Therefore, as the author of this study, I consider myself an advocate of learning disability research.

The review of literature covers themes central to this research study. The chapter begins with a general overview of the current research on the topic of post-secondary school outcomes for students with disabilities. From this area of research, it is noted that of students with disabilities, those who are labeled as learning disabled achieve at a rate

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To organize this review of literature the articles have been separated into two groups. The first group includes studies involving individuals with varying disabilities. These studies compare the post-secondary school outcomes for students with disabilities and those without. The findings from these studies show that students with learning disabilities tend to have more successful post-secondary school outcomes than those with other disabilities. This finding becomes the focus for the second phase of this literature review. The scope is narrowed and focuses on studies of post-secondary school outcomes involving only students with learning disabilities. From here, the factors contributing to the success of individuals with learning disabilities are examined. In terms of what predicts success for students with learning disabilities there are two schools of thought: the first is the individual's school experiences and the second is the personal attributes of the individual and their environmental conditions.

Post-School Outcomes Of Students With Disabilities

Much research has been done to attempt to assess post-school outcomes varying across severity of disability and among disability groups. In the United States, the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) offers the most comprehensive examination of trends in employment, wages, post-secondary education and residential independence for youth with disabilities. The study conducted by Blackorby and Wagner (1996) dealing with Longitudinal Post-school Outcomes Of Youth With Disabilities examined data regarding the youths' first five years after exit from high school. This longitudinal study involved a nationally representative sample of 8000 youth aged 13-21

with disabilities in eleven disability categories. The current study focused on three key post-secondary school outcomes: employment, postsecondary education and residential independence and used a subset of the original NLTS sample. Telephone interviews were conducted focusing on the youth and their families; the services rendered, their in-school and post-school experiences. This study emphasized employment status, wages, post-secondary education and residential independence. Results indicated that employment status for youth with disabilities was significantly lower than the employment rate of youth without disabilities three to five years out of school (57% vs. 69%). The study differentiated between disabilities and reported that those classified as having learning disabilities or speech impairments were employed at rates virtually equivalent to the general population 3 to 5 years after school.

Three to five years after secondary school 17% of youth with multiple disabilities were competitively employed. As well, 22% of youth with orthopedic impairments and 29% with visual impairments were competitively employed. Consistently males were more likely than females to be competitively employed.

The researchers also found that one of the strongest indicators of competitive post-school employment for students with disabilities was graduation from secondary school. However, involvement in school-to-work programs also improved chances for employment. The wages for working youth with disabilities was consistent with wages for the general population though ethnicity played a role. Caucasians were more likely to be higher wage earners. In addition, secondary school completion enhanced the opportunities of youth with disabilities to find competitive employment over their peers

with disabilities who did not complete secondary school. Still employment and post-secondary education rates were significantly lower than youth in the general population.

The results of this research showed that two years out of secondary school, 14% of youth with disabilities reported having received some type of post-secondary education. This rate is relatively low compared to 53% for youth in the general population. Five years after school the percentage rose to 37% of youth with disabilities attending some type of post-secondary schooling, a rate much lower than their non-disabled peers: 78% of whom attended post-secondary education. There were significant gains in residential independence for youth with disabilities after secondary school but at a rate below the general population: 37% vs. 60%. Of the youth with disabilities who attend post-secondary institutions, 60% were those with hearing impairments or deafness, as well as the 57% who had visual impairments.

In most disability categories, 36% to 48% of youth were living independently. Youth classified as having health impairments, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, deafness or blindness had lower rates of residential independence. However, youth with mental retardation showed significant improvements over time in gaining employment and residential independence: 37% five years after exit from secondary school. This percentage is lower than youth with disabilities at 57% but significant for the category of youth. These researchers also found a consistent relationship between living independently and secondary school completion across all disability categories.

This study provided evidence that there is a significant gap between youth with disabilities and youth without disabilities. Youth with disabilities across all categories consistently had lower levels of education and were unable to compete with their non-

disabled peers in the workforce. However, Blackorby and Wagner (1996) also found that across disability categories youth with learning disabilities and speech impairments were more likely to be employed and less likely than their peers with deafness and with visual impairments to attend post-secondary school or to be living independently. Moreover, completion of high school was linked to employment, enrollment in post-secondary school, and independent living.

The implications of this research focused upon the need for transition planning in high school that responds to individual goals, strengths and needs for youth. The authors also suggested that diversifying the experiences in secondary school, such as utilizing parental involvement and vocational education, for youth with disabilities might have a great impact upon post-secondary school success.

Benz, Yovanoff and Doren (1997) conducted a study on the school-to-work components that predict post-secondary school success for students with and without disabilities. Specifically, the researchers examined whether or not the school-to-work transition program predicted better post-secondary school outcomes for students with and without disabilities. The results from a sample of 553 students with and without disabilities showed that competitive employment for students with and without disabilities was predicted by: a) having two or more work related experiences during the last two years of high school, b) exiting high school with high social skills, c) exiting school with high job search skills, and d) having no continuing vocational instruction need one year out of school. Unlike Blackorby and Wagner, these researchers did not find a link between high school completion and employment. Instead, the “instructional components and skill outcomes commonly associated with school-to-work programs

actually predict better competitive employment and productive engagement for students with and without disabilities” (1997, p. 162). Hence, the results of the Benz, Yovanoff and Doren (1997) research suggested that for many of these students the post-school outcomes they experience may have their roots in the type and quality of services and programs received while they were still in school.

Not unlike the study by Blackorby and Wagner in 1996, only 40% of females with disabilities were likely to be competitively employed one year out of school, five times less likely than any other group (Benz, Yovanoff & Doren, 1997). This finding is also reported in another study of literature examined by Lindstrom and Benz (2002). This qualitative study used a case study method, using six female participants to discover the key elements that influenced career choices for young women with learning disabilities who had graduated from high school and entered the workforce. They discovered that vocational education and school-to-work programs tend to segregate individuals into stereotypical gender specific roles (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). Female high school graduates who did not attend post secondary education earned 64% of what their male counterparts earned (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). Outcomes for female with disabilities are even more disappointing. Females with disabilities are less likely to be employed than men with disabilities or women without disabilities (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). Women with disabilities who do have employment, tended to work in low status occupations, earn low wages, receive few or no benefits, and have little opportunity for career advancement (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). Lindstrom and Benz (2002) searched for critical factors that influenced short-term occupational and long-term career choices for females with learning disabilities. Using their ideas on career development, “career development

assumes that individuals develop vocational interests by being exposed to a variety of activities” (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002, p. 68). As a trend, women and especially women with disabilities tended to be exposed to less varied job activities. Workplace experiences also played a role. Females in school-to-work programs were often placed in traditionally low paying jobs and lacked preparation for skilled employment. Negative workplace experiences, such as lack of support in the work environment limited their career choices (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). To assist females with disabilities who chose non-traditional careers, research suggested that females benefited from having support such as mentors in their work environment (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002).

Another study conducted by Colley and Jamison (1998) on post-school results for youth with disabilities involved 720 former students who had received special education services. Like the study completed by Blackorby and Wagner (1996), Jamison and Colley focused on employment, post-secondary education and independent living outcomes for students receiving special education. These researchers also attempted to identify program components that contributed to success. This was a descriptive study, which included a random sample of former special education students in urban, suburban and rural districts of New York. Structured interviews were conducted with participants nine months after exit from high school. This method allowed for participants’ perception of their high school experiences and their post-school experiences to be examined. Only 40% of the participants in this study obtained a high school diploma. Of this sample 17% attended post-secondary education, and 46% of the participants credited their success to special education teachers. While attending post-secondary institutions, less than half took advantage of their campus resources, such as the academic support

services. Of these participants 79% were living at home with their parents at the time of this study due to their financial inability to provide for themselves. The majority of the participants did not socialize often with their peers. Of this sample, less than half of this sample of special education students (47%) were working and the majority of those working held competitive but unskilled employment (e.g., janitorial positions, food service and retail). Reasons given for not being able to work included: a) transportation problems and b) being insufficiently trained for employment. Students who had paid or unpaid employment in secondary school or who participated in occupational education seemed to have a higher level of employment, higher wages, longer hours, and more continuous employment. These findings supported those of Benz, et al. (1997).

Researchers also found that participants receiving special education services in integrated rather than segregated settings more often obtained competitive employment and participants felt better prepared to keep their jobs.

It was also found by these researchers that special education students who graduated with a high school diploma and who entered post-secondary education found the transition services offered to be helpful. Those students who aged out or dropped out of school did not find transition planning helpful.

Overall, across studies it has been shown that students with disabilities had lower employment rates, lower rates of post-secondary education, and lower rates of residential independence than those without disabilities. However, males and Caucasians tend to have higher rates of employment and higher wages. Those who were educated in integrated academic settings achieved higher rates of employment and post-secondary education than those educated in segregated settings. Across these studies the need for

better transition planning was discussed. It was also suggested that enhancing the social skills and job search skills of these students would predict better post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Benz et al., 1997 and Colley & Jameson, 1998; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002).

Learning Disabilities

Of the population of individuals with disabilities, more than half are labeled as learning disabled (Madaus, 2005). In Reid Lyon's (1996) article entitled *Learning Disabilities*, he described this disability as "not a single disorder, but includes disabilities in any of seven areas related to reading, language, and math" (Lyon, 1996, p.55). The specific areas are receptive language, expressive language, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics calculation and mathematical reasoning. He explained that "these separate learning disabilities frequently co-occur with one another and with social skill deficits and emotional or behavioural disorders." (p.55) The concept of a learning disability is frequently misunderstood and between countries there are different understandings of what this term represents. For example, in the UK a learning disability refers to a mental handicap. Lyon described the term learning disability as it is used in the United States;

An important part of the definition of Learning Disability is its exclusions: learning disabilities cannot be attributed primarily to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, cultural difference, or disadvantage. Thus, the concept of Learning Disability focuses on the notion of a *discrepancy* between a child's academic achievement and his or her apparent

capacity to learn. (p.54)

Other definitions focus on processing impairments and their effects on learning.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) defined it as:

“Learning Disabilities” refer to a number of disorders which may effect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.”

Or:

“Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g., planning and decision-making).” (LDAC, 2005)

Lyon (1996) and the LDAC stress the importance of early identification and intervention. Lyon claimed that children need to be identified before the age of nine to have successful intervention. He stated:

“The longer children with learning disabilities, at any level go without identification and intervention, the more difficult the task of remediation becomes and the harder it is for the children to respond...the longer children are faced with failure the greater the probability that comorbid

learning and behaviour difficulties will arise, further complicating the remediation task” (p.59)

Academic failure causes, children, adolescents, and adults to exhibit high levels of frustration, anxiety, withdrawal, social isolation, depression, and low self-esteem, these characteristics as well as deficits in social skills are predominately found in children who have learning disabilities and are less frequently observed in those who are non disabled (Lyon, 1996). This is significant because The National Longitudinal Transition Study’s (NLTS) data showed that beginning at age fourteen, 28.9% of students with disabilities dropped out of school (Dunn et al., 2004). Of students with disabilities who dropped out, those with mild disabilities such as learning disabilities, had higher drop out rates than those with more severe disabilities. Also, students with mild disabilities were two times more likely to drop out then their peers without disabilities (Dunn et al., 2004).

Post-School Outcomes Of Students With Learning Disabilities

Whitemore and Maker (1985), quoted in Reis, Neu and McGuires’ (1997) study examining high-ability students with learning disabilities who have achieved, viewed the educational treatment of the learning disabled and/or the gifted learning disabled as:

Intellectually gifted individuals with specific learning disabilities are the most misjudged, misunderstood, and neglected segment of the student population and the community. Teachers, counselors, and others are inclined to overlook signs of intellectual giftedness and to focus attention on such deficits as poor spelling, reading, and writing.

Expectations for academic achievement generally are inaccurate-either

too high and unrealistically positive or too low and discouraging of high aspiration. It is not uncommon for gifted students with learning disabilities to be told that college study is inappropriate for them, that professional careers will be unattainable, and that jobs requiring only mechanical or physical abilities are more fitting to their abilities.

Without equal opportunity to try, these individuals may be denied access to appropriate educational and professional career opportunities. (pp. 204-205)

In an effort to validate the above statement Reis et al. (1997) examined the perceptions of 12 postsecondary students with learning disabilities about their school experiences including: social problems, difficulty with teachers and administrators, and with academics. These students were chosen because of their success at the university level. Each participant reflected on his or her negative and positive elementary and high school experiences. These experiences showed that high school teachers were not able or willing to acknowledge the needs of the students, their strengths were not recognized or rewarded, and they were labeled and treated as disabled. Many of the students received special education support in elementary and high school, but noted the lack of modifications made by special education teachers and the lack of program goals. These students did not believe that the special education services they received in school helped them to become successful at university. For these students, their negative school experiences were paired with positive out-of-school experiences (i.e., parental support), which resulted in positive personal attitudes that enabled them to become successful in later life. These case studies also reflected feelings of being under-stimulated and bored

in special education settings. The constant repetition of material made students feel as though their needs were not being met in this setting. Moreover, many students felt that no program accommodations were developed for them or implemented. Students said they felt 'dumb' being placed in a special education setting even for one period a day and resented missing the activities going on in the classroom. Some students, who first resented this 'demotion' from the general classroom into a special one, made the most of the circumstances by becoming tutors to more severely disabled students, and they developed self-confidence in being the smartest in that particular setting (Reis et al. 1997).

Across studies, student perceptions of their special education program tended to be one of dissatisfaction. Statements found in a study by Guterman (1995) reflected some of these perceptions. They asserted: "Special education did not help them academically, they objected to what they viewed as low level, irrelevant and duplicative instruction." (Cited in Benz et al., 2000 p. 511.) Moreover, Blackorby and Wagner (1996) found that students with learning disabilities receiving special education services were unable to accurately respond to questions about the services they received, which suggested that they were either forgettable or non-existent.

At the post-secondary level, Madaus, Ruban, Foley, and McGuire (2003) examined the employment satisfaction among 132 university graduates with learning disabilities. They found that a successful post-secondary experience could improve employment outcomes, job satisfaction, and quality of life for young adults with learning disabilities. Their findings also showed that self-efficacy and using self-regulatory strategies led to employment satisfaction for these young adults.

In another investigation of the same 132 university graduates with learning disabilities, Madaus et al. (2001) found that this group of students were transitioning to work at a rate comparable or superior to their non-learning disabled peers as well as, to those with learning disabilities who do not enter post-secondary institutions. Success at the post-secondary school level was found to contribute to higher job satisfaction and quality of life satisfaction.

Following up on the above theme, Madaus (2005) investigated employment outcomes of university graduates with learning disabilities and found their outcomes to be positive. The employment rate, level of income, and level of benefits earned were comparable to the general workforce. The average salary was between \$40,000 and \$50,000 a year and the sample expressed high job satisfaction. Of this sample, women with and without disabilities had lower salaries than their male counterparts. This is a finding that is consistent with statistics for the general population. Results of this research also showed individuals with learning disabilities who graduate from university are more successful than their peers with learning disabilities who do not attend or graduate from university. Madaus concluded that earning a college or university degree has beneficial effects on individual with learning disabilities employment outcomes (Madaus, 2005). This finding is supported by Price and Gerber (2005). They interviewed adults with learning disabilities who were not college graduates and found that these adults “are often unemployed or under-employed, with erratic job histories that include multiple entry level jobs with minimum wages and few benefits” (Price & Gerber, 2005. p. 1). Once in the workforce the majority of Madaus’s sample found no need to disclose their learning disability to their employer. Madaus attributed this to a “goodness of fit” between the

individual's career and their learning disability, meaning that the learning disability did not impede on the individual's job performance. Madaus also recognized that some did not disclose their learning disability to their employer because of fear that it would result in a negative outcome (Madaus, 2005).

Murray, Goldstein, Nourse and Edgar (2000) examined the post secondary school education status of 168 youth with learning disabilities and 315 without learning disabilities who graduate from secondary school in 1985 and 1990. This quantitative study found that youth with learning disabilities were less likely than those without disabilities to attend post secondary education and the majority of those who did attended training programs and community colleges. Not only was this group less likely to enroll in post-secondary education, but those who did enroll were less likely to graduate from their respective programs than their peers without disabilities (Murray et al., 2000). Interestingly, Murray et al. (2000) found that it took longer for individuals with learning disabilities to enroll in post secondary education and it also took longer for them to graduate from their programs: ...“80% of students with LD [learning disabilities], who entered post secondary education, had not graduated 5 years after high school compared to 56% of those without disabilities. Ten years after high school 56% had not graduated compared to 32% without disabilities.” (Murray et al. 2000). These findings contrast with Madaus (2005) findings. Over a period of 10 years, Murray et al. (2000) found that young adults with learning disabilities had poor post secondary school outcomes. Murray et al. (2000) drew the implication that youth with learning disabilities were not being properly prepared in their secondary school setting for postsecondary experiences and specified methods that could facilitate preparation. These included: academically oriented

instructional programs while in high school, transition planning and experiences related to postsecondary education (Murray et al, 2000).

Baer, Flexer, Beck, Amstutz, Hoffman, Brothers, Stelzer and Zechman (2003) took a different track: they examined transition service utilization and post-school outcomes among 140 special education graduates to assess the effectiveness of their high school program and transition services. Results showed that the community's expectations for learning disabled youth dictated their outcomes. For example, in one prestigious suburban school setting the predominant expectation for high school students is to enter post-secondary institutions. To accomplish this, transition goals were put in place by the high school for the students with learning disabilities to reach this expectation. In this study having a learning disability was positively correlated with participation in regular academic programs, better employment and post-secondary education outcomes than those with other disabilities (2003). These researchers also found that females with learning disabilities did not participate as much in work-study and vocational education programs that increased the opportunities for employment for students with disabilities, and as a result had lower full time employment rates. This finding is consistent with other research in this field and could be attributed to females choosing to become wives and mothers instead of pursuing further education or a career. (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002; Levine & Edgar, 1994). Baer et al., (2003) studied employment and post-secondary education among high school students with disabilities. They found that the best predictors of full time employment was a combination of (a) having a learning disability as opposed to another disability, (b) being from a rural school setting, (c) participation in a work study programs, and (d)

participation in vocational education. In this study the only variable that predicted post-secondary education was high school enrollment in academic programs (2003). These findings are consistent with findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study showing that previous work training in high school predicted post-school employment.

Are adults with learning disabilities less likely to enroll in post-school education and more likely to be underemployed and in lower prestigious occupations? This was the question that Rojewski presented in his 1996 study looking at the educational and occupational aspirations of high school seniors with learning disabilities. The study examined the extent to which the aspirations of high school seniors with learning disabilities could determine future attainment. It was assumed that adolescents with learning disabilities would have lower aspirations due to the effects of discrimination, social attitudes and cultural expectations and stereotypes. The results showed this to be the case. Though the aspirations of this group were positive, those with learning disabilities had lower expectations for educational and employment outcomes than their non-disabled peers. These aspirations did not lead to educational involvement. Females with learning disabilities reported the lowest post-school aspirations. The conclusion was that people with learning disabilities choose employment that does not require academic skills. Rojewski posed transition planning as a solution for this group (1996).

In summary, there have been a number of studies conducted on the post-secondary school outcomes of students with disabilities (see Appendices A and B). As may be seen, there is a significant gap in achievement among youth with disabilities and youth without disabilities based on employment, education, and independent living outcomes. Among youth with disabilities, those with learning disabilities and those with

hearing impairments achieved at a level comparable to youth in the general population. Having a learning disability was positively correlated with participation in regular academic programs, better employment and post-secondary education than for those with other disabilities.

Other Factors Contributing To The Success Of Young Adults With Learning Disabilities

This section of the literature incorporates other factors that have contributed to success for individuals with learning disabilities. Such factors include personal characteristics such as: the individual's personal set of attitudes and behaviours, gaining control, acceptance of the learning disability, strong coping strategies, resilience and support in the form of advocacy. In the first study, Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins and Herman (1999) examine patterns of change and predictors of success in individuals with learning disabilities. In the second study, Gerber, Ginsberg and Reiff (1992) investigated the issues of employability, employment, and the work place for individuals with learning disabilities. The third study, explains the stages of acceptance of a learning disability and the impact of labeling in individuals. In the fourth study, Litner, Mann-Feder and Guerard (2005) identified factors that promoted academic success among students with learning disabilities attending university. Lastly, the fifth study by Morrison and Cosden (1997) studied risk and resiliency among individuals with learning disabilities.

Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins and Herman (1999) investigated the patterns of change and predictors of success in individuals with learning disabilities over a twenty-year span. Fifty individuals participated in this quantitative study. In-depth interviews were conducted to uncover information about employment, education, family relationships, independent living, social relationships, personal beliefs, values and

aspirations. Researchers were interested in the “natural history” of learning disabilities looking at patterns of change, as well as factors, conditions, events, and contexts, affecting specific outcomes. Three questions were addressed: (1) What factors promote or prevent the success of individuals with learning disabilities? (2) Do these factors change over time? (3) How might these factors interact to produce specific outcomes? As the study progressed over twenty years, attributes of success were identified. At year ten a successful person with a learning disability proved to (a) adapt to life events (i.e., attending post-secondary education, finding gainful employment, maintaining interpersonal relationships) and learned to accept themselves and his or her disability, (b) participated in goal setting, (c) used effective support systems. As well, learning disabilities were regarded as an ongoing condition and people with them faced life stressors in addition to their learning disability. However, these life stressors were more apparent in children and faded as individuals grow into adults. Finally, persons with learning disabilities tended to be late bloomers in that they matured more slowly (1999). From year ten through to twenty, success for these individuals did not rise or fall but was maintained at the same level for each participant. In summary, these researchers reported that the most significant predictor of success for individuals with learning disabilities was the participant’s personal set of attitudes and behaviours, specifically being self aware, having perseverance, being proactive, being emotionally stable, setting goals, and using support systems (1999).

In another study, Gerber, Ginsberg and Reiff (1992) investigated the issues of employability, employment, and the work place for individuals with learning disabilities across the developmental continuum. Forty-six highly successful adults and 25

moderately successful adults participated in this qualitative study to discover the patterns of successful functioning that promote high levels of vocational success. They stated that,

Outcomes cannot be judged by the success of transition programs nor from analyzing the entry level of job placement. Judging successful outcomes for the learning disabled population should be looked at further down the vocational path with the analysis of job maintenance, employment stability, career advancement, and the attainment of leadership roles.” (Gerber et al., 1992, p. 475)

In the Gerber et al. (1992) study, success was viewed as a positive measure of achievement and was assessed through job maintenance, employment stability, career advancement, and the attainment of leadership roles. The researchers' objectives in this study were to: (a) find alterable patterns of success; alterable patterns of success are special circumstances in one's self i.e., situation, influence, and interaction that may have an effect on success and are susceptible to change, (b) delineate the ecology of successful functioning, (c) construct a model for success in adults with learning disabilities, and (d) determine if there was a difference between high success and moderate success groups in the study.

To separate the highly successful group with the moderately successful group, the researchers defined success across five variables: income level, job classification, education level, prominence in one's field and job satisfaction. Each candidate was ranked across these levels as having high, moderate, or low levels of success. Each candidate was rated on the five criteria. To be in the high success group, candidates needed to have a rating of high on four of the criteria and no marks in the lower range.

To be included in the moderate group subjects needed to have a majority of moderate ratings and no more than one low rating (Gerber et al., 1992). The gender gap was evident in this study, and the researchers found less than half as many highly successful female as males (14 vs. 32). The final sample included a majority of highly successful participants because the purpose of this research was to identify key factors related to high levels of success (1992).

The results of the Gerber et al. (1992) study led to the creation of a Model of Success for adults with learning disabilities. In this model, success is a function of the degree of control attained by the person with learning disabilities. Gerber et al. describe this model as follows,

Success begins with a set of internal decisions; highly successful adults with learning disabilities pursue several ways of adapting themselves to their disability and the world around them.

Successful adapting strengthens the desire, produces more goal setting, and helps people through the maze of reframing. With strong adapting high levels of control are attainable. Again, high control positively influences adapting and the internal decisions. Finally, given a high degree of control, high levels of success are most likely. And success breeds more success, conceived in this model as more control, more adaptability, and stronger internal decisions (pp. 484-485).

The interview data from both moderately and highly successful adults with learning disabilities uncovered the participants' "quest to gain control" of their lives, this involved

internal decisions and external manifestations. Gerber et al. posited that the themes involved in internal decisions and external manifestations can be taught and could alter children's lives. Internal decisions include: desire to succeed, being goal oriented, and internal reframing of the learning disability into a positive and productive experience. External manifestations include: ways of being adaptable, individual persistence, set of coping mechanisms (i.e., learned creativity, a goodness of fit between one's ability and the environment and a pattern or social ecology of personal support), and planned experiences designed to foster success. Unlike previous research, the results of the study showed that high school programs were unrelated to any success experienced by these individuals as adults. Rather, the higher amount of control one had in all aspect of one's life was positively correlated with success for the individual.

Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, and Herman (2002) also conducted a qualitative study with 41 adults who had learning disabilities. They explained the stages of acceptance of a learning disability and the impact of labeling. The perspective of people with learning disabilities with regards to "acceptance" of the learning disability was delineated. Highly successful people with learning disabilities exhibited a pattern of passing through the stages of acceptance. (Higgins, et al. 2002)

Like the stages of grieving; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance that one moves through in order to accept death, the process of coming to terms with a learning disability has a similar formula and is called reframing or acceptance (Reiff, et al. 1997; Higgins et al., 2002). Reframing or acceptance "is a set of decisions related to reinterpreting the LD experience from something dysfunctional to something functional" (Reiff et al. 1997, p. 105). The five stages are described in the next paragraphs.

The first stage, *awareness of their “differentness”* meaning the person with a learning disability becomes aware that he or she has academic differences (e.g., poor reading, writing, or arithmetic skills), academic-related differences (e.g., attention and organizational problems), and non-academic differences (e.g., physical, social and emotional). For most people this realization happens during their earliest years of school when it becomes apparent to them that their peers are able to perform at a higher level (Higgins et al. 2002).

The second stage is *the labeling event*, referring to the labour intensive process that professionals go through to accurately diagnose the individual with the differences related above. This process may take years and different labels may be assigned to the individual as the professionals look for the right fit. Higgins et al. (2002) had several participants who “reported the actual experience of ‘having’ an LD (qualifying) in one setting or at one point in time and ‘not having’ an LD (not qualifying) in another.” (p.11) The issue of labeling is a sensitive one, and accepting the label as a description of who you embody is part of the reframing process.

The third stage *understanding/negotiating the label* consists of two issues. First, it refers to understanding what the learning disability means and what the individual is capable of doing and/or not doing. Second, what accommodations and remediation would be needed from the school. Children especially have difficulty understanding this label: “I didn’t understand. I thought I was retarded. I thought that someone with a learning disability, because it wasn’t explained to me, was second to somebody with Down’s Syndrome.” (p.12)

The fourth stage is *compartmentalization*, which refers to the individual's ability to "place the disability in perspective relative to the (individuals) other attributes, that is, to *minimize its importance*...the task of this stage is to *minimize weaknesses and maximize strengths* (p 12)." The idea is that people who have deficits in certain areas learn to avoid these activities and are motivated to exert themselves in their areas of strength. By doing so the disability is "contained" and only exposed when unavoidable in classroom situations (Higgins, et al., 2002).

The fifth stage *transformation* is only achieved by some individuals who have learning disabilities. These individuals fully accept their learning disability and see the disability as "a positive force in their lives." (p.13)

The contribution made in this study was that many of the successful participants; those who were rated by the researchers as successful, based on their employment, education, familial, social, and psychological criteria, reached the stage of compartmentalization of their disability while only a few of the most successful participants reached the stage of transformation, that is "seeing their LD as a positive influence in their lives" (p. 14).

In a Canadian qualitative study by Litner, Mann-Feder and Guerard (2005), they sought to identify factors that promoted academic success among 16 students with learning disabilities attending university. The researchers maintained that this population was at risk for poor school experiences both academic and social: "the demands of school require skills and abilities for which these youth are at a pronounced neurological disadvantage" (Litner et al., 2005). They wondered, "Why have some of these youth been

able to overcome the dismal prognosis and despite the odds (negative predictors) achieve academically?" (p.10). They find an answer embedded in other research,

Experts agree that among positive factors, a critical one is the role the family and significant others in providing caring, acceptance, and encouragement on a consistent basis throughout the person's development...connectedness is the key to mental health in children and in adults as well (Hallowell, 1996. p.71. cited in Litner et al., 2005. p.10).

Though the above was predicted as a finding of their research, Litner et al. (2005) could not conclude that family support or an intact family played a significant role in the outcomes. The majority of their participants had negative memories of family support. The most difficult years for them were their high school years, and family support systems became strained as their grades deteriorated. The majority of the participants in this study had not been identified as children or adolescents, but obtained a diagnosis in adulthood. The authors commented that without a diagnosis, family support systems can break down due to lack of awareness of what the problem is and a lack of sensitivity to cope with the issues that arise for persons with learning disabilities (Litner et al., 2005).

Some participants described feeling "stupid and slow" and struggled to be successful within one-dimensional learning environments. In most cases, their only opportunities for success came from practical and or artistic subject areas. Participation in these types of learning environments affirmed their sense of self (Litner et al., 2005). Brooks and Goldstein (2001) described a technique used to build 'islands of competence,' the idea is that resilient children learn to accept their difficulties as part of

who they are and instead rely on their strengths. Self esteem is built because they don't focus on their limitations; instead they develop coping strategies and focus on strengths. (Brooks & Goldstien, 2001). Among the students in Litner et al. study, their islands of competence were in the practical or arts subject areas, which served to get them through high school.

At the university level, many of the participants acknowledged their professors and counselors as important facilitators contributing to their success. The use of technology was also significant in opening doors for successful academic outcomes (Litner et al., 2005). Participants also credited their diagnosis as playing an important role in their ability to find coping strategies. The researchers stated, "There is a clear sense that these subjects saw themselves as capable and were motivated to work hard and achieve their goals" (Litner et al., 2005). They had a powerful drive to succeed, assured of their own competence, proactive, and determined to prove their real worth to others (Litner et al., 2005).

Morrison and Cosden (1997) studied risk and resiliency among individuals with learning disabilities in a synthesis of current research on the topic. They stated that having a learning disability puts the individual at greater risk for a negative academic school performance and that it increased the risk for nonacademic problems at school, at home, and within the community. Yet despite these risk factors, many individuals adjusted to their learning disability and lead successful lives. The researchers examined environmental and personal factors that facilitated both risk and resilience among the participants. Their results indicated that resilient individuals shared positive self-esteem, high verbal skills, and accurately understood the nature of their learning disability

(Morrison & Cosden, 1997). The environmental factors that promoted positive outcomes for these participants were having caregivers who exhibited good parenting skills, appropriate expectations for the child, and flexibility in the home. For these individuals, school completion was facilitated by a lack of school transfers and disruptions, a successful school performance, and the existence of intact families (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). The personal factors paired with the environmental factors created resilience among this sample of individuals with learning disabilities. Factors that promoted risk were identified as stressors in the family, such as, parental disappointment, family rigidity or disorganization, school disruptions, and school failure (Morrison & Cosden, 1997).

In summary, the focus of these five studies was on the perceptions and attitudes of the adults with learning disabilities (see Appendix A). The results showed that personal attributes, such as being self aware, having perseverance, being proactive, emotionally stable, setting goals, and using support systems are predictors of success for individuals with learning disabilities. Environmental conditions such as having a supportive family and a supportive school environment predicted resilience among these individuals. High-school programs were not related to any success they experienced as adults but many credited their universities as facilitating successful outcomes. Highly successful adults with learning disabilities went through the process of accepting their learning disabilities. They also wanted to gain control over their lives, and the more internal decisions and external manifestations that existed for these individuals, the higher the success.

Defining Success

Success is considered to be a subjective quality in our modern world; in general it

refers to a “favourable outcome...one obtaining what one desires or intends” (New Illustrated Webster’s Dictionary, 1992). The examples vary from the largest to the smallest endeavours and are endless. Accounting for success becomes an individual and personal matter. Having said this, successful outcomes can be measured. In humans, there seems to be a natural preoccupation with, achievement, attainment, ability, progress, fortune, completion, execution, performance, production, talent, triumph, and fulfillment. When one of these has been satisfied we consider ourselves successful. In the survival of the fittest mode of thinking, we have a natural predisposition to compete. In our modern world we do not compete for survival, instead we compete for dominance (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survival_of_the_fittest). Humans compete to achieve higher and higher levels of success. In the 1980s, as reported by Gerber et al. (1992), researchers began to study success and how it is achieved in highly successful people. In the business world researchers concluded that, “The key to success was the focus on success itself (individually or collectively) and the ability to lay a blueprint for successful endeavours.” (Gerber et al., p. 475) Another study attempted to understand the educational process of human potential and how potential becomes reality. Authors were concerned with identifying alterable variables of success and found that “alterable variables were special circumstances in self, situation, influence, and interaction that may have had either an individual or a cumulative effect on success and that are susceptible to change.” (Gerber et al., p. 476) A study to determine the characteristics of children who exhibited exceptional abilities in academic, extracurricular, and leadership activities despite living with conditions such as poverty, sickness in the family and family dysfunction, found that these children had “internal psychological mechanisms for this overachievement,

including determination and a strong need for a sense of control in one's environment." (Gerber et al. 476) Gerber et al, (1992) also discussed the results of Baker (1972) who studied famous people with learning disabilities in history, and found that "their success was due in large part to "amazing willpower to overcome adversity" (Baker, 30 cited in Gerber et al. 1992). Lastly, Gerber et al, reported on Baker (1978) who studied scientists with severe handicaps and found that "success was attained by persistence (of motivation and efforts), self-confidence, and strength of force of character." (Gerber et al.,1992). The consensus from these studies is that success is achieved through forces from within. Gerber et al, (1992) considered the above research and went one step further by researching success among adults with learning disabilities, an area of study that had not been examined and found that the most successful adults with learning disabilities were able to gain control over their lives through internal decisions and external manifestations.

The very definition of a learning disability, "a significant discrepancy between one's ability and achievement" (Lyon, 1996. p.54), creates a challenge for the person with a learning disability to achieve success, yet some do achieve high levels of success as demonstrated by the above research. With the capability to achieve but the inability to produce, studying how successful outcomes are achieved for this population will advance our current knowledge of how to assist students with learning disabilities achieve success.

Research Context

What interested me in this area of research were the studies that focused on identifying success among individuals with learning disabilities. Often there are negative

associations made with individuals who have special needs and often low expectations are formulated or expressed. Studies that focus on success and how success can be achieved for these individuals are empowering and serve to inform individuals of the possibilities for success and a better quality of life. I feel that concentrating on the positive aspects of learning disabilities, rather than the negative is good practice because positive attitudes are associated with improved service for students with exceptionalities (Reis, et al., 1997).

Specifically, I modeled this study after the Gerber et al. (1992) research. This American research is twelve years old and its participants were not of the generation who may have benefited from funding for special education initiatives. My research focused on individuals who received special education services in elementary and secondary school: whether full integration in a special education setting or accommodations made in the general classroom. In their concluding thoughts, Gerber et al. (1992) reflected on the finding that their participants felt that school did not contribute to their successfulness. They went on to say that this result is not surprising given the fact that these participants did not receive special education programming while in school. Certain questions arise from this observation as we reflect on the change in our educational system in Canada over the last twenty years. Former students with special needs of the last twenty years would likely have found themselves receiving extra services and accommodations and many may have been fully integrated into a special education setting.

As shown in this review of the literature, the results of research conducted in the United States are conflicting. Some validate that school programs can make a difference and others show that school programs make no difference. Blackorby & Wagner (1996),

Benz et al. (1997), Colley and Jamison (1998), Reis et al. (1997), Madaus et al. (2003) and Baer et al. (2003) found that school experiences; programs, accommodations and school-to-work programs predicted post-school success. Whereas, Raskind et al. (1999), Gerber et al. (1992), Higgins et al. (2002), Litner et al. (2005) and Morrison & Cosden (1997) showed that individual and environmental factors predict success for these individuals. This Canadian study, examines post-secondary school outcomes of individuals with learning disabilities and consider the impact of high school programs as well as individual characteristics and environmental factors.

Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of this research was to examine how school experiences, individual characteristics and the environment contributed to the post-secondary school outcomes of successful adults with learning disabilities. The primary research question that guided my study was:

1. What are the educational experiences of individuals with learning disabilities?

There were two other research questions of secondary importance. They are listed below:

2. What are the employment, education, and independent living outcomes for adults with learning disabilities who received accommodations, in their elementary, secondary, and/or post-secondary education?
3. What are the facilitators and barriers that are related to their post-school outcomes (e.g., personal characteristics and environmental conditions)?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the methodology of this study is described. Outlined is the purpose of using a qualitative approach and a constructivist conceptual framework using a phenomenological strategy and a case study method. The methods used to recruit participants, collect data, and analyse them are also described. As well, the relevance of the researcher's perspective and the efforts to maintain trustworthiness through member checks and a researcher's journal are explained. Lastly, the limitations and implications of this study are detailed.

Qualitative Approaches

Qualitative research allows for an individual to explore “natural settings where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (Creswell, 1998, p.14).

As stated by Mertens (2005) qualitative research in many cases follows a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist theoretical framework refers to the understanding that, “Knowledge is socially constructed by the people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 2000; cited in Mertens, 2005 p. 12-13). Furthermore, “research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them” (Mertens, 2005, p. 13). This study adopted a constructivist approach. I saw myself as ‘the passionate participant’ concerned with

‘facilitating the inquiry process’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The constructivist researcher understands that all research is subjective and seen through many perspectives and that parameters are defined based on what the researcher believes to be true (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Within the constructivist conceptual framework, a phenomenological strategy was employed, and more specifically a case study method was used. A phenomenological strategy describes the meaning that a group of individuals make of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). It allows the researcher to “enter the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of participants’ experience” (p. 31). Therefore, the conceptual framework and phenomenological strategy were used in this study in order to understand the educational experiences of the participants and the meaning they made of their experiences. The conceptual framework and the review of literature guided the formulation of the research questions as well as selection of the method and the interpretation of findings. In this case, the phenomenon is the experience of living with a learning disability and the researcher attempted to “set aside her preconceptions to best understand [and describe] the phenomenon as experienced by the participants” (p. 31).

A case study method allows for an in-depth understanding of a single, unique situation and its meaning for those involved. This is a collective case study that is bounded by time and place (3-6 months, Eastern Ontario region). Case studies allow for an in-depth analysis of an individual’s experience (1998) and using multiple case studies helped to achieve generalizability across the cases. While in qualitative research

generalizability is not a necessary component, it is useful for my study to be able to find a consensus and like patterns among these case studies.

Following the case study method, the technique of an in-depth interview allowed the participants to describe the phenomenon in their own words through their perspectives and their lived experiences. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman 2006, p. 9). An important assumption made in the in-depth interviewing strategy is that the “participant’s perspectives on the phenomena of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 108). In terms of this in-depth interview strategy, as an educator with a learning disability I have listened to the information told to me by the participants and set aside my own beliefs and understandings to view the phenomenon through the participants perspective and not through my own. I have also kept a reflective journal in order to control any bias that I brought to the interpretation of the data.

Participants

The participants for this study included four adults who were diagnosed with a learning disability in elementary school and who received accommodations and special services or programs while in elementary and secondary school. It is understood that successful post-secondary school outcomes vary among individuals with learning disabilities. However, for this study success was defined as enrollment in or completion of a post-secondary program. Based on the above criteria, three females and one male participant were selected to participate. Though this is not a representative sample of the general population, “one goal of qualitative research is to increase understanding of a

phenomenon as opposed to generalizing data extrapolated from the sample to the population at large” (<http://www.aorn.org/journal/2001/febrc.htm>). Each of the participants were Caucasians, born in Canada, spoke English as their first language, and were schooled within the Canadian educational system. Their ages ranged from 21 to 25 years. All of the participants’ parents had high school diplomas and some type of post high school education (university or college training). Three of the individuals were presently working on their university degree and one had recently graduated. Three of the four participants had A averages and one person had a B average.

