

## Eastern Kentucky University Encompass

---

Honors Theses

Student Scholarship

---

Fall 2016

# The Educational Experience: Understanding the Voices of Students with and without Specific Learning Disorders

Morgan A. Wood

*Eastern Kentucky University*, [morgan\\_wood32@mymail.eku.edu](mailto:morgan_wood32@mymail.eku.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://encompass.eku.edu/honors\\_theses](https://encompass.eku.edu/honors_theses)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wood, Morgan A., "The Educational Experience: Understanding the Voices of Students with and without Specific Learning Disorders" (2016). *Honors Theses*. 393.

[https://encompass.eku.edu/honors\\_theses/393](https://encompass.eku.edu/honors_theses/393)

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Encompass. For more information, please contact [Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu](mailto:Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu).

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

The Educational Experience:  
Understanding the Voices of Students with and Without Specific Learning Disorders

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of HON 40

Fall 2017

By

Morgan Anne Wood

Mentor

Myra Beth Bundy, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology

## ABSTRACT

### The Educational Experience: Understanding the Voices of Students With and Without Specific Learning Disorders

Morgan Wood

Dr. Myra Beth Bundy, Ph.D., Department of Psychology

#### Abstract description:

Elementary school is a pivotal time during a child's development in cognition, social behaviors and relationships, and development of self. For students who may have significant academic disabilities, resulting in a diagnosis of a Specific Learning Disorder, this time can be more difficult than their "typical" learning peers. Intervention techniques have been developed and implemented; however, academic success is defined as increased standardized test scores. Little research has been done regarding these students' emotional and social success within their prescribed intervention technique. It is the aim of this study to strive to understand the voices of students with specific learning disabilities and see how their educational experience as a whole compare to those of their peers without specific learning disorders. It was found that few universal themes could be drawn, but inner group comparisons could be made, in addition to interesting insights among individual themes. This was a semi-structured interview of seven students at a local semi-private elementary school.

*Keywords and phrases:* education, special learning disorder, qualitative, semi-structure interview, psychology, development, academic, elementary school, student development, intervention

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tables .....	page iv
Acknowledgments.....	page vi
Literature Review.....	page 02
Methodology.....	page 08
Results .....	page 10
Discussion and Implications.....	page 14
Future Research.....	page 16
Limitations.....	page 17
Concluding remarks.....	page 18
References.....	page 19

## Tables

**Table 1** Individual Participants' Answer Themes

Student (grade)	SLD 2 <sup>nd</sup>	NSLD 2 <sup>nd</sup>	SLD 3 <sup>rd</sup>	NSLD 3 <sup>rd</sup>	SLD 4 <sup>th</sup>	NSLD 4 <sup>th</sup>	SLD 5 <sup>th</sup>
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Friendship	Some	None	Many	Many	Many	Many	Some
Favorite Topic	Music	Reading	Science	Art, social studies, gym, science	History/ Language Arts	Science	Science
Least Favorite	Music	N/a	Reading	Math	Math	History/ social studies	None
General Thoughts	School safety	Neither like or dislike school generally	Defines perceived deficits	Likes school to learn and socialize	Likes variety of topics covered, particularly electives	Expresses need and use of education on holistic level	Sometimes can be fun, other times not.
Importance of School	N/A	N/A	Help with difficult areas; to learn	Practical application	Practical application	Teachers try to help you learn	Help learn, read and write. Required.
Rule Change	Safety oriented	Additional Sports equipment	Leave in middle of day; extra socialization time	Dress Code rule not as strict	Extra socialization time, dress code less strict	Play game that is against rules.	Better lunch food and recess all day.
Two descriptor words	“play” and “friends”	“good” and “okay”	“Hard” and “fun”	“Fun,” and “learn”	“Fun” and “friends”	“Fun” and “education”	“Learning purposes”

**Table 2** Identified common themes surrounding the students' Educational Experience

	SLD specific group	Typical Student group	All participants
Favorite subject	Coursework outside the traditional classroom.	Coursework within traditional academic topics	No theme.
Least favorite subject	Systematically within the traditional classroom in the area of perceived lack of ability	No theme.	No theme.
Rule change	Rule release	Rule release	More freedom
General thoughts about school	No true themes. Often portrayed as "fun"	Discussed what they were learning about in a variety of topics.	No theme.
Importance of school	Emphasis on learning.	Learning outcomes, considering the future	Importance of learning and attending school
Descriptor words	"friends," "difficulty," "learning," and "fun"	"good/fun" and "learning"	Oriented around social interaction and education