Recruitment notices were placed at the centers for students with disabilities at two universities, one college, and a Learning Disability Association. Each facility is located in Eastern Ontario. All of these centers posted an online version of the recruitment notice that was sent out to potential participants. This notice listed the requirements of this study and the researcher’s contact information. Eight potential participants responded via email. Of the eight respondents, two did not meet the requirements of this study; they were not diagnosed with a learning disability until university, and two did not follow through with scheduling interviews. The four respondents who met the criteria under investigation were asked to participate in three 90 minute interviews (Seidman, 2006). Each participant had the option of having face-to-face interviews at a location convenient to him or her. Three of the participants preferred to participate in telephone interviews, due to work commitments, and one individual had face-to-face interviews. All participants received a hard copy of the consent form. They also had the option of having the researcher read the form to them over the phone and one participant took advantage of this option. Consent forms were mailed to each of the four participants with a return

envelope and stamp. The consent form outlined the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time, and they were assured that their participation would be completely anonymous and that pseudonyms would be used in any reports and publications in place of any names given in the results of this study. All of the consent forms were returned and signed by the participants. After each interview, another appointment based on the schedule of the participant was made for the following week. During the week the researcher produced a transcript of the interview and emailed it to the participant for him or her to view and reflect upon before the next interview took place. This method also gave the researcher the opportunity to begin an initial analysis of the data. This cycle of (1) interviewing, (2) transcribing, and (3) initial analysis, continued until the interview series was complete. Each of the participants was interviewed separately, and when the interview series was complete for one participant, the researcher was able to move on to the next participant. Each participant was given unlimited time to look over the transcripts and was able to make any changes that he or she felt necessary. Only one of the participants made revisions to a transcript. She added information that allowed the researcher to understand more details of her experience. The participants sent an email to confirm that they approved of the transcripts.

Researcher's Perspective

Clarifying researcher bias is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any of the assumptions that may have impacted the inquiry (Merriam, 1988). I am a teacher who has been educated in theories of teaching and learning, and who studied different exceptionalities with a particular focus and passion

for the issues that children with exceptionalities face, while they are in school, at home, and after they leave high school. I am also an individual who was diagnosed with a learning disability at the young age of 10 and who received early intervention and accommodations throughout school. Therefore, I know that with the right kind of support, all children can learn, and in turn, all adults can experience some success. This study is personal for me. I have experienced much of the same feelings and issues expressed by the participants in this study. It is my belief that students, educators, parents and communities need to plan for the success of students with learning disabilities.

I also acknowledge that different criteria may be used to define success. Many successful people never pursue post-secondary education they take another route to pursue their passions. The definition of success chosen on this occasion helped the researcher to narrow the scope of the study, but the point must be made that pursuing post-secondary education is one way and not the only way to define successful outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities.

Data Collection Procedures

As a form of data collection, Seidman (2006) recommends the three-interview series, in which participants are interviewed on three separate occasions and each interview lasts for approximately 90 minutes. In this study, the first interview focused on the participants' life history. Questions were asked that put the participant's life into context. Participants told as much as possible about his or her school experiences and were asked specifically about the psychological assessment, diagnosis, and advocacy. In the second interview details about university and other post-secondary school

experiences, the participants' individual characteristics, and environmental conditions were explored. In the third interview the participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences and what they gained from the interview process. This sequence was important in that the three-interview strategy helped the researcher and participants build trust and understanding. Moreover, each interview "helped to illuminate the next." (Seidman, 2006, p. 19)

Interviewing

Retrospective interviews were conducted to understand the past experiences of the participants and how these experiences have contributed to their present outcomes. Through the use of Seidman's three interview series, and the participants' verification of the transcripts, as well as my own reflections made during the interview process these multiple sources of data provide corroborating evidence that triangulate the research findings (Creswell, 1998).

Three different interviews were used (See Appendix E). The first interview consisted of forty-three questions. The first few questions were designed to collect demographic data. The questions later became more open-ended and indulged in the participants' memory of their educational life history, their social experiences, and their school experiences as being diagnosed with learning disability. The purpose of this interview was to provide data to answer the first research question: what are the educational experiences of individuals with learning disabilities? The underlying goal was to discover how the learning disability and the diagnosis affected the earliest memories of their educational experience, and in turn, their sense of self.

Page 50 missing.

To allow the participants to reflect on their answers, five to seven days were given between interviews. Participants appreciated this time because it allowed them to recall experiences, think about why certain questions were asked, and how the questions were relevant to their lives. By doing this, the responses in the next interviews became more detailed and reflected the meaning the participants made of their experiences. Through this process of critical analysis, participants reflected on their experiences and a deeper understanding of them ensued (Seidman, 2006). After each interview the researcher was able to reflect on the conversation, reread the transcript and make any necessary changes to the questionnaire for the following interview in order to ask meaningful and relevant questions.

Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1985) described trustworthiness as including four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this research, credibility was achieved through member checks. Transcriptions were sent to participants to be edited and to add further information. This technique gave participants full control over the data used in the study and reduced researcher bias. As described by Lincoln and Guba, (1989) member checking is,

“the process of testing hypothesis, data, preliminary categories, and interpretation with members of the stake holding groups from whom the original constructs were collected...If the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognizable of

Page 52 missing.

interviews were recorded and kept on file along with any notes and other artifacts. In sum, through the methods described above, trustworthiness was achieved.

Data Analysis

The visual concept of data analysis used for this study took the form of a spiral.

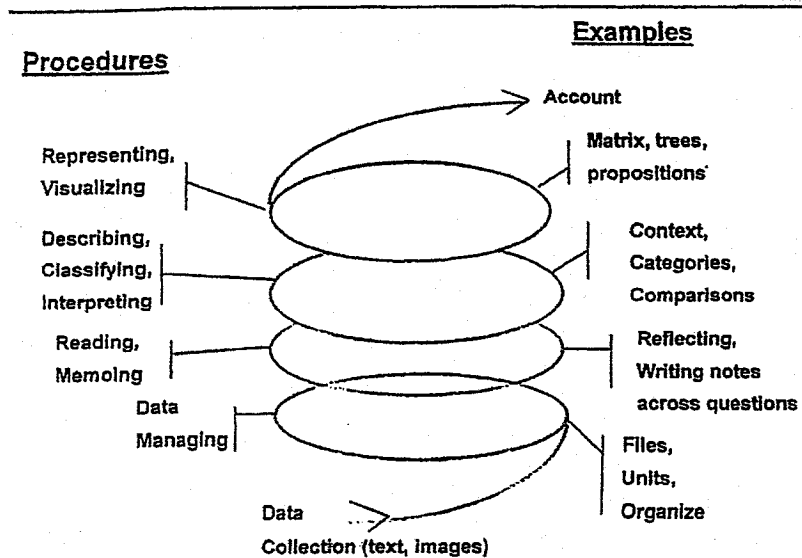


Figure 8.1 The Data Analysis Spiral

The data analysis spiral is a representation of analytic circles that when together form a complete spiral, each loop in the spiral represents a stage in the analysis process. The spiral is open ended to enable the researcher to move forward and backward during the data analysis process. The spiral begins with data collection and moves into data managing; the organization of materials into files and units, moving through the loop the second phase is to read the transcripts through several times reflecting and making notes, in the third loop the researcher describes, classifies and interprets the data, putting it into context and forming categories and comparisons, during the fourth and final loop the data is presented in a visual format that helps to illuminate the final narrative (Creswell, 1998).

After each interview was conducted and transcribed, steps to systematically analyze the data began. The purpose in this initial step was to examine the interview series together so that I could mentally piece together the life of each participant. Each of the participants' accounts were read several times to create an understanding in the researcher of the participants' described experiences. Once the researcher felt well acquainted with the essence of the data, she started the process of extracting statements which would best illuminate the participant's experiences and eliminated redundant statements which would not contribute to furthering the researcher's explanation of the participant's lives. Her goal was to select meaningful statements that were representative of the participant's thoughts staying true to the original context in which the statements were given. Through this method the final narratives for each participant were produced. Interview three facilitated this process by producing reflections from the participants about the meaning they make of their experiences. Across participants, categories emerged and comparisons between the four cases were evident. The cross case analysis exposed themes which are reported in the final chapter of this paper.

The following chapters portray the profile of each of the four participants and offer a discussion that describes the experiences of these individuals and examines the commonalities between the experiences which lead to the implications of this study.

Limitations and Implications of the Study

One significant limitation of this study occurred during the data collection process, in that the trustworthiness of this research relies exclusively on the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The data are only as accurate as the participant's ability to remember past accounts and his or her willingness to talk about their experiences. The

purpose of this research is to gain insight in to the educational experiences of these participants when they were young children and throughout their school careers. Although these participants experienced first-hand the diagnosis and their initial awareness and attempts to begin living and coping with their learning disability, they were less informed about what a learning disability is. Therefore, they were not entirely clear about how it affected them at a young age. Their caregivers and teachers would have been better informed as to the actual problems they had and progress they made as children. However, the reason these participants were chosen for this study was to understand how *they* viewed the reality of their experience, with the aim at discovering when and how they became aware of their learning disability and how this awareness affected them.

Another potential limitation to the research was that the participants were asked to explain their life history through the lens of their learning disability. They were asked to talk about their experiences in terms of how having a learning disability has influenced their lives. Though the aim of the study was to discover how the learning disability has affected the experience, it is acknowledged that this is a narrowed view and that life experiences are more complex.

Practically, the findings from this study will lead to recommendations for schools, regarding the types of programs and accommodations that contribute to post-secondary school success among individuals with learning disabilities.

In summary, this chapter has described the method used for data collection, data analysis and the interpretation of data. It describes the method by which the study was organized. It details the recruitment process and explains the suitability of the participants

to this research. The researcher has explained her interest in the topic under investigation and her efforts to maintain trustworthiness. Limitations and implications have also been addressed.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASES

The findings for this study take the form of four narratives that describe each participant's life history. Each narrative moves through the individual's life, from their earliest memories of school to their current experiences at university. Specific attention is paid to memories of the way their learning disability has affected different aspects of their lives. Each of the names used in the narratives are fictional and any information that could be traced back to the individual has been changed in order to keep the anonymity of the participants.

Each narrative was constructed through the use of the original transcript of each telephone interview. The goal was to stay true to the individual's experiences, illuminating certain stories that reflected turning points in the participant's lives, and all the while continuing on a straight path to highlight examples that reflected the purpose of the study.

The instrument used for data collection was lengthy and provided a multitude of stories and a clear and circular description of the participants' lives. Only redundant and non-relevant information were extracted from the final narratives. As seen through the narratives the experiences of the four participants follow a similar pattern. Their stories are different but there are similarities among many of their experiences.

Jack's Profile

Jack was a twenty-two year old Caucasian Canadian who was diagnosed with a learning disability at age seven, while he was in Grade one. His assessment stated that he has short-term memory difficulties, visual motor integration problems, and problems with visual processing. Jack had also been just recently diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. At present, he is living with his parents, which is convenient for him as he works and attends university close to his parents' home.

During the interview process, I found that Jack, though intelligent and very interested in participating, distanced himself from his difficulties. He had trouble expressing emotions, and relating analytically to his experiences and to some of the more abstract questions asked. This could be due to Jack's diagnosis of Asperger's. As a child Jack was confused about what a learning disability was, and when asked about his memories about being diagnosed with a learning disability and how he felt about it, he responded:

I can't remember back that far. I had remedial assistance and occupational therapy in writing. I went to small groups for remedial assistance. When I was a child, no one noticed that I left the classroom for assistance, kids were being pulled out of a class all the time, and I didn't feel labeled.

Jack's story begins in the first grade when his teacher observed that he was not performing well, "She noticed a difference with my performance and what I was capable of doing, she notified my parents and they were very involved. Everyone was concerned about my reading difficulty." Jack had both a private psychological assessment and a

school assessment from the board psychologist. The assessments began in 1991 when he was in Grade one and his diagnosis was given in 1993. Jack repeated second grade because he moved from a French speaking school to an English one. By the end of third grade he was doing so well that he was able to skip Grade four to be with his like age peers. This was the wish of his parents. Throughout this time, the children's hospital provided Jack with remedial assistance and occupational therapy to enhance his writing skills. By Grade five, Jack's classes were set up in a rotary system, "When some kids went to one class I would go to the resource room. I just perceived my accommodations as a necessary part of my school experience; I had no feelings about it." Jack remembered his elementary school experiences as positive. To him the accommodations that were made for him were necessary helpful and timely, "Definitely the accommodations that I had up until the end of middle school put me in a good place to begin high school."

The atmosphere changed once Jack started high school. Jack remembered that he really struggled academically.

The first part of high school was great and I was able to cope with certain academic difficulties. Later on in high school in Grade 11 and 12 I got depressed and broke down. There was a decrease in my performance. I believe that my learning disability played a part in my inability to cope and perform well because I wasn't able to fall back on certain skills that others without a learning disability might have developed.

During what Jack explained as a breakdown in Grades eleven and twelve his marks dropped from an 85% average to a 65% average. Jack went on depression

medication during his OAC year, he felt better and was able to get his marks up to a 75% average. He commented, "I finished high school with a decent average but it didn't reflect my ability because at university I have an A average." When Jack explained that he felt depressed in high school, he didn't refer to social interactions and didn't elude to there being any social problems in high school that would have affected his depression in Grades eleven and twelve. When asked about his relationship with his peers he did say:

I don't have much of a relationship with them. I always related to people of an older age. I still keep in contact with the resource teacher from high school, he was a strong advocate for me. If it wasn't for him I would've failed a lot more courses. Even though he didn't see me regularly, he was there when I needed him.

In his reflections of his school experiences, peers or friends did not appear to play a role. The tone in his voice told me that his priorities were his work and his academics. He demonstrated recognition of his social ineptness by stating "my social comprehension skills are weak". This revelation did not emerge from his thoughts on his social relationships; rather it surfaced through his story of one of his greatest challenges: English literature. "I had a lot of difficulty in English and I couldn't relate to what was being taught. Understanding literature was my greatest challenge because the social aspects of understanding and relating to characters is an area of difficulty for me" he revealed.

A continuing theme throughout this interview was that Jack struggled with his inability to perform up to his potential.

My marks weren't high enough to go to university because there was a dispute over my English mark. The teacher gave me 35% and the principal boosted it to 50% because I had him review my assignment which I thought was marked unfairly. I got a 66% I still felt that that mark did not reflect my potential I had to get references from the school, and the principal had to review the work material. I was given an unfair mark. The teacher was well known as being incompetent.

Jack took a lot of pride in his ability to perform academically. His sense of self was wrapped up in being able to demonstrate his academic potential. He struggled with having a learning disability because he perceived that presence of a learning disability lowers the possibility of achieving one's potential. Hence, he was frustrated because he could not achieve his potential unless he had accommodations: 50% extra time to write exams in a quiet location with access to a computer. Moreover, Jack perceived that his achievement in a course was in the hands of teachers who could choose to provide or not provide the accommodations he required to reach his potential. The most negative impact on Jack's learning were: "The teachers who weren't willing to accommodate for me in high school. Doing poorly in high school didn't help me it wasn't good for my self-esteem."

Jack attributed some of his academic difficulty in high school to budget cuts made in the education system.

When I started high school there were eight full time EA's on staff, but during my years they were all cut and by OAC there was only one third of a

teacher in the resource room. I don't think I had much resource room time in high school and they didn't teach much in the way of strategies for coping with learning disabilities. Over time the IPRC meetings became less and less and near the end of high school they didn't have the budget for meetings with my parents. It would have been helpful to have these meetings and to have somebody reviewing and making recommendations to my progress.

In high school, Jack found that without scheduled resource room time, the resource teacher was not always available to give him assistance.

Jack said that his single greatest challenge has been "passing high school." He elaborated by saying; "In elementary school you're not aware of how well or poorly you're doing. I wanted to go to elementary school but the last few years of high school I didn't want to be there anymore, which related to some of the difficulty I was having." Jack became very agitated when he talked about his high school experiences. He felt some injustice was done by teachers as he explained the problems he faced with some of his teachers and compared them to his elementary and university experiences.

School was positive in elementary school, it was neutral in middle school, and high school was negative because I performed poorly but it made no difference in post secondary. In post secondary there is no dependence on what you learned in high school.

Jack expressed his lack of trust in the public education system.

I went to eight schools up until university switching from French to English or when the board changed the school boundaries, I would have to change schools. I found that there was no

communication between schools about the needs of kids with learning disabilities. Going to high school was the worst, there was no communication. In university I am able to advocate for myself. I am skeptical as to whether they provided any support in high school at all.

In contrast:

I have done well in university. In order to get into university I had to take the ESP program which is the enriched support program for people who don't have the average to get into university. They provide you with programs in applied skills and work shops that teach study strategies to apply to other subject areas. After the English mark I had enough marks to get into a general arts program at my university, but I chose to take the ESP transition program anyway. This program allows students without marks high enough to get into university the opportunity to get in. There are a lot of kids with learning disabilities in this program. The program integrates information from the university and prepares you for academic life. They teach you certain strategies to help you be successful in university. It improved my writing by leaps and bounds.”

Jack took pride in participating in programs offered for students with learning disabilities and demonstrated acceptance of his disability by taking the necessary steps to cope, such as registering with the services for students with disabilities on his campus, and informing his professors that he had a learning disability and needs accommodations.

I had to accommodate myself before I finish school. Before September I went to the university to get registered and get organized. I have to tell the teachers what work I need, the process can be difficult at times, sometimes it's hard to find the professors to discuss my accommodations, I've managed.

Jack was confident in the services and support that he has received through the services for students with disabilities at his university. "These individuals help teach coping strategies and they have degrees in education and psychology. They help people to adapt to their disability." His accommodations remain 50% extra time on exams and a quiet location to write in with access to a computer. In his classes he can have a note taker or get a photocopy of the notes from the professor. Jack explained "the University tailors its services to each individual student. Though in university it is your responsibility to seek out services when needed." Some factors that contributed to Jack's success were not from the accommodations; "I purchased a laptop to bring to class. I type faster than the average writer."

He observed:

In University having a learning disability has been positive experience because it forced me to talk to professors and to get to know them. It forced me to work harder, and I have bettered myself because I wasn't at the level I wanted to be at. At the university level you see a lot more determination in people with learning disabilities. In high school you see a lot of people give up... Going from high school to university

was a significant change for me. I finally have the ability to learn how I want to learn.

One of Jack's best coping strategies is that he has learned to make use of secondary resources available which demonstrated the responsibility that he takes for his own learning.

At university, I learned to look for secondary sources. I wish I learned to look for secondary sources earlier because restricting me to learning from a single resource was limiting. If the professor can't teach in a way that I can understand I go out and find other books and I learn the material myself. Right now I am "challenging for credits". So instead of taking a course in an area that I have skill, I make a deal with the professor to write the final exam and get credit for it as a pass/fail mark. Through this mechanism I can learn the material on my own and get the credit that I need.

Challenging for credits has lightened Jack's work load each semester, which is important because he has a full time job working for a high tech company. Jack was introduced to this industry during his co-op placement in Grade eleven. He works with computers and he excels in this setting, "I learned that I wasn't learning anything in high school. I learned that I have marketable talents and skills I have been employed since Grade 11." Jack has strengths in his "ability to work with computers, I have a strong logic base. I am strong in math and computer science. I am a quick learner, independent, and good at problem solving." Jack has an impressive work ethic, even with his full time job he is very determined to finish university. He commented, "The degree will open doors

and it is needed for graduate school...One reason that I'm not moving faster to complete my university is that my lack of degree does not inhibit me in my job. I need a degree so that in the future I am able to get potential job prospects."

Jack said that there was an understanding in his home that he would go to university. Even with his negative experiences at high school he never considered dropping out.

In high school I wasn't fond of the experience but I wasn't considering dropping out...My parents encouraged me. It was always implied that I should get a university degree...At university I haven't dropped out but I am going at a slower pace.

Jack described his achievement in relation to his peers;

Initially in elementary school I was below my peers, then in the first half of high school I was on par with them and at university I am above my peers with high A marks. Elementary school with positive place for me, middle school was neutral, high school was negative because I preformed poorly. Post secondary education is great and I'm doing well.

Jack considered his learning disability and his weak social skills as potential barriers to him achieving success. To compensate he has a plan:

My plan for academic success combines the strategies and coping mechanisms I've learned. I take my toolkit of strategies and determine how to apply them and my strengths to the particular problems. This plan for academic success was created by necessity because with a

learning disability you have difficulties that you need to get around and you have to plan for your own success. I set high goals to continue to do well. My desire to succeed prevents me from setting low goals.

The university setting and its flexibility is a facilitator. They teach you how to learn and give you tools needed for particular courses.

He defined success as “synonymous with being happy and content with what you have been able to accomplish. I feel successful with my current situation.” Jack felt satisfied to have passed high school and to have a full time job. His post secondary experiences have given him autonomy and confidence. He felt that he has reached his goals and has set new ones: “I plan to go further with my education and potentially manage or start my own company.”

Jack says that despite the negative aspects of having a learning disability it has helped him build character:

The experience of my learning disability has helped me to continue to work hard and progress towards my goals...I think that my learning disability has influenced my having coping strategies, being determined, and having the drive to succeed. Determination drives confidence, and you have to be adaptable as an LD learner. Having a learning disability forced me to develop these skills; it is a fighter instinct. I am proactive by necessity and I try to start things early in order to be prepared.

Jack further mused on how his learning disability has affected his life.

It caused me to work harder. I have a learning disability, but I also have the same experiences as most people. I have never felt different. The

learning disability and being labeled doesn't encompass me...I try to continue and to limit the amount of perceived difference from other people. I worked in such a way that having a learning disability is not a defining attribute of myself. In other words, I create opportunities to have success for myself. I don't enter situations where my weaknesses show. The learning disability doesn't affect who I am, my strengths define who I am. The strengths that I have over-compensate for my weaknesses. I define myself in terms a positive attributes as opposed to negative... prior to university I didn't know what my learning disability really was. In the past I was directed toward strategies to help, but I didn't know what my learning disability really was, or what impacted how I learn. It is hard to come up with strategies for yourself when you don't know the details of what you are working with or without... Now that I know what I am working with, it has caused me to go and seek my own learning strategies, how I can learn and how I can't learn. To get material taught to me or to teach myself in a way that I can absorb it. Learning about my learning disability has enabled me to take control of my own learning.

Jack defined his success based on what he is able to achieve. He struggled to match his perceived potential with his actual achievement. He learned to self-advocate and take complete ownership of his learning as a means of minimizing the gap between potential and achievement. He demonstrated this through his ability to maintain his job, which highlight his talents bringing him fulfillment and success, while he continued to work on

his university degree. He is an example of a person who has learned how to “create opportunities to have success.”

Lauren's Profile

Lauren is a twenty-three year old Caucasian Canadian who has scotopic sensitivity in her eye, otherwise known as Irlen syndrome. This syndrome makes it difficult for her to read on anything other than blue paper. Lauren lives with her parents and commutes to a university near her city. Both of Lauren's parents are teachers, and post secondary education has always been a family value. At the time of the interviews, Lauren was completing her final year in an Honours Psychology degree. Lauren had a grade point average of 10.8 on a 12 point scale.

Lauren was first diagnosed with a learning disability at age ten by the diagnostic teacher at her school. She has deficits in language. At sixteen, her mother insisted that Lauren be retested by a private clinical psychologist, "My mom wanted more details and an explanation of what was wrong. She wanted clear suggestions of accommodations and with a clinical diagnosis the schools have to follow the recommendations made." The clinical psychologist diagnosed Lauren with dyslexia. No other member of Lauren's immediate family had been diagnosed with a learning disability but she said; "My mom might have a learning disability, but she was not formally diagnosed." Lauren described her learning disability as 'severe' until age sixteen. "I would say that without assistive technology it is severe, but I use technology so much that I don't find my learning disability as noticeable as when I was a child."

Lauren was very insightful and self-aware. Her passion for learning and her determination to succeed was inspiring for me. Her struggles have clearly been obstacles in her life, but she understands them as trials that make her stronger and she gave credit

to the supporters in her life, like her mother who created opportunities for her to have success.

Lauren's story began in Grade one with negative memories of her school experiences. She shared with me her feelings of incompetence, falling behind her peers, and being different.

I knew that something was wrong because I couldn't do what other kids could do. My mother explained it to me, but I didn't get it. I was trying to keep up with my peers and I couldn't. I would have tantrums every night. I knew by Grade one that I couldn't keep up in spelling and reading.

Lauren's mother was a teacher at the school she attended and had no indication that Lauren was having problems. In Grade four, Lauren was working at a Grade one level, "I relied heavily on the support of my friends; I got them to spell my words for me sometimes." She further explained:

One of my teachers told my mother that I was behind and that something was wrong. "She works so hard and she still can't spell or read." I was tested and diagnosed in Grade four by the teacher diagnostic. My mom initiated everything. We worked on spelling and language for hours at night. It was painful.

When Lauren began to be assessed by the diagnostic teacher she said, "I didn't know what was going on with the testing, my mother explained it to me but I didn't get it... the test incorporated things that aggravated me because I found some of the tests hard to do and I didn't know why they had to be done."

Lauren described learning to read and spell as an experience of misery and fear.

She recalled one negative experience writing a spelling test;

In Grade 5 my teacher would always give us a spelling list on Monday and the test would be on Friday. But on Monday we were all tested on these new words and if we got all the words right we didn't have to write the test on Friday. Well, I never got them right and I always felt anxious and upset about these tests. My mother asked the teacher to change that method, after that the teacher gave us the option of being able to write that test on Monday so I no longer had to be put on the spot to write these tests.

Lauren acknowledged that her mother played a significant role in providing successful learning opportunities for her.

My mom ran into so much adversity with me. Other people couldn't understand why she would work for hours with me at night. She would tell other people stuff like "I can't let it go she's my daughter. I have to help her be all that she can be." My mother and I worked so hard after school so that my problems didn't appear as obvious to my teachers while I was in school. Because of this, my teachers wanted to decline some of my services and the accommodations they made for me. My mother let them know that the services were needed, but she would still work hard with me after school so that I would get ahead. I remember my mom saying that she couldn't just let me drown to prove a point. I really believe that I am as successful as I am today because

of my mom never giving up on me. She taught me what it was like to succeed. If it weren't for her I would be like the dog that gets a continuous shock and doesn't try to escape ("learned-helplessness").

After the school assessment Lauren began one hour of resource classes a day in spelling and reading remediation. This hour of time in the resource room continued throughout high school. Lauren recalled feelings of embarrassment over having to leave the class for resource time;

I never liked being taken out of class for resource because none of my friends ever had to go. I also knew that I was being taken out not because I was special but because I needed help...In elementary school I had resource for spelling, using phonics, sounding out words, learning to put vowels into words and putting "s's" on words. Also I had extra help with reading. I worked with reading buddies. These were my resource classes until Grade 8. In Grade 9 and 10 the resource classes were more about helping me with my homework.

Competition has always been a driving force for Lauren;

I was very competitive with my friends in academics; this was very frustrating because I was always behind. I had supportive friends to help me copy things down and they would help me to read. I didn't know any different. I knew that learning was supposed to be easier but I didn't know how different it should be. I knew that I worked really hard when my other friends didn't have to. This hard work ethic carried on into high school. What really frustrated me was that

my younger sister could do better than I could in reading and spelling and that annoyed me because I was very competitive.

Lauren learned from her negative experiences in elementary school and avoided them for a better secondary school experience.

When I look back on my elementary school experiences I realized that it was not fun. All the memories were negative and difficult because I had ongoing problems that no one else seemed to have. I realize now that it was a maturing process for me, that growing and discovering what my needs were was a process of maturation... in secondary school, things were better I started to feel less frustrated and I started to learn how I learn best.

Lauren recalled that in high school she had very supportive teachers. After her diagnosis of dyslexia in Grade eleven, at age sixteen, her marks rose from getting Bs through ninth and tenth grade to getting B+s and A-s in Grade eleven, twelve, and OAC. The recommendations made by her psychologist for accommodations assisted in her academic success:

By Grade 11, I got books on tape and I had a reader for my exams, due to the psychologist's recommendations. In OAC, I got a note taker because I couldn't keep up in class. So my friend took notes for me. I got "Dragon Naturally Speaking" also in OAC. By OAC, I was an A student and I got a scholarship to go to university because my average was 86 %. I feel that the accommodations gave me more independence and my marks rose. During final exams I had 50%

extra time and an alternative setting to write in and I read things on blue paper. In Grades 11, 12 and OAC I had access to books on tape, note takers, I did one oral exam, I had a reader, and I used Dragon Naturally Speaking for assignments, but not in class.

Lauren explained the benefits of working hard to learn, and the rewards due to her discovery of assistive technology.

I didn't really have accommodations in elementary school. What I meant is I had to do spelling tests and I had to learn to read, which was really difficult (probably one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do). Most people would say if she isn't going to learn to read and spell anyway why make her do it. Thinking it would be better to introduce the assistive technology to help with work. For me even though I really didn't like it at the time, being made to do things that were extremely difficult, I am grateful now that I was made and taught to do those things that I still can't do well even now. They are helpful in the sense that now I can read and spell, not well, but I can do it. I can function if I don't have the assistive technology (i.e., reading a magazine or typing an e-mail). I think it is important by high school/late elementary that technology does become available because by this point you will have a learned work ethic as well as basic ways to cope with your disability.

The other element to Lauren's academic success in high school was the rise in her self-esteem. "Definitely the accommodations made my average go up and I felt less stupid. You almost forget you have a disability when you have so much help."

During high school Lauren was pulled out of French classes to take resource classes and her program was adapted because she struggled to complete a full course load.

In Grade 11 the school wanted me to take another resource class but that would mean that I wouldn't have enough courses to graduate in the year with my friends. So I talked to my mom and told her that I would not take another resource class. She supported me and met with my special education teacher and told her that I would be taking a class instead of having resource. I worked very hard. I was able to pass my courses without taking a spare class in Grade 11 and 12; I had one spare in OAC. That was really hard but I really wanted to graduate with my friends.

Lauren was determined, she put her foot down and said that option was not good enough for her, and she took a risk. This was the first time during the interview that Lauren's strength of character shone. This was a turning point in her life. From then on, Lauren understood that she was able to create her own destiny by taking steps which moved her toward her full potential and by taking risks. Interestingly her mother's response was not to trust the education professionals, it was to support Lauren's decision. That year, Lauren worked hard to keep up with her academics and achieved her goal of graduating with her friends.

Lauren's mother initiated a retesting by a clinical psychologist when Lauren was sixteen. "My mother wanted the testing done so that I could get more resources. I got extra time, a note taker, and the program Dragon Naturally Speaking; these were the things that the new diagnosis gave me... at sixteen the testing was a positive experience." Lauren described the second diagnosis as another turning point in her life. A light turned on for her. Her passion in this description revealed a new way of seeing her life and her future possibilities. The second diagnosis opened doors that she had not been aware were open to her before, and a new Lauren emerged. After this she no longer lived in doubt of her abilities, instead this experience taught her to apply herself in order to reach her potential. She did not know where the limits to her potential were but she did realize that she could set high goals, and for the first time she had a long term goal and was determined to make it a reality.

The diagnosis was a big turning point for me. I really liked the process of the testing. I found it interesting and fun. When I look back at my elementary school experience I realize that it was not fun. All of the memories were negative and I realize now that it was a maturing process for me; that growing and discovering what my needs were was process of maturation. The psychologist inspired me because she said, "You are not dumb, you have high intelligence" and she told me that her sons and she herself have learning disabilities. When I looked at how successful she was I wanted to be like her. It changed my life and becoming a psychologist became my ambition.

With this new information about herself and an expert telling her that she could achieve

and showing her that people with learning disabilities can be successful, Lauren's attitude toward herself changed; "[I] went from feeling dumb, frustrated and not knowing myself to gaining self-knowledge. She told me my weak and strong areas, she told me what I needed to do to cope and she also told me that I can do, be, and function however I want." Lauren's mother also noticed this change in her immediately after the assessment. She finally realized that nothing should hold her back, least of all herself. With this understanding, her parent's dreams for her could be realized;

My mom says that after the assessment I came out and said that I could do anything I wanted, that I wasn't stupid but I had a learning disability and I would have to work harder than other people, but that I could do whatever I wanted. My mom, dad, and teacher said that they have been telling me that for years and my reply to that was "Yeah, but you weren't doctors." There was something about the doctor telling me that I had a learning disability that was different from when other people told me. I am not sure why, maybe because the doctor seemed unbiased and that I thought my teachers and parents had to tell me I wasn't stupid to make me feel better about my self.

Lauren attended a university located close to her parents' home. She lives with them and commutes into the city. Upon entering university, Lauren registered with the services for students with disabilities at the university. She did this through the recommendation of a friend who had a hearing impairment, who attends the same university, and who is also registered. The services are for students who have physical disabilities, mental disabilities or learning disabilities. They provide accommodations to

the students assisting them through their university years. "I like that at university no one knows that I have a learning disability. I feel have I have a lot of anonymity... the university experience has been really positive and the centre has been super supportive." Lauren continued to take responsibility for her academic success making use of all the resources and accommodations available to her. She took the initiative to meet with the library technician to get help with researching and she registered to receive her books on tape.

I got a bursary for students with learning disabilities and with that money I bought a laptop, the new version of "Dragon", "Kurzweil" which they use in schools. With this you can scan anything and then it reads it back to you. I use it to proof read my work. I also use a tutor for statistics or math related subjects. With all of this technology, my marks are really moving up to A+'s... In elementary school I relied on the people in my life to get through. My mom was always there for me giving unconditional support. She worked really hard with me. Now that I am in university, I rely on technology. I need to be able to self-advocate and I definitely would never give up."

With Lauren's hard work ethic there are some sacrifices she has learned she must make:

I played hockey my first and second year. I had friends from high school with me, playing with me, but I found that hockey was very difficult because I would be up at 5am to practice. And then I would have class, and then I would have to do homework, and the traveling to get to games was too much. I also was unable to take the technology I needed to study

with me while I traveled. In my third and fourth year I no longer played hockey and my marks went up... this program [honors psychology] has been very intensive. In my second year I was writing an exam once a week so I was studying every night.

In Lauren's case, her learning disability has created many negative experiences that have had lasting effect on self-esteem. Success has not come without strenuous work, determination and perseverance. She has learned that her self-esteem is only as strong as the coping mechanisms she uses to compensate for her learning disability.

Everything has been challenging for me, and spelling is still a challenge.

Processing is getting harder for me because now that I am in university,

I need to write faster. But I think that there will always be challenges,

they won't go away, but I am highly motivated and I am a high achiever.

This learning disability acts like an albatross around Lauren's neck tightening with every wave that challenges her comfort level. Lauren explains that she avoids writing things down in front of people because "it always ends up being a negative experience for me. I don't even like sending emails." She is very insecure about exposing her weaknesses to others:

I am a people pleaser, and I feel that if I do a bad job my status will go down in the other person's eyes. I still feel that I need to prove that I am not dumb. I don't feel that I am on an equal playing field with other people. I feel that I have to prove myself to them.

She thought of herself as a person with faults that others would be able to notice quickly, and did not realize that other people also have areas of weakness comparable to hers. She

was obsessed with how others might judge her, and she did not trust herself to make natural mistakes.

I worry that I will have a child who can spell better than me by the time they are ten. I worry that I won't be able to help them with their homework. Also, if I don't become a psychologist I would like to teach, but then spelling is still an issue.

Even though Lauren has never had trouble making or keeping friends, this insecurity affects her interpersonal relationships as well. She explained:

I feel like my learning disability holds me back. For instance, if my boyfriend and I broke up and I had to meet someone new, I would feel very self conscious because I have poor reading and writing skills. In order to be with someone I could never be with anyone who would ever say anything about me being dumb.

During this very open interview, "dumb" was the word that reoccurred in her statements about herself. Although, she did not disclose an episode where someone called her dumb, it was a word that she uses to describe herself when she felt insecure that others might think of her that way. "If I meet someone who does not understand, then the coping strategies that I have built up collapse. I go red in the face and my confidence drops because I have to explain myself," she explained.

Despite her difficulties in spelling, Lauren took another risk last year by taking an English course at university:

I took an English course last year; which I did of my own free will, which turned out to be a mistake. Although I finished with an A, it was

really hard on my self-esteem. I found the English teacher to be very picky about spelling and I had trouble with the concepts. I didn't find her overly accommodating and I found her to be insensitive when she talked about the level of reading/spelling/grammar that we should all be at. This class brought back really bad feeling and emotions of being stupid and not being able to compete with other people my age. I had quite a few break downs to the point where I actually thought about dropping it. I went back to the services for students with disabilities and my counselor and I re-did my accommodations, which I found helped. I used the Dragon to write the essay portion and I got double time [to write the exam]. I wrote the final for 6 hours in April...and finished the entire test, which was better than at Christmas when I didn't finish.

Through her struggles, dropping out of school was never a consideration for her. She explained: "I am highly motivated and competitive. I don't like failure and I don't consider it at all...I really want to be something and I know that I need university to do it."

Her motivation to work so hard is for her career goal,

I'd like to be a clinical psychologist, testing children for learning disabilities and if I can't do that then I want to be a teacher. I know that to be a clinical psychologist I will really need high grades. After I graduate, which is in November, I plan to pursue a Master's in psychology and if I get high marks I will do a PhD, but I know that the program is really competitive so I may be 29 before I finish

school...I would really like to do it, but I know that it is hard. I was told in high school that this was not a realistic goal but I am still working towards it.

Lauren's motivation to graduate from university is not just to qualify for a job, it is more than that, it is an achievement that symbolizes the conquering of this demon within her. She stated: "I still feel the need to prove that I'm not dumb. I don't feel that I am on equal playing field with other people. I feel that have to prove myself to them." One thing that has been a source of strength for Lauren "is to know that other people came before me and were able to do it." Lauren found strength from other people with learning disabilities who have survived through university and who are successful.

I compared myself and still do to that doctor who tested me in Grade 11. Whether she told me that she had a learning disability or not, I don't remember, but I convinced myself that she did, and because of that I looked up to her. I feel that I have accomplished so much that I never thought I could.

Lauren's meeting with the psychologist inspired her to speak for the services for students with disabilities on her campus to individuals with learning disabilities who want to go to university or college about her experiences. She said: "I encourage them to do what they want because I know and understand their feelings. I show them that they can do it. I tell them that they can do whatever they want to. I know because I have done it." As a person with a learning disability, Lauren says that to achieve successful outcomes

You have to be a high achiever, a self motivator, and a self advocator.

You need a support network and you have to accept accommodations

without feeling that it is a privilege that you don't deserve. You *do* deserve them. You have to be able to communicate your needs with others. People who aren't willing to ask for help put barriers up for themselves. I think that success is achieving what you set out to achieve and being satisfied with what you do achieve. I am successful, I am proud of what I have achieved so far.

When asked if she feels she has achieved at a rate comparable to her peers, Lauren responds,

Yes. I have overcome a lot to be where I am and I am proud of where I am. I have received a lot of accommodations but it is up to me to put the accommodations to good use and I do. However, I would like for a day to see what it would feel like to not have a learning disability.

One of my purposes for this study was to determine if people who have learning disabilities and who are successful attribute their success to the fact that they have had to cope with their learning disability. In other words, do these individuals see their learning disability overall as equipping them with survivor mechanisms which have provided them with positive outcomes.

To this question she responded,

The only thing that has made this [my learning disability] a positive experience is that I am understanding of others. Otherwise, I don't see it as a positive experience. If I could choose not to have one, I would in a minute.

Lauren reflected on how her learning disability has affected her life.

Having a LD has been a very painful experience and still has the potential to be a very painful experience. I could still be put into a situation where I might look dumb...But I will say that I would rather be a person who has been identified with a learning disability rather than a person who has a learning disability and has not been identified because now I know that I am not dumb. I know that I just have trouble learning. The experience of being identified has been a positive experience. Being identified has positively affected my education and has helped me to move forward with assistive technology. The learning disability itself has been a negative experience. I think if I didn't have one I would get better grades, or I would not have to work so hard to get the grades I am getting now...My sense of self isn't attached to my disability. I do consider myself a smart person and I use assistive technology. I am not cheating. This is a way to get my talents out. The identification helps me to understand that I am not a stupid person. I am a person with a learning disability... My experiences have really helped me see the potential in everyone. Even in children who people would refer to as globally low. I know that there is something in them and that hard work pays off...Having a learning disability, I am still very fragile about it. If someone came down hard on me I would break down. Even though I got through four years of university, I knew there were always those people who thought I couldn't do it. I have soft spots from growing up. It is like my Achilles heel...but everything has fallen

into place for me. Everything I have been through had to happen for things to turn out this way.

Lauren's sensitivity about her learning disability and about how other people might view her have pushed her to want to prove herself. She has gained control over her learning disability through the use of assistive technology. Becoming a psychologist would bring the circle of her experiences to a close, and she would no longer be a victim. Instead, she would carry the solution, and demonstrate to others that she is a capable person. She would also be able to provide help to others in her position and finally conquer her Achilles heel.

Elizabeth's Profile

Elizabeth was a twenty-five year old Caucasian Canadian. Both of Elizabeth's parents have post secondary school education. Her mother has a degree in science and is a registered dietitian, and her father took some university and college certification courses. Elizabeth was first diagnosed as having a learning disability at the age of nine. The report read that she has difficulty with hand-eye coordination, processing delays, and response delays.

The process between visually seeing something, then processing it in your brain, to physically responding to it takes a long time for me. So, the act of taking notes off the board during lectures is difficult for me. I have an inability to visualize words in my brain.

During my testing there were also hints of ADD. I have overcome that.

Elizabeth has a Bachelor of Arts Degree with honors in the field of recreation and leisure studies from a Central Ontario university and stated that "in my last year I ended up with an 80% average." Elizabeth just recently finished her Bachelor's degree in Education from an Eastern Ontario university and added "I received Magna Cum Laude for my Bachelor in Education." During the time of the interview Elizabeth was living at home with her parents and preparing for her wedding that summer.

During the interview Elizabeth struck me as a confident person who knew what she wanted and who was on her way to achieving her dreams. She was very aware of herself and of how her experiences have created the person that she is. With her marriage

and qualifications to be a teacher, she was excited about the prospects of beginning a new phase of her life.

Elizabeth's early memories of her school experiences were painful ones. She experienced feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment with an inability to relate to her peers, females especially.

I didn't know what was going on with me, and I was so depressed.

Before my diagnosis I was not happy at school. I was being bullied.

I had no close friends, and I didn't want to make friends with the girls because I was embarrassed that I wasn't as smart as them. I would play with boys. I didn't feel that I had a connection with anyone. I had nothing to feel proud about. I didn't have a lot of self-esteem.

From the earliest memories of her school experiences Elizabeth said that her learning disability created negative experiences for her: "It was a negative experience in the years when I wasn't successful in a personal and social way, and I couldn't develop relationships." Upon leaving Grade three, Elizabeth's teacher suggested that she be tested by a psychologist in her fourth grade year. Elizabeth was tested privately at the local General Hospital in the child and family development clinic. She described this experience,

The diagnosis as well as the assessment was a very positive experience. Being diagnosed opened doors to so many things...I found the process positive. The tests were fun, and it was nice to leave school to be tested. I didn't realize what the end result was. I

had really nice ladies testing me one-on-one. They gave a lot of praise and attention.

Elizabeth's mother was a forceful advocate and her actions led to the diagnosis. Elizabeth was put on the waiting list to be tested at the General Hospital. She explained "At this time the school board paid for the assessment and also for a taxi to take me from school to the appointment." After the diagnosis, Elizabeth entered a program at the General Hospital which taught organizational skills to young students who had a learning disability. As a way to involve Elizabeth and to inform her about her learning disability, the psychologist conferenced with Elizabeth's parents in front of Elizabeth. Experiencing this adult conversation at her young age was traumatic for Elizabeth and contributed to her confusion and misunderstanding of what her learning disability meant. This confusion continued into her adult life, along with a lack of education and information about the details of her learning disability.

I remember the psychologist telling my parents that I was in the 6th percentile, which is horrible. I was almost suicidal... I think they conferenced in front of me as a means of support to help me understand what was going on. I didn't understand how knowing what was going on would change things.

Elizabeth had an IQ within the average to above average range but misunderstood what it meant to be in the 6th percentile. The psychologist was obviously talking about one of Elizabeth's scores, but with her young age and inexperience she was unable to understand what it all meant. With the new awareness that her learning disability was the cause for her academic and social struggles, she felt guilt and shame.

After I was diagnosed I remember telling my sister that I knew that she would want to ask me questions that I could not answer. I would not always be able to answer her questions. I felt like I was letting her down.

Elizabeth remembered that in her primary school years she had very weak social skills and a short attention span. She added, "My mom would have to type assignments. I had no skills or discipline to work independently. To do a book report I would have to read it (the book) and then my mom would have to read it and then we would write the report together." Of her mother's assistance, Elizabeth elaborated:

My school experience during elementary school was very labour intensive. There was a joint effort between myself, my mom and my teachers... I liked to and I felt better telling my teachers that I had a learning disability and I needed more support.

The diagnosis changed Elizabeth's perception of what she thought she was capable of doing; "things really got better after my diagnosis." The following memory is an example of how her school experiences improved;

In Grade 5, there was an award for best student and I really wanted to win. The desire to have this award made me work really hard. I was doing recreational activities, the sessions I was going to at the Hospital taught me how to organize better, and the school had a modified program for me. I didn't win the award in the end and that didn't matter because I had a better sense of happiness and it was because of the diagnosis and accommodations. If I didn't turn myself

around academically in those years I would have had a really hard time and I don't think I would have gone to university.

Patience and positive reinforcement, as well as an early diagnosis and accommodations turned a negative school experience for Elizabeth into a positive one. She also had some understanding and supportive teachers.

My Grade six teacher was really fun. He said "Lizzy will do great in high school and university." He was really great about positive reinforcement. I started to improve academically and with my confidence. He was flexible and creative. He let us express ourselves how we wanted to. He loved teaching. This is partly the reason why I became a teacher.

Before her diagnosis, and with the recognition that there were factors that prevented Elizabeth from doing well in school, she was unable to connect academically and socially. Her sixth grade teacher allowed her to exhibit her talents, and in doing this he created a positive learning environment for her. It fostered connections with her peers and confidence in her abilities. He also planted a seed in her mind when he told her that she was capable of going to university. During one IPRC meeting in Grade eight she recounted, "I remember them [her teachers and principal] saying that I had a successful experience. In Grade four I was a D student and after the identification in Grade five I became an A student."

Self-advocacy is a coping strategy that successful students with learning disabilities learn to embrace. Elizabeth explained that in her first year of high school she "took control," advocating for herself by letting her teachers know that she had a learning

disability; "I had to tell my teachers about my learning problems because I knew the teachers wouldn't check on their own."

Elizabeth took the coping strategies she learned in elementary school and applied them to her high school experiences. She learned to not procrastinate, to stay organized, and to have a balance between challenging and non-challenging courses. Even with these successful strategies, Elizabeth experienced failure. In high school, Elizabeth struggled in courses like math and English; "I didn't pass Grade twelve math. That was devastating. My parents paid for a tutor and I tried so hard, so it was very discouraging" Expressing her thoughts in writing was difficult for her as well:

I didn't have the ability to articulate; to process things and then to write them down...I have high verbal skills but I can't get my thoughts on paper... learning to type in Grade nine was a good coping strategy, it improved my speed and I didn't have to concentrate on spelling.

During high school she also received accommodations: extra time on exams and permission to write them alone in a quiet controlled space. She elaborated, "I had a lot of anxiety during tests. As a study strategy I would rewrite and memorize my notes. Having a photographic memory, I would be able to picture the information on the page as I was taking my test. This reduced my anxiety on tests." Elizabeth stated that she did not feel embarrassed about writing tests in a separate location from her classmates, "If I didn't write them in a separate room I knew I wouldn't be successful."

One of Elizabeth's most positive experiences in relation to her learning disability happened in her last year of high school, when her guidance counselor asked:

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had accommodations for exams: they were extended time and a quiet room with no distractions. Through the office I took time management courses, workshops for note taking, I would sit close to the front of the class during lectures, and I let my professors know that I needed them to speak slowly. I made a lot of use of the services available to me.”

Registering with services for students with disabilities was a turning point for Elizabeth in that she boosted her grades and found that,

Success is a drug. Once you start having success you want more.

Learning how to have success was satisfying. I became self-reliant and responsible for my education. I was accountable for my own learning.

I feel like that was when I really started to learn...My ability to create a network in the office for person's with disabilities led to a positive school experience.

Elizabeth acknowledged that the services she received “were extremely helpful. I know that I could not have finished my graduate degree without the services.”

Elizabeth described herself as; “extremely organized, creative, driven, proactive, self-disciplined, and highly motivated...my creativity has been a coping mechanism for me. I am highly creative, but I am not artistic.” Elizabeth has entered a career in education. She mused, “To me a successful career is when you find something fulfilling...being in a creative professional child centered career would make me happy.” Elizabeth recognized that she needs variety in her life and looks forward to career advancement and opportunities to move into supervisory roles. She is interested in pursuing a Masters degree and she knows that she will “be a lifelong learner in whatever

setting.” With sincerity and pride, Elizabeth exclaimed that her motivation comes from “having parents who are great examples of how to achieve great success. With her parents as role models she was motivated to “do well and to open doors for a great future.”

Elizabeth assessed her overall school experience as positive. She furthered, “My school experiences gave me a sense of accomplishment and success. I feel empowered by taking control of my learning.” Elizabeth explained the hierarchy of support that made it possible for her to persist.

First and foremost there was my mom. Always giving me support. Then my dad giving reinforcement. Thirdly, there were the teachers in my school as well as the counselors; they were all great. Fourth, I had a small group of friends who I could trust.

Once Elizabeth reached university this hierarchy was reorganized and she became the top block/the keystone, having to rely on herself; “My family is supportive, but from a distance because they are not here.” With an affirmative voice as she spoke, Elizabeth made the point that university had been a struggle, but that it was her self advocating and determination to work hard that has got her through school. With this acknowledgement she demonstrated growth, confidence and maturity in her ability to influence her achievements and take responsibility for her own success.

When asked how successful she felt compared to her peers, Elizabeth responded,

I think I achieved slower than my peers. During second and third year university I was challenged to figure it out. During elementary school and high school I was spoon fed by my teachers...I would

say that by second and third year university I had achieved comparably to my peers. I have a high understanding of the things I have to do to be productive...I think that other people who learn easily would not be so in tune to what works best for them...I am successful. I feel good that some people don't finish school and I have finished two degrees.” That is a huge accomplishment. I do feel that I have completed my goals, but I also feel that I've just started.

Even after Elizabeth's diagnosis and her successful academic experience, she revealed that there were still feelings of fear, anxiety and inadequacy that do not fade easily. Elizabeth explained that it takes years to overcome the struggle with 'the self' and she feels that external support is paramount.

I always felt that I had to do so much more work than others. I know that I work differently than other people do...My single greatest challenge has been learning how I learn best and learning how to overcome my disability...I don't see that my learning disability has given me anything positive. I have had many experiences where having a learning disability created a negative experience for me. Luckily it all turned out to be positive. But if I could wish my learning disability away I would. I wouldn't wish the frustration I had on anyone.

Elizabeth referred to her outcomes as luck but did not reflect how her life might have been different had she not had this struggle of being forced to compensate for her

learning disability. Would she have pushed herself to the level that she has reached had she not felt the need to prove that she “can” to herself and to others?

Elizabeth is an example of a person whose determination has promoted success. In her words: “Success is about having a positive attitude and being motivated and then deciding that you want to get something completed and making sure that you have the right tools.”

Elizabeth explained that a barrier to success is not knowing how to ask for help and thinking that nothing can help.

If people don't feel they have a sense of purpose they won't lead successful lives...there is a sense of overwhelmingness that you can get lost in, there is also a fear of failure...Big or small steps don't matter. It is achieving something that you want. You can also be partially successful and sometimes it might take longer than you thought to reach your goals but that's okay. Also, a person's goals can change over the years, as well as how you want to go about achieving them may change and it is all okay.

She learned to accept her learning disability and to work with it rather than let it dominate her. The following is Elizabeth's reflection of the meaning that she ascribes to her learning disability.

I know that I am different and that it is okay to be different. I realize that everyone is different, but in my case with a learning disability it is more specific. I intake and process information differently than the majority of people do. I know that I still have to work harder than

most, but that is okay because it builds character. I have a greater understanding of how I think and work best. I have a sense of acceptance of myself and I am able to move on from this learning disability. I have learned that everyone is good at different things and you need to understand what you are good at. It has empowered me but I think without the learning disability I would have been empowered anyway by setting goals and knowing I will get there whether I work fast or slow I will get there. That is empowering.

Elizabeth shared her most inspired memory with me:

I was teaching at an outdoor school and I was telling a story to two kids, and there was a moment when I was telling the story that I saw that the kids were listening and believing in what I was saying. I had those kids hanging. Learning disability aside I felt I was contributing. I felt I had a sense of purpose as I saw I was touching these children. That was the moment I knew that I was going to be a teacher. I realized that having a learning disability doesn't matter. I could touch lives. Teaching and affecting the lives of kids is very empowering.

Empowerment was the final word in Elizabeth's reflection. Empowerment that she had knowledge of her learning disability, resources to help manage her learning disability, and that she has come through the struggle with her learning disability and she has triumphed.

Ashley's Profile

Ashley was the fourth participant interviewed for this study. She was twenty-one and is a Caucasian Canadian who grew up in Eastern Ontario. Ashley was in her third year of a history honours program at University. She had a cumulative 72% average and expected to graduate with honours in 2007. Ashley lived with her parents during the summers. Her mother a registered nurse practitioner and her father is a senior manager at a chemical plant, both have had post-secondary school education and her older brother was completing his PhD in science.

Ashley was diagnosed with a learning disability at age eight in Grade three: "There is a deficit in my working memory. I have problems with comprehension and a processing delay". She described the severity of her disability as,

It was far more severe as a child, I felt far behind my peers. I don't notice it as much now that I am older, but I think that it is the issue of being accustomed to the learning disability and being able to adapt to it and to find coping strategies to overcome my disability.

Throughout the interviews, Ashley was pleasant and perceptive with a positive outlook on life. She had a firm belief in spirituality and drew strength from her Christian beliefs.

Ashley's story began when she was in Grade two; "When I was younger I was a terrible reader. That is how they caught my learning disability." Ashley's teacher and mother collaborated and decided to have Ashley tested by a psychologist because she was not progressing.

Prior to the diagnosis, I took failure hard, I took it personally, and it frustrated me. I had very low self-esteem. I felt bad about who I was, I was already shy and so finding out that I have a learning disability was a bigger blow to my self-esteem. At that age, I was not able to understand why I couldn't do things that others could do. My parents told me that I was smart. This helped, but I knew that I was behind.

Ashley was tested by the school psychologist at age seven.

During the testing for my diagnosis I hated the assessment. I didn't know how to answer some of the questions, and I felt that I wasn't doing well or that I wasn't doing what they asked of me. It was aggravating because they kept asking more and more; it got me upset.

Ashley said that her self worth was negatively affected by the assessment. She felt extremely discouraged by the questions that she could not answer: "mental math was really tough for me during the testing and the psychologist just kept probing me to do the questions and I wouldn't know the answer". Her image of herself continued to diminish when she started to observe that she was far behind her classmates academically. She explained:

I had a best friend in Grade 3 that could read a book. I couldn't read and I would have to ask her to read me books, and would ask her to tell me words. I was very discouraged by this; I didn't want to try. I was also traumatized by being taken out of the class for resource

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told me to go for it, to go to university. He was really encouraging.

Ashley decided to attend university and she majored in history. Her older brother attended the same university and she felt that she would be supported there. In her last year of high school, Ashley was reassessed privately by a clinical psychologist because psychological assessments have to be renewed in order for an individual to receive resources and accommodations at university. Like her first assessment, the second one was a negative experience for her.

I broke down again during that assessment because I felt that it was an intelligence test. I knew I had a learning disability and I knew how to compensate for it so that I don't feel it exists, but during the testing I felt I had a learning disability because there were things I couldn't do and the psychologist would just have to move on past some things because I was so frustrated. During the second assessment I knew not to let my failure on the tests affect my self-worth, whereas when I was younger it did affect my self-worth.

The summer before university, Ashley entered a transition program offered by the university called Preflight. She participated in this program during the summer before she began university. "Preflight is a transition program at my university for students with learning disabilities. It was a mock university experience and I was there for three weeks". She attended mock lectures which offered teaching strategies and learning strategies for people with learning disabilities. "It gave me a real edge on the university experience because I knew what to expect. It also gave me insight into the social aspects of university". One of the positive university experiences that was an outcome of her

learning disability was that Ashley was able to take part in a course specifically designed for students who had learning disabilities.

They told us that people with learning disabilities have one area of weakness which is significantly lower than the average person. We also learned that we have one area that is significantly higher than average. For me that was empowering because anyone with a learning disability takes it personally. We learned that having a learning disability does not affect your intelligence. It is empowering to know that there is one area that I am better than anyone else in. This gives me motivation to work on my strengths. I feel lucky, because most people do not even know what their strengths and weaknesses are. Not knowing is a negative.

Being part of this program informed Ashley about what a learning disability actually is and eliminated her misconceptions. She realized that young children are not sophisticated enough to grasp a deep understanding of what a learning disability is. Often they pick up bits and pieces and become confused. They think that they have low intelligence, which is not an unreasonable conclusion to make because they live in an academic environment where they are failing. Ashley now realized that although she had areas of weakness, she could use her strengths to compensate and achieve academic success.

Even with her preparation for university, Ashley found her first year to be challenging, "In university my first year marks were discouraging. My marks dropped 20% due to the stress of change I think". She was able to adjust and she experienced

higher grades in her second year. Ashley enjoyed the experience of being a university student. She commented, "My favorite thing is to do research for papers. I enjoy learning things independently. It is rewarding to hand in a paper and get it back with a good grade".

Ashley learned about her limitations. She took four courses per semester and one correspondence course every summer. "I find that five courses are too hard for me and I end up having to drop one". Ashley has strengths in English and social science courses, and admitted that she is a poor math and science student. She reflected, "I think that the fact that I was able to succeed in at least two subject areas is due to my willingness to try and work hard, this makes me feel so good about myself".

Ashley told me that her greatest academic challenge is

Studying for exams. Remembering information is a nightmare for me because my memory is so poor. Note taking is difficult, because I often miss out on what the professor is saying...I have to cram for exams the day before, because if I don't, I will forget any information that I've learned over a period of time. To study, I use every sense that I can. I use my sight to write out my notes and to memorize. I read over my notes the week before to get familiar with the subject. And then one or two days before the test I will start to cram so that I can remember. The day after the exam, I wouldn't be able to recall information or to pull concepts together.

Ashley received many accommodations while in elementary and secondary school and university that contributed to her academic improvement,

It is hard for me to say what accommodations were made for me in elementary school because there was so much done, things that I may not even be aware of. I had one-on-one time with the resource teacher and help with my language and math. I was also allowed to use a calculator. In secondary school I wrote my tests in the resource room and I received time and a half. I used a calculator for math and I was allowed the use of a computer for tests. In university, I have been able to write exams in the Center for Students with Disabilities. When I need to write essays for my exams, I am able to have the support of the word processor. I also get time and a half, and I'm allowed to have one exam per day. These accommodations have been very helpful. I am less stressed out about writing exams, and I'm not worried about finishing on time anymore. I have trouble with processing information. I sometimes read directions wrong but with more time I am able to concentrate on what I'm doing and don't make as many mistakes. The accommodations were really necessary and I used them often all throughout my schooling.

Ashley explained that her ability to cope and to be successful was enhanced by the support of her family,

I got a lot of support from my parents. My parents spent a lot of time explaining things to me, they never did any of the work for me but they gave me pointers. My dad edited a lot of my essays and

gave me a lot of help at home with math and sciences. I was highly motivated, I wanted to achieve.

Persisting in school was natural for Ashley. Dropping out was not an option and pursuing higher education was a common goal that she and her family shared,

I was initially afraid in my first year of university, but I never seriously thought of dropping out of school. School is a positive place because I enjoy learning. I just find recalling information very hard to do. I feel that I have achieved a far higher rate than my peers, because I have had more challenges to overcome...I always thought I'd be a failure if I did not achieve, I wanted to prove that I could do it all.

Ashley reflected that though the process of testing was negative obtaining a diagnosis has been very positive. "To know of my strengths and weaknesses is a blessing. It is a relief to know what my problems are. It is also a relief to know that having a learning disability is a condition that can be worked with".

Ashley described herself as the person who blamed herself for her failures in learning.

I always had overly high expectations of myself. If I fail to reach my standards I get really down on myself. I'm not so much a perfectionist anymore. I think it's good to be diligent, but it is not so good to be obsessive.

Ashley's perspective on herself has changed, and she has learned not to take herself so seriously or try so hard to be in control. She has faith.

The belief that God is in control. My perfectionist attitude came from feeling [that I had] no control. With my belief that God is in control, I now know that if I try my best he will honour my work. When we honour God, he will honour us. When I started working with the motivation that it was not about me that it was about God, I achieved without being selfish or having a selfish motive... For so long I try to live up to my own expectations, and I failed. With God, I know that I don't have to be perfect. He has a plan and a purpose for my life. By giving my life over to him. I am living up to the plan he has for me.

Ashley examined the emotional change that she experienced since being diagnosed.

I have grown a lot. I think that positive self-esteem comes with maturity. I think that having a learning disability initially brought my self-esteem down. It has impacted how I relate to people. When I was young I was so shy. No one knew that I had a learning disability, and so no one taunted me about it...I guess I have changed over a vast period of time. I'm different now compared to when I was eight. I have accomplished a lot and my self-esteem has risen. Having a diagnosis, and knowing what you are facing, it gives you huge success.

Ashley described herself as "creative, hard-working, determined, a good writer, a good listener, though I don't always grab every concept that comes my way, but I can pay attention, and I am sporty. I can be very hard on myself. I have very high standards for

what I want for myself". Her future aspirations are to go to Teachers College or to do a Masters in theology or history. Marriage, children and travel are also priorities. Part of her desire to succeed comes from her competitive drive of,

Wanting to out-do my brother...I do things according to my strengths. I never want to fail. I want to achieve, and I have to work hard because it doesn't come naturally. It is necessary for me to be proactive and to take responsibility...I also wouldn't go into something that I'm not good at. I do not set myself up for failure."

Ashley has learned that "hard work pays off.

Her parents "especially my mom, encouraging and advocating" has facilitated her success. A barrier to her success has been "my self-confidence and image issues". She elaborated,

People have to be determined if they want to succeed and they have to apply this determination to their strengths. University is not always the way, you need to follow your strengths and interests. That is how people are successful. Forget about not being good at everything, focus on your strengths.

When asked if she feels that she has achieved at a rate comparable to her peers, she replied, "I have achieved at a far higher rate than my peers, because I have had more challenges to overcome".

Ashley defined success as "being financially independent and happy". She felt that she has achieved a certain amount of success;

I am successful so far. I am in University and I am taking history; I really wanted to do this, so I am on route and I am enjoying myself. I have lots of really good friends, and I live according to my faith. I am also really happy in my relationship.

I asked Ashley if she attributed any of her success to the fact that she grew up with a learning disability. She replied:

For a long time the answer was no, but more recently I see some positives. I use to see it as something that I was trying to overcome. Now I know my strengths and weaknesses and I am able to gear my directions toward my strengths.

She described her understanding of the experience of having a learning disability.

I don't let it define who I am. I think of it as something that I have, but it is not a crutch. I am a lot more than a person with a learning disability...It means that I recognize that I have trouble in certain areas, but it doesn't mean that I can't do well. It is a challenge that I can overcome...I don't let it define me. I don't get down about it. I don't dwell on it. I have moved on...I have always been very self-aware. I am analytical. I can be hard on myself and I always have internal dialogue going on in my head, asking, "Am I good enough...Having a learning disability has taught me to not give up. I now understand what a learning disability is, and it helps me to never pass judgment on others...It means all the more to me when I do achieve my goals because there was more potentially keeping me back then most people.

Ashley's belief that "God is in control" has allowed her to let go of her insecurities and to accept her strengths and weaknesses as part of who she is, a purposeful design by her creator. In recognizing this she has become open to accepting herself, no longer thinking about the negative experiences that her learning disability has caused instead she counts her blessings and looks forward to a bright future.

In conclusion, the four narratives describe the overall educational experiences of the participants in this study. From these narratives, the reader should understand that the statements made are segments of an individual's life which have been pieced together to tell as accurately as possible the story that the participants want told. By narrowing the lens to focus on the individuals' educational experiences the reader learns not just about how having a learning disability has affected their education, they learn about the person and their social, emotional and family circumstances. They learn about how struggles influence growth and get to see how these people have evolved. Through struggle comes strength, and that is what makes these narratives significant.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

When beginning the analysis of data it is important to go back to the purpose of this investigation. Three research questions guided the investigation, and the analysis of data will form three distinctive sections in an attempt to answer these questions. To approach the data analysis, the first step will be to distinguish a general pattern among all four of the participant's life histories. From here the patterns will be explained case-by-case deciphering the different experiences of each individual. Lastly, the themes that emerged from the analysis will be linked to current literature on the topic.

Educational Experiences

In the past I was directed toward strategies to help, but I didn't know what my learning disability really was, or what impact it had on how I learn. It is hard to come up with strategies for yourself when you don't know the details of what you are working with or without...

Jack

To begin, I will analyze the first research question, what are the educational experiences of individuals with learning disabilities? Among the four participants distinctive patterns emerged. During their early elementary school years, the four participants experienced what they described as negative school experiences involving the lack of academic success, an inability to keep up, social difficulties and a lack of connectedness with peers. The participants began his or her life histories telling a similar story; they explained that their earliest memories of school were unpleasant because they started to learn that they were not as capable as their peers. As they saw the gap widen between their capabilities and those of their classmates, the participants experienced shame and a desire to disconnect socially in an effort to disguise the shame. Much of the

social disconnect came from the participants' feelings of inadequacy; they knew that they were different but did not know why. This sense of 'differentness' detached them from forming peer relationships. For Elizabeth, Ashley, and Jack their academic difficulties created self-consciousness, producing introverted behaviours and made it difficult for them to form strong peer relationships. Although Lauren did not share the same social difficulties, a similar sentiment is echoed in her description of how she felt she is perceived by others: "Dumb". This was a word that Lauren used often throughout the interviews to describe how she thought others would see her if they became aware of her weaknesses. Lauren did not have social difficulties in school. In fact, she described her friends as facilitators, but she described herself as "Dumb". Jack had a different approach to the opening of his life history. He did not use emotion as a means of description, either because he did not remember how he felt as a child falling behind or because he does not know how to express himself in terms of feelings. His recent diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome would provide evidence for the latter conjecture (Kasari & Rotheram-Fuller, 2005). In general, as Jack spoke of his life history he stated his experiences in factual terms and did not equate the fact with the feeling. Jack admitted that he did not connect socially to his peers at any point during his education. A recurring theme in Jack's narrative was dissatisfaction which he expressed at different points in his life when he was not able to produce to the level he was capable. In each case, a poor academic performance contributed to a poorer image of self, social disconnectedness and low self esteem. A synthesis study, entitled Social Aspects of Learning Disabilities, discovered that the self-concept in children with learning disabilities fluctuates from high to low depending on with whom the child compares themselves with (Wong, 1996). For the

participants in this study, their self concepts were very low because they were aware that they were not able to achieve academically the way there peers could. At this point, the psychological health of these participants had flat lined and their future seemed bleak.

There were significant turning points' events marking an important change in these participants' life histories. The first and arguably most significant turning point for these participants was their first diagnosis of learning disability. A commonality between the participants was that they all were diagnosed with a learning disability in their primary school years. Their teachers recognized the need for testing and by Grade five each had been assessed, diagnosed, and were receiving remedial assistance. This new diagnosis was a turning point in that it gave the participants, their parents and teachers an explanation as to why they were not progressing at the same level as their peers. With the extra attention and effort made on the part of their teachers and parents, these individuals began to make academic strides. Also important to note was that when these individuals were diagnosed around fifteen years ago, there was extra funding in Ontario schools for remedial assistance programs to help the newly diagnosed to adjust and to cope with their learning disabilities. Jack, Elizabeth, and Ashley all were placed in some type of government funded remedial assistance program after their psychological assessment and diagnosis. However, Lauren was not diagnosed by a psychologist; instead she was assessed by a diagnostic teacher at her school. She therefore was not eligible for special services outside of what the school would offer her. Due to the drastic change in her accommodations, after her second diagnosis by a clinical psychologist, she perceived her elementary school accommodations as none existent. Students with learning disabilities receiving special education services are often unaware of the specific services that they

had received (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Surely Lauren received some type of assistance, but obviously the assessment with the diagnostic teacher did not qualify her for extra assistance. At age sixteen, her mother opted to have her retested by a clinical psychologist. The feeling was that, with the clinical psychologist report, the school would be required to meet the recommendations made. This strategy worked to Laurens benefit. With the accommodations and the extra help that the participants received, they started to develop their own set of coping strategies and began to achieve success at school. Litner et al. (2005) stated “a diagnosis enhances coping strategies” each of the participants in this study found that to be true.

The participants credited their success to having been identified at a young age, enabling time for advocacy, remediation, accommodations and general adjustment to their learning disability. This finding was also suggested by the results of Litner, et al. (2005) and Lyon (1996) who stressed the importance of early identification and intervention, and claimed that children need to be identified before the age of nine to have successful interventions (Lyon, 1996).

As demonstrated by these participants, academic success did not happen overnight and it did not happen with minimal effort. With the new awareness that a disability was causing the deficit, the parents (in these cases the maternal parent) learned to advocate for their child. In this study, parental advocacy proved to be an important facilitator for child success. This finding is also found in studies concerning child success and resiliency (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Lauren was exuberant about how instrumental her mother had been in assisting her to cope, acting as an advocator who never gave up teaching her how to be successful. Both Elizabeth and Ashley reflected

the same sentiments on the importance of having that kind of maternal support in their lives. Jack did not credit his parents as lavishly as the others. He stated, “both my parents were very involved.” And with the two different assessments that he received and his movement from French to an English school, it was evident that his parents were very involved. For these participants the road to success was not just paved for them, they were lead down the road by a forceful hand. The leading continued until the participant was able to navigate the path for themselves. In contrast, Litner et al, (2005) found that individuals in their study who have negative school experiences due to a learning disability, and who are diagnosed late in their education do not report positive parental support. Family relationships were strained, because the lack of diagnosis produced misunderstanding and frustration within the family.

Although the new diagnosis and interventions were making it possible for these children to experience success at school, being taken out of the regular classroom everyday to receive remedial assistance sometimes created embarrassment for them, contributing to feelings of *differentness*, at a time when it was important for them to feel a sense of belonging. Among the participants there were inconsistent feelings about being taken from the general classroom to attend the resource room. During the first years after the diagnosis, the support was appreciated but as the participants became older they would have rather participated in the general classroom activities. This finding coincides with Reis et al. (1997) study finding that students felt ‘dumb’ having to go to a special education setting and resented missing the activities going on in their classrooms. Guterman (1995) found that students felt that “special education did not help them academically, they objected to what they viewed as low level, irrelevant and duplicative

instruction.”(Cited in Benz et al., 2000; p. 511.) In contrast, although the participants in this study sometimes resented being withdrawn from the general classroom to attend resource, they stated that the accommodations they received in elementary school and throughout their schooling were necessary. The accommodations evolved as the participants journeyed through school and were a definite contribution to their academic success. To define the term learning disability simply, would be to say that a gap exists between the individual’s potential and their achievement. With the capability to achieve but the inability to produce, accommodations are implemented to reduce this gap. The findings from this study showed that, in general, the participants recognized the importance of the accommodations they received during elementary school. They also felt that they had understanding and supportive teachers who prepared them for secondary school entry.

Upon secondary school entry, these participants who as children had flat lined psychologically before the diagnosis, had since receiving a diagnosis, experienced a rise in their academic achievements and their self-esteem. With the services they had received they were able to compete with their non-disabled peers. In secondary school, they began in the academic stream and continued until graduation. The general pattern among the participants was diminished academic support in secondary school. There was no remedial assistance available to these students. There were accommodations offered such as withdrawal for exam writing, having test questions read to them during exams, and a note taker in class. It is almost as though the help they received in elementary school gave them so much success that because they were achieving at a level comparable to their non-disabled peers they were viewed in secondary school as ‘cured’ and therefore

no longer in need of assistance. An analogous situation to what these students experienced would be a diabetic patient whose diabetes is controlled through correct diet and exercise finds that he has normal blood sugar levels, so he stops his exercise program because he no longer has unhealthy blood-sugar levels. It was the exercise that was regulating his diabetes. It was not a cure; it is an ongoing preventive maintenance regime. The student with a learning disability has academic support, remediation, and accommodations in elementary school but once he or she gets to secondary school, he or she enters the academic stream and is performing on a level with his or her non disabled peers, the secondary schools do not offer academic remediation or tutoring. They expect that their streaming system of academic, applied, or essentials will provide programming that meets the needs of any student. At the secondary school level there does not seem to be the recognition of the basic premises of what a learning disability is, that is, the gap between ability and achievement.

These participants' secondary school experiences were a struggle. Jack recalled this time in his life as the most challenging. Specifically for Jack, the lack of support in secondary school contributed to a decrease in his performance, his coping strategies were not strong enough, and he experienced depression. In order to pass their classes, each participant developed a strong work ethic and exercised their coping skills. Elizabeth explained that she 'took control' advocating for herself by letting her teachers know that she had a learning disability. Among these participants the trend was self advocacy, letting their teachers know what their learning problems were. The rotary system used in secondary school limits the time teachers spend with their students. Many are not aware or willing to put the time in to modifying the program to meet individual needs. This was

also a finding of Reis et al. (1997) study, in which they found that secondary school teachers were not willing to accommodate for the needs of their students, and their strengths were not recognized or rewarded. Students felt that because they were labeled, they were treated as disabled by their teachers. Reis et al. (1997) also found a general lack of preparation made by special education teachers and the lack of program goals for their students with learning disabilities. The students in their study did not think that the special education services they received in secondary school helped them prepare for university (Reis et al., 1997). The participants in this research study also found a lack of support in secondary school. Those who received services beyond the accommodations made for exams had to actively advocate for those services.

Among the participants in this study the accommodations that Jack, Elizabeth and Ashley received were few and consisted of 50% extra time and a quiet location to write exams. In secondary school the level of accommodations and resources that the participants received depended on parental advocacy, the parent's willingness to pay for the additional resources, and the strength of recommendations made by clinical psychologists. Lauren had the most accommodations in secondary school but not until she was sixteen. Lauren's mother felt that her needs were not being met in her secondary school and a second diagnosis by a clinical psychologist was initiated by Lauren's mother to insure that she would be entitled to every resource possible. Lauren had severe problems reading and writing. She also had been diagnosed with Irlen Syndrome, making it difficult for her to read on anything other than blue paper. She received, a modified program, taking less courses each semester, she was able to drop her French course, she was allowed to have books on tape, and a reader for her exams, she had a note taker, and

computer software programs like Dragon Naturally Speaking paid for by her parents. Resources such as these, used to their potential, contributed to more independence and increased performance. She graduated from secondary school with an 86% average and received a scholarship to university.

Parental advocacy was still an important factor for these participants during their secondary school years. Among the participants, those who had greater parental advocacy also tended to have more accommodations in secondary school, contributing to more positive secondary school outcomes.

Jack struggled in his secondary school program; he did not find that he was able to excel the way he wanted in many of his classes and that frustrated him. He thought that he would have benefited from a more diverse learning environment. Litner et al. (2005) also found that the high school programs of their participants did not allow for the alternate learning styles (Litner et al., 2005). Jack's case was similar in that his inability to perform to his potential had a negative impact on his self esteem. The contributors to his positive self worth were not developed through his relationships with his family or friends, like they were in the cases of Lauren, Elizabeth, and Ashley. Instead his self worth came from his achievements. He struggled emotionally with the deficits between his achievements and his ability and resents those secondary school teachers who did not take an interest in helping him achieve to his ability. Jack became animated during the interview process as he discussed his disappointment and frustration in the secondary education system. This was his first and only display of emotion.

All four of the participants said that they had one secondary school teacher who they credited as making a difference. Teachers who taught with varied methods and who

took an interest in them, and gave them positive and affirming feedback were remembered. Elizabeth and Kristen found role models in those teachers who recommended that university be part of their future. Lauren found her role model in the clinical psychologist who retested her and who offered encouragement, demonstrating for her that having a learning disability does not have to restrict an individual's ability to achieve greatness. Jack found a supporter in his resource teacher, with whom he still maintains a relationship today. With the competitive nature of these participants they set out to prove to themselves and others that they were intelligent and could achieve. The role models in their lives were significant because they gave the participants a purpose and planted the idea in their minds that they were capable of achieving great success. Interestingly, each of the girls was on track to achieving the careers of their role models. Even with role models, all participants experienced a lack of support at the secondary level. But there is evidence here that individual teachers can make a difference in the lives of these students. This is a significant finding, because teachers at the secondary level are working mainly in isolation and are not relying on an Individual Education Plans (IEP), not working closely with the resource teacher, and when students are experiencing difficulty in a course they are usually counseled to drop it or take the course at an applied level. When a teacher takes an interest in a particular student who is having difficulty, gives them help, encourages them, sees the potential in the student, and tries to maximize that student's performance, that effort brings rewards. One person at the secondary school level can make a difference. All of the participants condemned, in general, their secondary school experience but they can all remember a teacher, counselor, or health care professional who made a difference.

For each participant there was an expectation in the family that going to university was the next logical step. Participation in academic secondary school programs predicted post secondary education (Baer et al., 2003). This was another reason why developing secondary school programs that meet the needs of individuals with learning disabilities is important. Students should not be expected to lower their standards by going in to an applied program, which would not facilitate their plans to attend university.

Entrance into university was the second turning point; it was a great accomplishment and a validation for these participants. One common theme was that each of these individuals really enjoyed learning and challenging themselves. Ashley and Jack both took advantage of transitions programs available to students with disabilities at their respective institutions. Ashley, Jack and Lauren, took the initiative to register with the disability services on their campuses. Self advocacy proved to be critical at the university stage. Without taking initiative, none of these students would have had accommodations in university. Elizabeth chose not to disclose her learning disability and failed her first year of school. She was allowed to continue her studies on the condition that she registered with disability services.

Although each found the first year of university to be a challenge, all four participants have experienced success at the university level. Part of this success came from the fact that they had learned to avoid situations where their weaknesses could be exposed and instead seek situations that would lead to successful experiences. This is not to say that these individuals were not risk takers because they were. The learning environment is very challenging for them and they have learned to control some of the

variables in their education experience such as, course selection, course load, considering the evaluation method and choosing those courses that complement their learning style. Brooks and Goldstein (2001) described this as building *islands of competence*, meaning one focuses on their areas of strength and deemphasizes areas of weakness. (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001).

Their respective centers for persons with disabilities have been excellent providers of support. The participants describe the support at university as “tailored” to each individual student with the acknowledgement that the services have to be sought out. Participants learned that in order to gain any aspect of support at university, they had to constantly self-advocate. Litner et al. (2005) also found professor support and counseling services to be important factors facilitating success for individuals with learning disabilities. Elizabeth described her second year of university; when she finally registered with disability services, as a turning point. Taking advantage of the services available to her, she achieved success. Elizabeth and the others credited the services they received at university as being instrumental in their ability to graduate and have success.

Interestingly at university there were so many more options for students with disabilities. Funding was also available to them. Each of the participants took advantage of the services available but had these options been available to them in secondary school they may have had more positive experiences. The services available to the participants at university were 50% extra time on exams written in a quiet location with access to a computer, books on tape, note takers or willing professors who would email the notes to the students before the class, funding to purchase a new computer and software programs tailored to help individuals with disabilities (Kurzweil 3000, Inspiration, and Dragon

Naturally Speaking), funding for new assessments, and tutoring services and writing centers available on campus. These students also had access to learning strategists, technology specialists and counselors.

At university Jack was able to choose his method of learning. He challenged for credits, which was a different method that Jack discovered of gaining credits. He was able learn the material on his own time and through his own methods. Then he could take the exam for a pass/fail mark. Jack also had a full time job and this method of achieving credits suited his lifestyle. The university experience and the variety of services available have benefited each of the participants. Lauren assisted at the center for student with disabilities on her campus. She spoke to groups of high school students with disabilities who are considering university as an option, she explained her experiences and encouraged them to pursue higher education. Lauren changed from someone who had to be advocated for, to becoming an advocate and a role model for others. She developed confidence and saw herself as a success and realized that there are other students that can learn from her experiences.

In university, these individuals have been able to gain a sense of independence and autonomy. At this point the advocating role of the parents became obsolete. The individuals have learned to advocate for themselves and in doing so were very aware of their learning needs. Their successful experiences at university restored their faith in their accomplishments and they began to take credit for their hard work; focusing on what they have achieved and not on what assistance they needed to achieve. Some studies have found that university services are not adequate enough to service the needs of the learning disabled population (Lock & Layton, 2001). However, this study found excellent support

for these students. Lock & Layton (2001) also stated that students entered university being unaware of what they would need in order to achieve success. The difference between their participants and the participants in this study was that through the support they received early in their education, the participants in this study were aware of their needs and had developed excellent advocacy strategies.

In summary, before being diagnosed with a learning disability the participants described a negative school experience, accompanied by a lack of academic success, inability to keep up with peers, social difficulties, and low self esteem. The first significant turning point for these participants was their first diagnosis of learning disability. The participants were identified in their primary years, and had immediate remediation. With the extra attention and effort made on the part of their teachers and strong advocacy from parents, these individuals began to make academic strides. They started to develop their own set of coping strategies and began to achieve success at school. The participants credited their success to having been identified at a young age, enabling time for advocacy, remediation, accommodations and general adjustment to their learning disability. Participants recognized the importance of the accommodations they received during elementary school. They also felt that they had understanding and supportive teachers who prepared them for secondary school entry.

Upon entering secondary school, the participants were able to compete with their non-disabled peers, but due to the lack of academic support for students with learning disabilities in high school, the participants found keeping up a challenge. In order to pass their classes, each participant had to 'take control'. They developed a strong work ethic and exercised their coping skills. Among these participants the trend was self advocacy.

It was found that many secondary school teachers are not aware of their students' needs or willing to put the time in to modifying the program to meet individual needs. Those who received services beyond the accommodations made for exams, had to actively advocate for those services. Parental advocacy was an important factor for these participants during their secondary school years. The level of accommodations and resources that the participants received depended on parental advocacy, the parent's willingness to pay for the additional resources, and the strength of recommendations made by clinical psychologists. Role models played a significant role in the lives of the participants. They gave the participants a purpose and planted the idea in their minds that they were capable of achieving great success. This is a significant finding, because it demonstrates that one person can make a difference. When a teacher takes an interest in a particular student who is having difficulty, gives them help, encourages them, sees the potential in the student, and tries to maximize that student's performance, that effort brings rewards.

Entrance into university was the second turning point for these students. Self-advocacy proved to be critical at this stage, without taking initiative, none of these students would have had accommodations in university. Each participant found their first year to be a challenge but all have experienced great success at the university level. This success came from the fact that they have learned to avoid situations where their weaknesses could be exposed and instead seek situations that will lead to successful experiences. The findings from this study found that university and specifically the disability services on campus provide excellent support to students. These participants

credited the services they received at university as being instrumental in their ability to graduate and have success.

Employment, Education, and Independent Living Outcomes

I work in such a way that having a learning disability is not a defining attribute of myself. The learning disability doesn't affect who I am, my strengths define who I am.

Jack

The second research question that guided this study was what are the employment, education, and independent living outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities who received accommodations in their elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education? In the case of these participants at the time of the interview three were still completing their university degree and one had just recently graduated from teachers college. Of the university participants, one was working full time and completing his degree on a part time basis.

Jack had a full time job working in the high tech industry and was completing his degree in computer science. Jack felt validated and really successful in his job and therefore was completing university part time. His strategy to gain experience while upgrading his education, helped build his confidence. He was satisfied that he was finally able to achieve his potential.

Lauren, at the time of the interviews was completing her honours thesis in psychology. Her aspirations since meeting the clinical psychologist, who gave her the second psychological assessment, had been to become a clinical psychologist herself. Her strong work ethic and determination put her on the path to achieving that goal. She was in the process of applying for a Masters in Psychology and planned to pursue a Ph.D.

Lauren said that if she does not get accepted to a PhD program, her second career choice was to become a teacher.

Elizabeth had achieved an undergraduate degree and recently graduated with a Bachelor in Education. She was preparing for her upcoming marriage and was looking for a teaching job. Elizabeth also talked about pursuing a Master's degree at some point in the future.

Ashley was the youngest participant and at the time of the interview was entering her third year of university in a four year honours program in history. She aspired to pursue a Master's degree in Theology, or a career in teaching. In all four cases the participants were very goal oriented and their career aspirations seem realistic and feasible.

Interestingly, all of the participants were willing to continue their formal education. It might be expected that because of some of the negative experiences they experienced during their education, and the fact that they all said that school work was a struggle, that they would be eager to be finished with educational pursuits. This is not the case, all of the individuals even those who were finished school and entering a career, said that they would like to continue their education at some point in the future. Perhaps they felt they still had something to prove to themselves and others. The confidence of these participants, credits the support given to them at the university level. Without these positive experiences they would not wish to pursue further education.

The independent living outcomes of this group were difficult to assess because of their university status. Interestingly, two of the participants chose to attend a university located in their home cities because of the need to be close to their families and the

emotional support they provided. Lauren said that her choice to live at home and commute to school was because she relied on her mother for emotional and tutorial support. Jack also chose to live at home and commute to school. He did not describe this choice as coming from a need for emotional support, rather it was a convenient option for him financially. The other two participants Elizabeth and Ashley, both went to schools three to five hours from their home. During the summers, they both returned to their home towns to work and live with their parents. At the time of the interview Elizabeth had just finished school and was living at home until her wedding. The underlying theme was that home was a safe place for these individuals. They find emotional, tutorial, and financial support. All of the participants experienced warm relationships with their family members.

In summary, at the time of the interview, three of the participants in this study were completing their university degree and one had just recently graduated from teachers college. Of the participants still in university, one was working full time and completing his degree on a part time basis. In all four cases the participants were very goal oriented and their career aspirations seem realistic and feasible. Interestingly, each of the participants aspired to further their education; either a Masters or Ph.D.

The independent living outcomes of this group were difficult to assess because of their university status. Two of the participants chose to attend a university located in their home cities because of a need to be close to their families and the emotional, tutorial and financial support.

Conditions Contributing To Post-Secondary School Outcomes

I always have internal dialogue going on in my head, asking, "Am I good enough...Having a learning disability has taught me to not give up... It

means all the more to me when I do achieve my goals because there was more potentially keeping me back.

Ashley

In the Gerber et al, (1992) study of successful adults with learning disabilities, individuals who were most successful manifested a 'quest to gain control' of their lives. This process involved internal decisions (desire, reframing, goal-orientedness) and external manifestations (persistence, goodness of fit, learned creativity, social ecologies). The final phase of this research sought to find support for the above. The third research question pondered the conditions (e.g., personal characteristics and environmental conditions) that have contributed to their post-secondary school outcomes?

Personal Characteristics

Each participant in this study had a strong work ethic and determination paired with competitiveness with regard to their goal directed behaviours. They all felt a desire to prove their abilities to themselves and to others. This was also a finding among the participants in Litner et al, (2005) study. The subjects learned that having ADHD or a learning disability did not mean that they had low abilities. Through the process of learning to cope with their disability they realized that they were capable, and that motivated them to work harder. The same can be said for the participants in this study. In the beginning when they first realized that they were not like, or as able to achieve as their peers they wondered what was wrong with them. But through the diagnosis and the interventions, they developed an awareness that they were capable and worked harder to prove themselves. They overcompensate and try even harder to be successful.

In university, they had the most success and were the happiest. Self determination theory attributes this to three essential needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness

(Ryan & Deci, 2000). At university, it was the first time in their school careers that they had the autonomy to choose what they learned. They had control over the learning context. Having control of the situation was significant in determining successful outcomes as well for the participants in Gerber et al. (1992) research. They felt academically integrated because they were achieving high marks and were supported by the centers for students with disabilities and their families.

At this stage in their life they better understand that their learning disability was merely an obstacle on their road to success; it was not a wall that blocked them. The bar of expectations and outcomes did not have to be lowered. They learned that they needed to work harder to achieve their goals. Like the Raskind et al (1999) study, our participants adapted to their life events and learned to accept themselves and their learning disability. They set goals which were effective. As well, each individual had been fortunate to obtain effective support systems in their families and to have made supportive connections with teachers and councilors throughout their schooling (Raskind et al., 1999).

This group had strengths that minimized their weaker areas. The key element was that the participants were aware of these strengths. Jack relied on his ability to understand logic, and he was able to direct his career goals toward that strength. Lauren had a photographic memory which helped her with study habits. Elizabeth used her creativity to think outside of the box. Ashley had an interest and talent for research, a tool which has assisted her in choosing courses at university. As Brooks & Goldstein (2001) determined, these islands of competence, which have helped to improve the individual self esteem. Litner et al. (2005) discovered, for student with learning disabilities the

islands of competence in the realm of the arts and practical subjects. The findings of this study showed that *islands of competence* exist and are compatible with the individual's interests and natural talents, and can be found over any subject area, arts, practical and academic. The participants learned coping mechanism to compensate and to be able to compete with their non disabled peers. Strategies such as the use of assistive technology and self-taught learning strategies increased the autonomy and self esteem of these participants. Morrison & Cosden (1997) would characterize this group as resilient.

Learning disabilities manifest themselves differently in individuals. The needs of each of the four participants were different, and their struggles and coping mechanism were different. For the participants with less severe disabilities, they were able to see that their learning disability created some positive outcomes in their lives. All four participants recognized that having the learning disability and receiving accommodations, extra attention from teachers and parents and funding for technology, benefited their outcomes. When it came to the acceptance of their learning disability, not all participants held the same view.

Ashley and Jack recognized that their learning disability had provided some unique opportunities for them, and credited their persistence to the experience of having to cope with their learning disability. This awareness came with age and maturity, and only because her coping strategies minimized the effects of their learning disability. For both Jack and Ashley, their learning disability did not keep them from being successful or from achieving their goals.

Those with more severe challenges brought on by their learning disability, could not attribute their successes to any influence that the learning disability might have had.

Lauren felt hampered by her disability because even though she has a multitude of coping strategies, her learning disability continued to create problems for her. Elizabeth's sentiments mirrored Lauren's. These two individuals experienced intense frustration and feelings of failure. Being identified and given remediation and accommodations had created positive experiences, but both Lauren and Elizabeth felt that having a learning disability created more negative experiences and thus feelings of inadequacy and lowered self-esteem. From their perception, having a learning disability had not produced any positive outcomes. They would have done better academically had they not had a learning disability, and in turn, would have had more confidence in other areas of life. As Elizabeth said about her outcomes, "luckily it has all turned out for the best" meaning it has all turned out for the best in spite of the learning disability. The 'best' because of strong motivation and drive, a *fight or flight response*. Stress causes individuals to flee or to attack (Neimark, 2005). The individuals in this study faced their learning disability. Their strong work ethic, unbreakable determination, risk taking, proactive drive and goal orientation. Not everyone who has learning disabilities are able to fight, but these individuals did and continued to fight by working toward the high expectations that they have set for themselves. Had they not had a learning disability they might not have been tested, and in turn, they may not have been as successful. In Higgins et al. (2002) stages of acceptance of a learning disability: the impact of labeling, the participants who achieved the highest degree of success reached the fifth stage of acceptance, *transformation*, the stage where they perceive their learning disability as a positive influence in their lives. The participants in this study may not have accepted their learning disability at the level of *transformation*, but all have reached the level of

compartmentalization, and are able to minimize weaknesses and maximize strengths (Higgins, 2002).

As demonstrated through this study, because the child was too young, it is the parent who makes the choice to flee or to fight. Children learn to fight for themselves once it has been modeled for them. Lock and Layton (2001) make this point in their study entitled, *succeeding in postsecondary education through self-advocacy*. Students entering university needed help learning to self advocate. They recommended the creation and use of a self-advocacy plan. The participants in this study did not use a paper blueprint to self-advocate. Through practice they had their moves perfected. Self-advocacy was a natural element of their behaviours. This is not surprising, because the participants in this study had parents who actively advocated for them, demonstrating the importance of advocating for the services that are necessary to do well in educational endeavours. The parents also taught their children to value education. In that the four participants were expected to attend university. They first began to self advocate at the secondary school level to fulfill the expectations of their parents.

Environmental Conditions

A common thread across the participant's stories was the support in their respective homes. The reason that they did not drop out of secondary school and why they all pursued university studies seems due to an attitude in the home that quitting was not an option. Their earliest memories recalled an understanding in the home that gaining a university degree was the next logical step, as important as achieving their secondary school diploma. Baer et al, (2003) also found that community expectations for their learning disabled youth dictated the youth outcomes. It was evident from this study, that

people will achieve according to expectations as long as what is expected of them is also facilitated.

Advocacy was an essential facilitator for these individuals. Each started their schooling with forceful parental advocacy, which continued throughout elementary and middle school. In secondary school, the individuals began to take some responsibility advocating for themselves and upon entering university the advocacy came primarily from the individuals. Jack relied on his parents, teachers and then professors, to help him create his own set of learning strategies. Initially, Lauren relied on her mother's tutorial and emotional support, but now relies more and more on technology and with this reliance she is able to be more independent. Ashley also relied on her mother's advocacy and her father to help with homework, but her focus has changed. She seems more confident in her ability to advocate and achieve success without as much assistance, and her strong spiritual faith has given her this confidence. Elizabeth relied on her mother, but when she moved to a university out of the vicinity of her mother's help, she turned to the services at the university and became successful because she learned to advocate for herself. She also learned what elements were necessary for success.

Positive parental support at home was shown to negate the difficult experiences in school. Any time there were negative school experiences such as during secondary school, parental support and encouragement helped to keep the participants motivated to persist. This finding concurs with Reis et al. (1997) study who stated that negative school experiences paired with positive support at home resulted in the development of positive personal attitudes which enabled success in later life. A finding emerging from this research is that once children were diagnosed, the parents became proactive about

their children's future and started to plan how they were going to succeed. Parents invested and created opportunities for their child, looking at future career opportunities and preparing them for the future.

A theme that emerged from the findings was the notion of success. Each of the participants had a different definition, but they all related to achieving one's goals. Control was an important factor in their definitions of success. The participants' ability to choose their goals and enact their own strategies to achieve them contributed to their feelings of success. They all felt that their learning disabilities had helped them to develop a strong work ethic and the steady resolve to accomplish their goals. Moreover, due to their learning disabilities, they were not shy about asking for assistance from others as a means to help them realize their goals. They do not consider their learning disability per se as a contributor to their success. Yet it is clear that their definitions of success have been filtered through their experiences having a learning disability. At a young age, through the struggles to achieve any kind of success they learned to appreciate even small triumphs and they redefined the term making it applicable to what they could achieve. These participants were proud of their outcomes. All view themselves as extremely successful individuals who not only have the ability to compete at a level equal to their peers. They view themselves as individuals who have surpassed their peers.

In summary, the participants had developed a goodness of fit between their personal characteristics and environmental conditions. Each participant in this study had a strong work ethic and their determination paired with their competitiveness motivated their goal directed behaviours. The deficits experienced before the diagnosis, and the interventions given after, created a desire in the participant to prove their abilities to

themselves and to others. As a coping mechanism they overcompensate and work harder to be successful. Control has proven to be an important aspect in achieving success in this study.

University was the first time in their school careers that they manifested the autonomy to choose what and how they wanted to learn. At this stage in their life they better understand their learning disability and they have learned how to be successful with it. They also accept and make good use of the services that having a learning disability has afforded them.

However, the participants perceived their learning disability as creating many negative experiences and all feel that they would have had better outcomes without the learning disability. Yet a strong motivation and drive persisted. Each have in common a strong work ethic, an unbreakable determination, the ability to take risks, being proactive and goal oriented, and each have a learning disability. The learning disability tested their survival skills. Had they not had a learning disability they might not have been tested, and in turn they may not have been as successful. The participants in this study may not have attained the level of *transformation*, but seem to have reached the acceptance level of *compartmentalization* (Higgins et al. 2002).

Each individual was fortunate enough to find effective support systems in their families and to have made supportive connections with teachers and councilors throughout their schooling. With the help and influence that these individuals have had in their lives they developed goal setting strategies, which have served them well in determining their academic and career pursuits. As demonstrated through this study, parental advocacy leads to self advocacy. As children these participants were too young

to advocate, or fight for themselves, they learned to advocate for themselves because it had been demonstrated for them.

A finding that emerged from this research was that once children were diagnosed, the parents became proactive about their children's future and started to plan how these children were going to succeed. Parents became invested and created opportunities for their child, looking at future career opportunities and preparing them for the future.

The level of support in their homes predicted successful outcomes. With an attitude in the home that quitting school was not an option, each of the participants graduated from academic secondary school programs. As well, with an attitude in the home that a university education is important, each participant enrolled in and were working toward graduation from a university. The positive home environment and strong support was able to mitigate any negative school experiences that these individuals had (Reis et al. 1997).

Model

The above findings may be organized into a model consisting of concentric circles (see Appendix D: Figure 1). The 'self' the innermost circle encapsulates characteristics of the circles that enclose it. The family encloses the 'self' a supportive family helps develop positive affirmations of the 'self'. Outside the family are environmental characteristics, school is an important characteristic. Attitudes of the school and environment permeate onto the family and the self. As well, there are other environmental factors that contribute. But the self is protected by the closer circle of family, which has the largest influence of the self.

Conclusion

An exploration of these four case studies produced conclusions which were discovered in the analysis and discussion and provided responses to the three research questions. The conclusions reflect some of the findings of other research studies mentioned and also uncover some new findings.

The findings from this study support for both schools of thought on the predictors of success for students with learning disabilities. Individual's school experiences paired with their personal attributes and environmental conditions contributed to successful post-secondary school outcomes. Facilitators between the two schools of thought include: early identification and remediation, use of accommodations, participation in academic programs, participation in coop programs, high expectations in the family, enrollment in post-secondary education, use of transition programs, disclosing the learning disability at university, teacher acceptance, parental advocacy, self advocacy, finding role models, using *islands of competence*, developing coping strategies and study habits, taking advantage of resources, being determined, motivated and having goals, taking control, having the desire to prove themselves, LD acceptance, and having a supportive family.

Barriers exist as well and include: late diagnosis or no diagnosis, no advocacy, teachers who are not willing to follow individual education plans, lack of support and resources in secondary school, not disclosing the learning disability in university, having misconceptions about the learning disability, low self-esteem, and an inability to form friendships. These facilitators and barriers are found throughout the research on outcomes for student with learning disabilities (Benz, Yovanoff & Doren, 1997; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Reis, Neu & McGuire, 1997; Madaus, 2005; Baer et al., 2003; Raskind et al., 1999;

Gerber et al., 1992; Higgins et al., 2002; Litner et al., 2005; Morrison & Cosden, 1997).

More facilitators in the experiences of these participants impacted their post-secondary school outcomes.

The first significant turning point for these participants was their first early diagnosis of learning disability. The identification and remediation in their primary years had the greatest impact on their present outcomes. With the extra attention and effort made on the part of their teachers and parents, these individuals began to make academic strides. They started to develop their own set of coping strategies and began to achieve success at school. With the strong support from teachers, as well as the advocacy on the part of the maternal parent, these individuals felt that they could be successful at secondary school.

The lack of academic support for students with learning disabilities in secondary school created negative experiences. Keeping up a challenge. Control became a quest, in order to pass their classes each participant had to 'take control'; they developed a strong work ethic and exercised their coping skills, they learned to self advocate, and by developing these mechanisms they successfully completed secondary school. Role models played a significant role in the lives of the participants, giving the participants a purpose and planting the idea in their minds that they were capable of achieving optimal success. This is a significant finding, because it demonstrates that one person can make a difference. When a teacher takes an interest in a particular student who is having difficulty, gives them help, encourages them, sees the potential in the student, and tries to maximize that student's performance, that effort brings rewards.

Entrance into university was the second turning point for these students. Self-advocacy proved to be critical at this stage. This is the first time in their school experience that the individuals are completely responsible for self-advocating. The findings from this study found that university and specifically the disability services on campus provided excellent support to students and were instrumental in their ability to graduate and have success. The autonomy and control that the participants had during their university years contributed to their success at the university level

Each of the individuals in this study were working to complete their university degrees and one had just recently graduated from teachers college. In all four cases the participants were very goal oriented and their career aspirations were realistic and feasible. Interestingly, despite their struggles each of the participants aspired to further their education; taking a Masters or Ph.D.

Participants had personal characteristics and environmental conditions which contributed positively to their post-secondary school outcomes. Each demonstrated a strong work ethic, determination, competitiveness, motivation and goal directed behaviours. The deficits experienced before the diagnosis, and the interventions offered after, inspired a desire to prove their abilities. As a coping mechanism they overcompensate and work harder to be successful. The learning disability like a test, tested their survival skills. Had they not had a learning disability they might not have been tested, and in turn they may not have been as successful

Parental advocacy leads to self advocacy. Parent involvement and investment in their child created standards for the child to live up to. The level of support in their homes predicted successful outcomes. With an attitude in the home that quitting school was not

an option and that a university education is valuable, each of the participants graduated from secondary school and enrolled in a university.

The participant's ability to control their future pursuits and to achieve at a level comparable to their non-disabled peers had given them a high self concept and contributed to their feelings of success.

Implications for Further Research

One underlying theme among each participant was the confusion they experienced and still experience about the nature of their learning disability. They have learned how it affects them academically, but have little knowledge about what a learning disability is. Sadly, as stated by Lyon (1996) there is confusion, "LD remains one of the least understood and most debated disabling conditions that affect children." Future research needs to deal with educating children and adults about learning disabilities, it is important for an individual who lives with any disability to understand what that disability is. As can be seen from this study, an inaccurate understanding of learning disabilities may lead to diminished self-esteem.

The participant's accounts reflect the perception they had about their experiences. In my opinion this is what makes research rich and interesting. Our perceptions seem to motivate our behaviours. In this study, Lauren's perception of the clinical psychologist motivated her to strive for a high goal, to become a clinical psychologist herself. Lauren admitted in her last interview, that she may have imagined this conversation with the psychologist, when she told her that she too had a learning disability. Whether this independent construction of reality was experienced or imagined does not matter. This

was Laurens perception of reality at the time of her diagnosis. She drew strength from it and it motivated her behaviours, and this makes it a rich experience.

Litner et al.,(2005) revealed that individuals who do not have support early in their education (for instance, because they do not have a diagnosis) experience strained family relationships, as they are misunderstood. For individuals with learning disabilities who have not been supported by caregivers or teachers throughout their schooling, and who reach university, self taught coping mechanisms are most needed. Litner et al. (2005) found that those individuals who overcame their difficulties developed one caring relationship or interaction of some kind. Someone in their life influenced a behaviour change. In some cases, this is a brief encounter with someone who told them that they are smart. Finding areas of competence and using strengths to overcompensate for weaknesses also help this population who had little support at home, to achieve. Personal qualities such as determination and persistence, as well as the desire to gain self-knowledge are qualities that influenced the participants to self-advocate, to gain supports and resources. These adults were successful (Litner et al. 2005).

Parental support and acceptance seem essential. The stigmas surrounding any type of disability may limit the parent's desire to have their child tested (Todd & Shearn, 1997). Parents need to be properly informed on the importance of a diagnosis and how to effectively advocate for their child who has a learning disability. Before they can advocate they must be informed properly as to the nature of a learning disability, as well, they need to feel supported. More research is needed that focuses on the success stories of individuals with learning disabilities because people need to understand that a learning disability is not necessarily a predictor of future failures.

The study demonstrated the lack of support at the secondary school level.

Students with learning disabilities are in general underrepresented in the university population representing only 3% of the university population, where statistics vary between 10-12% in the general population. (Madaus, 2005; Mull, Sitlington, Alper, 2001). Enrolment rates of students with disabilities lag behind those of their non-disabled peers. Research needs to focus on strategies at the secondary school level that could be associated to the under representation of students with learning disabilities at universities. For instance, are secondary schools counseling students with learning disabilities in academic programs into applied level courses instead of providing more academic level support?

In conclusion, the overall school experiences of the individuals in this study were positive, especially in elementary school where they were given plenty of remedial assistance and in university where they were given a multitude of services, accommodations and funding for assistive technology. A gap appeared in their secondary school experiences. Individuals found a general lack of motivation on the part of teachers to make accommodations. These were the years that caused the most frustration for the individuals. Luckily, role models helped these participants to find a direction for their futures.

With regard to employment, education and independent living outcomes, all four participants attended a university or had just recently graduated from one. All achieved high grades and all formed realistic expectations of their future goals and were being educated in areas that would suit their career plans. Supportive family connections

predicted graduation from secondary school, their enrollment in university and influenced three individuals choice of university.

The participants exhibited extraordinary survival characteristics, such as self determination, persistence, being goal oriented, a strong work ethic, motivation, being proactive, a desire to succeed and the ability to take control of their learning. These characteristics may be attributed to the test of living and coping with a learning disability.

The findings from this study offer hope. With certain facilitators intact students with learning disabilities can achieve successful post-secondary school outcomes. One person can make a difference. Strong advocacy from a parent can teach a child to self advocate. A teacher who demonstrates interest and who offers encouragement to students make a significant contribution to that students self-esteem, and self concept, and has the potential to influence the future direction of that student. The ability for students to find safe and supportive avenues throughout their schooling; such as, supportive parents and teachers, accommodations and remediation received in elementary school, and from disability services at university, facilitated positive self esteem and enhanced the ability for these students to achieve.

Living and learning to cope with a learning disability is a life long process. A child has difficulty separating themselves from their learning disability. Their self concept is shattered because they see themselves in terms of what they cannot do. As these participants demonstrated, recovering from those childhood feelings is a lengthy process. These participants felt the need to prove to themselves and to others that they could achieve. They chose to *fight* rather than to *flee*, and this reaction; facilitated by the

above support, produced successful post-secondary school outcomes for these students with learning disabilities.

I would rather be a person who has been identified with a learning disability rather than a person who has a learning disability and has not been identified, because now I know that I'm not dumb, I just have trouble learning.

Do you want to hear my biggest fear?

I worry that I will have a child who can spell better than me by the time they are ten. I worry that I won't be able to help them with their homework. Also, if I don't become a psychologist I would like to teach, but then spelling is still an issue. But I think I have a solution, I will teach using PowerPoint!

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Appendix A

Table 1: Summary of research findings on post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

Study	Results
Blackorby & Wagner (1996)	- Employment status for those with disabilities is lower then for non-disabled - Males were more likely to be employed them females - Caucasians had higher wages than non-Caucasians - Rate of post-secondary enrolment is lower for those with disabilities than for non-disabled - Rate of residential independence is lower among those with disabilities than for non-disabled - Need for transition planning
Benz, Yovanoff & Doren (1997)	- Competitive employment was predicted by: a) Having two or more work-related experiences during the last two years of school b) Exiting high school with good social skills c) Exiting school with job search skills d) Having no continuing vocational instruction need one year out of school - Males were more likely to be employed than females
Colley & Jamison (1998)	- Employment status for those with disabilities is lower than for non-disabled - Those with disabilities educated in integrated settings were more likely to be employed than those in segregated classrooms - Rate of post-secondary enrolment is lower for those with disabilities than for non-disabled - Rate of residential independence in lower among those with disabilities than for non-disabled - Those with disabilities who graduated from high school and entered post secondary education found transition services helpful
Reis, Neu & McGuires (1997)	- School experiences did not contribute to their success in post-secondary education - Parental support contributed to positive self-esteem which contributed to success in post-secondary education
Madaus, Foley, McGuire & Ruban (2003)	- Successful post-secondary experiences contribute positively to employment outcomes, job satisfaction, and quality of life for young adults with LD.

Lindstrom & Benz (2002)	- Women with disabilities tended to be exposed to less varied job activities - Females in school-to-work programs were often placed in tradition low paying jobs and lacked preparation for skilled employment - Negative work place experiences, such as lack of support in the work environment limited their career choices - Research suggested that females benefited from having support such as mentors in their work environment
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Table 2: Summary of research findings on post-school outcomes for students with learning disabilities.

Study	Results
Madaus (2005)	- Employments rate, level of income, and level of benefits earned were comparable to the general workforce - Individuals with learning disabilities who graduate from university are more successful than their peers with learning disabilities who do not attend or graduate from university
Murray, Goldstein, Nourse and Edgar (2000)	- Youth with learning disabilities were less likely than those without disabilities to attend post secondary education and the majority of those who did attended training programs and community colleges. - Those who did enroll were less likely to graduate from their respective programs then their peers without disabilities - Youth with learning disabilities were not being properly prepared in their secondary school setting for postsecondary experiences
Baer, Flexer, Beck, Amstutz, Hoffman, Brothers, Stelzer & Zechman (2003)	- The community's expectations for youth with LD were related to the actual outcomes - Having a learning disability was positively correlated with participation in regular academic programs, better employment and post-secondary education than for those with other disabilities - Higher rates of employment for males than females - Lower rates of participation in work-study and vocational education programs among females than males - Predictors of full-time employment: having a learning disability rather than another type of disability, educated in a rural school setting, participating in a work-study program, and participation in vocational education

Pages 154-155 missing.

Table 3: Summary of other factors contributing to the success of young adults with learning disabilities

Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins & Herman (1999)	- Predictors of success for those with LD: individual's personal set of attitudes and behaviours (self-awareness, perseverance, proactive, emotionally stable, setting goals and using support systems.
Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff (1992)	- High school programs were unrelated o any success experienced by these individuals as adults - Those with LD who were highly successful wanted to gain control over heir live - Internal decisions: desire to succeed, being goal oriented, ability to reframe experiences - External manifestations: adaptability, persistence, coping mechanisms, finding a goodness of fit between one's ability and the environment, having support mechanisms
Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, and Herman (2002)	- Highly successful people with learning disabilities exhibited a pattern of passing through these stages of acceptance. (awareness, the labeling event, understanding/negotiating the label, compartmentalization, transformation)
Litner, Mann-Feder and Guerard (2005)	- 'Islands of competence,' the idea is that resilient children learn to accept their difficulties as part of who they are and instead rely of their strengths. - At university many of the participants acknowledged their professors and counselors as important facilitators contributing to their success. - The use of technology was also significant in opening doors for successful academic outcomes - Participants credited their diagnosis as playing an important role in their ability to find coping strategies.
Morrison and Cosden (1997)	- That resilient individuals shared

	positive self-esteem, high verbal skills, and accurately understood the nature of their learning disability - Environmental factors that promoted positive outcomes for these participants were having caregivers who exhibited good parenting skills, appropriate expectations for the child, and flexibility in the home - School completion was facilitated by a lack of school transfers and disruptions, a successful school performance, and the existence of intact families
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Appendix B

Table 4: Summary of findings for each participant

	Jack	Lauren	Elizabeth	Ashley
Experiences:				
Before Diagnosis	- Weak social skills - Low self-esteem - Academic problems	- Strong social skills - Low self-esteem - Academic problems	- Weak social skills - Low self-esteem - Academic problems	- Weak social skills - Low self-esteem - Academic problems
Diagnosis	Grade 1 - Private psychological assessment and school assessment from the board psychologist	Grade 5 - 1st, Teacher diagnostic - Grade 11 -2nd, Clinical psychologist	Grade 4 - Clinical psychologist	Grade 3 - Clinical psychologist
Elementary School Experiences	- Positive, - Extensive remediation - Parental advocacy - Academic improvement	- Positive, - Extensive remediation - Parental advocacy - Academic improvement	- Positive, - Extensive remediation - Parental advocacy - Academic improvement	- Positive, - Extensive remediation - Parental advocacy - Academic improvement
Secondary School Experiences	- Negative - Depression - Marks dropped 20% - Few accommodations - Found a supporter (role model)	- Negative before her second diagnosis - Strong parental advocacy - Accommodations improved grade performance. - Learning to self-advocate - Found a role model	- Challenging, formed coping mechanisms - Found a role model	- Challenging, formed coping mechanisms - Found a role model
University Experiences	- Positive - Used transition programs - Self advocated - Registered with disability	- Positive - Self advocated - Registered with disability services - Excellent	- Negative because she did not disclose - Failed first year - Positive after	- Positive - Used transition programs - Self advocated - Registered with disability

	services - Excellent support - Part-time student - Uses <i>Islands of Competence</i>-challenges for credits - Works full time - Achieves high grades - Feels autonomous	support - Took advantage of resources available - Talks to secondary school students with disabilities who want to enter university - Completed her honours in Psychology - Currently pursuing her Masters - Aspires to do a Ph.D. in Psychology - Achieves high grades - Feels autonomous	she registered, self-advocated - Excellent support - Took advantage of resources - Became very successful - Graduated from her B.A. and B.Ed. - Achieves high grades - Feels autonomous	services - Excellent support - Took advantage of resources available - Currently in 3rd year - Plans to pursue Masters - Achieves high grades - Feels autonomous
Employment, Education, and Independent Living Outcomes	- Part time student - Works full time (Hi-tech.) a job that he really enjoys - Future plans to start his own business - Lives with parents	- Pursuing a Masters in Psychology - Living with parents - Would like to become a clinical psychologist or a teacher	- Graduated from her B.A. and B. Ed. - Looking for a teaching position - Living at home with parents until her wedding	- Entering 3rd year university - Living with parents over the summer - Plans to become a teacher or to do a Masters in Theology
Personal Characteristics	- Ability to self-advocate - Work ethic, determination, competitiveness, motivation, goal directed behaviours - Desire to prove themselves - Took Control - Understanding	- Ability to self-advocate - Work ethic, determination, competitiveness, motivation, goal directed behaviours - Desire to prove themselves - Took Control - Understanding	- Ability to self-advocate - Work ethic, determination, competitiveness, motivation, goal directed behaviours - Desire to prove themselves - Took Control	- Ability to self-advocate - Work ethic, determination, competitiveness, motivation, goal directed behaviours - Desire to prove themselves - Took Control

	of LD's effect - LD acceptance	of LD's effect	- Understanding of LD's effect	- Understanding of LD's effect - LD acceptance
Environmental Conditions	- Family support system - Connected to teachers and professors - Support network at university	- Family support system - Connectedness to peers - Connected to teachers and professors - Support network at university	- Family support system - Connectedness to peers - Connected to teachers and professors - Support network at university	- Family support system - Connectedness to peers - Connected to teachers and professors - Support network at university

Appendix C

Table 5: Facilitators and Barriers from the Findings

Facilitators	Barriers
Self - Disclosing the learning disability at university - Self advocacy - Using <i>islands of competence</i> - Developing coping strategies and study habits - Taking advantage of resources - Being determined - Motivated and having goals - Taking control - Having the desire to prove themselves - LD acceptance Family - High expectations in the family - Parental advocacy and family support School and Environment - Early identification and remediation - Use of accommodations - Participation academic programs - Participation in a coop programs - Enrollment in post-secondary education - Use of transition programs - Teacher acceptance - Finding role models	Self - Not disclosing the learning disability in university - Having misconceptions about the learning disability - Low self-esteem - Inability to form friendships. Family - No advocacy - Low expectations - Having misconceptions about the learning disability School and Environment - Late diagnosis or no diagnosis - Teachers who are not willing to follow I.E.P's - Lack of support and resources in secondary school

Appendix D



Figure 1: Model of findings

SELF	- Personal characteristics, attributes, values and beliefs (self-advocacy, study skills, coping skills, attitudes toward LD, hard work ethic, motivation, desire to succeed)
FAMILY	- Encloses the 'self' - Has the greatest influence on the 'self' - Supportive family helps develop positive affirmations - Advocacy in elementary and secondary - Support- emotional, tutorial, financial
SCHOOL/ ENVIRONMENT	- Elementary- high levels of support by teachers - Secondary- less teacher support, few program options - University- special services: program options, accommodations, remediation, funding for assessments, technology, tutors, some helpful professors

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Interview I

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What are your parent's occupations?
5. What are your parent's education levels?
6. What is your highest level of education?
7. What are you studying?
8. Where are you in your program?
9. What are your grades?
10. When do you expect to graduate?
11. At what age were you diagnosed with a learning disability?
12. What disability have you been diagnosed with?
13. Do you have any siblings with learning disabilities? or a parent?
14. Do you have any other disabling conditions besides the learning disability? (e.g. hearing and/or vision loss, physical handicap, emotional condition)
15. What is the severity of your learning disability? Can you rate these abilities as moderate, high or low functioning as they pertain to you: listening, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, mathematical abilities, perception, coordination, impulsivity, distractibility, hyperactivity, attention span.
16. What are your living arrangements?

Experiences

17. What do you remember about being diagnosed with a learning disability? How did you feel?
18. How did it come to be that you were diagnosed?
19. Can you tell me as much as possible about the details of your experience being identified as a student with LD?
20. Talk about your experiences during the assessment/identification process? Did you find them positive or negative?
21. Can you talk about your school experiences? Elementary, Secondary, Post-secondary? What was learning like for you at this time?
22. What accommodations were made for you? (Special education or general classroom placement, resource time, EA)
23. Do you feel that these accommodations were helpful? Why or why not?
24. Talk about a learning experience of great joy, happiness, positive affect.
25. Talk about a learning experience of misery, fear, negative affect.
26. How would the significant people in your life describe you before and after the

- assessment and identification process? Was there a change in your personality?
27. Was there an area of study that you found you had more strength in or less strength in? Can you describe how this strength affected your learning?
 28. Talk about a single greatest challenge.
 29. Do you feel that you have achieved at a rate comparable to your peers? Explain?
 30. Was school a negative or positive place for you? Why?
 31. Can you describe an instance where your learning disability created a negative experience?
 32. Can you describe an instance where your learning disability created a positive experience?
 33. What environmental and learning strategies/coping skills were necessary to help you succeed in school?
 34. Where you ever retained a grade in school? Did you fail any courses in high school?
 35. Did you ever have problems with peers or with teachers? Can you tell me why?
 36. Was there a teacher that you feel really made a difference in your life? Can you explain why?
 37. While in high school did you have any work experience programs/co-op? If yes, what did you learn?
 38. While in high school did you have a part-time job or summer job? What was it? How long did you hold them?
 39. What transition plans, if any, were available to you upon entering university?
 40. What university did you choose and why?
 41. Describe a person or institution who has had the most negative impact on your learning?
 42. Describe a person or institution who has had the most positive impact on your learning?
 43. Talk about a turning point in your life, a scene in which you experienced a significant life change.

Interview II

Present Life

44. Do you or have you participated in services available to students with disabilities on your university campus? What services have you used? Have they been helpful? Why? Why not?
45. Can you tell me about your strengths?
46. Can you tell me about your weaknesses?
47. Tell me about your future aspirations?
48. Tell me about your personal goals?
49. Have you reached any of your goals?
50. Do you consider yourself a hard worker? If yes, what is your method? If not, why not?
51. What are the personality traits that have helped you or will help you to reach your goals? Tell me about how they have affected you? Do any of these characteristics

apply to you? (Being goal-oriented, having the desire to succeed, self-awareness: seeing the LD as a positive experience, self-efficacy, being proactive, being adaptable, persistent, having a set of coping strategies, determination, perseverance, ethics of hard work, stubbornness)

52. How did you develop these personality traits? Was there a positive or negative experience that influenced these traits?
53. Do you have a plan for academic success? What was it? How was it created? What have been facilitators or barriers for you?
54. In your opinion what factors promote or prevent the success of individuals with learning disabilities?
55. How important is it for you to complete university? Why?
56. Do you expect to be employed after graduation? If so, as what? If not, why not?
57. What do you see yourself doing in five years? Ten years?
58. How do you plan to achieve your goals? Will you need further training?
59. What barriers could be in your way?
60. What does the term successful mean to you?
61. Do you feel that you are successful? Why?

Interview III

Reflections

62. How do you understand your experience as being identified with a learning disability?
63. How has this understanding affected your education?
64. How has this understanding affected your sense of self?
65. How has your level of self-awareness changed?
66. What have you learned from this experience?
67. How has this experience empowered you?
68. Having the knowledge that you have now, how might you cope differently with this experience in your life?
69. Describe a favourite story, something that has inspired you, a way of seeing your life experiences and who you are now.

Appendix F

Consent Form

Stephanie Fullarton

University of Ottawa

Faculty of Education

613-569-3506

stephaniefullarton@hotmail.com

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Stephanie Fullarton M.A. student of the Department of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. The project is under the supervision of Professor Cheryll Duquette. The purpose of the research is to examine the school experiences of students with learning disabilities.

My participation will consist essentially of attending three 90-minute interview sessions during which I will be asked questions about my school experiences, the process in which I was diagnosed with a learning disability, the accommodations I received while in school, and the elements (demographic, individual and academic) that helped me achieve success as a University student. The sessions have been scheduled for spring and summer 2005. I understand that the contents will be used only for research concerning the experiences of students with learning disabilities for the purposes of this M.A. thesis. I understand that my confidentiality will be respected and that no information that can identify me will be published or made public.

I understand that since this activity deals with very personal information, it may cause me emotional discomfort, which may, at times, be difficult. I have received assurance from the researchers that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences. The researcher will attempt to be aware of any discomfort that I may feel and will address it as necessary.

I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an interview, refuse to participate and refuse to answer questions without prejudice.

I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. Anonymity will be assured. No names will be published and the researcher, supervisor and committee members of this research will only discuss personal accounts.

Tape recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner. Data collected from the research will be stored and kept secure for a minimum of five years and will be accessible to only the researcher and the supervisor for this research.

Any information about my rights as a research participant may be addressed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa, or by calling the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, (613) 562-5841 or email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the researcher Stephanie Fullarton, 624 King Edward #161, Phone: 613-569-3506, email: stephaniefullarton@hotmail.com or her supervisor Cheryll Duquette, 145 Jean Jacques Lussier, Room 232, Phone: 613-562-5800 (x. 4040), email: cduquett@uottawa.ca.

Please complete the section below:

I would like the interview audio taped. Yes ____ No

I would like to review the transcript. Yes ____ No

Researcher's signature: _____ Date:

Research Subject's signature: _____ Date:

Witness _____ Date:

Appendix G

Description of Research Given to Members of The Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa, The Special Services at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University's Paul Menton Center for Persons with Disabilities

My name is Stephanie Fullarton, and I am a M.A. student at the University of Ottawa. I am conducting a study on the school experiences of students with learning disabilities. I am recruiting University students who have been diagnosed with having a learning disability to tell their school experiences.

Students will be asked to participate in three 90-minute interviews. The interview questions will center on their school experiences, their home environments, and their present and future goals. The interview will be held at a time and place convenient for them. They will be audiotape, and typed transcripts will be sent to each participant to be edited and approved.

This data is being collected for the purposes of an M.A. thesis and will not be used for any other purpose.

If you have any further questions or if you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me via email at stephaniefullarton@hotmail.com or by telephone at 613-569-3506. I will bring a copy of the consent form to our first interview session.