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank those who have spent countless hours not only advising me academically, but specifically on this project. Firstly, my mentor Dr. Bundy for being so readily willing to work with a student who was not of her department and expressing excitement for the project and the information to get me to this point. Your support and dedication has been greatly appreciated, and has made the process easy and enjoyable. The honors faculty and staff who want nothing more than for their students than to be successful, and providing the tools to accomplish whatever the students set their minds to. Ms. Puckett, the director of special education at Model Laboratory School, for assisting in setting up the interviews and encouraging undergraduate research. My parents, who have instilled in me the desire and love of education and knowledge of accomplishment due to hard work. Dr. Nguyen of the Honors office and Dr. Lisa Kay of the statistics department for being willing to assist me in my initial thesis goals.

I would not be able to have this opportunity to have most of the wonderful undergraduate research experiences without all of these voices of support, reassurance and intellectual resources. It is true that ECU has been a place that encourages academic success and knows their students can do great things. For this, I am exceptionally thankful.

## Literature Review

### The Specific Learning Disorder

In recent history, education has been prominently on the national and international stages of interest. Principally, the concept of equal educational rights that need to transcend that of gender, race or class. While this equality is not always achieved and what is fair is often pushed aside for what is easy or financially manageable, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to education” and expounded as “a fundamental human right” that promotes “individual freedom” and “empowerment” (United Nations [UN], 1948;UN, 2014). Students who have documented specific learning disorders often require additional academic tailoring within or outside of the traditional classroom. However, much development of self and other cognitive and social arenas is starting to gain momentum during the pivotal elementary school years. The question then becomes how might having a documented specific learning disorder affect the educational experience of a student within their elementary school years.

The Diagnostic Statistic Manual, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (DSM-5), defines a diagnosis of specific learning disabilities to be based on several diagnosis tools, including but not limited to development, medical and family history, test scores and teacher observations. Persistent difficulties must be present, and cannot be better explained by another, more encompassing diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It must also be noted, that the DSM-5 states that this diagnosis must also see signs that its effects are *significantly* “interfering with academic achievement, occupational performance, and/or activities of daily living.” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; Zumeta, Zirkel, & Danielson, 2014). Not only is the student’s SLD



interfering with academic performance at a pivotal time in their development, but can have the ability to interfere in other parts of these students' lives. Diagnoses can be made throughout the lifespan, however there are only interventions and strategies taught rather than a "cure." (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2015). In 2014, the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) notes that within their longitudinal studies, young adults with a diagnosed learning disorder often self-report social and emotional difficulties, have a higher rate of unemployment than their peers without a specific learning disability (NCLD,2014). This research done by the NCLD is, however, limited, as they focus only on high school students on through young adulthood and rely primarily on self-reporting, volunteer samples. It is interesting to note though, that they point to early support at home, a strong sense of self-confidence, and strong connection to friends and community can be indicators for a successful post-secondary life, therefore combating the possible influence a SLD can produce on daily activities and occupational success (NCLD, 2014; APA, 2013). This would go hand in hand with early diagnosis as well to enable this foundational support and gains in self-confidence.

Predominantly in middle childhood, many aspects of development are rapidly occurring and influenced within this span. Prototypical changes involving social and emotional interactions, cognitive ability, and the concept of self, self-efficacy, and self-confidence are all developing within these key years (Berk, 2013). Students with a specific learning disorder are going to develop neurologically different, however, and may need to approach education or their particular academic difficulties from a different angle or pace than that of a traditional classroom approach. Students at this age are comparing themselves to their peers (Berk, 2013). As their academic setting is one of the most involved environments at this point in their lives, children are prone to place their current and growing concept of self-based on peer comparison (self-esteem

generally starts developing more so in adolescence). If a child is having learning challenges and difficulties and comparing themselves to their peers who are developing on par for academic trajectories, the student may develop negative self-image, and possibly negative emotional and social interactions as well. Tabassam and Grainger found that students, ages twelve to thirteen, reported academic self-concept, self-efficacy beliefs scored lower than their typical learner peers (Tabassam and Grainger, 2002). This does not take into account academic scores, intervention, nor academic trajectory, but only self-reporting behavior. Students can take on two approaches to their education, one being that of learned helplessness, the other learned mastery. The first occurs due to failure, or perceived thereof, to succeed, success defined by the education system of which they are apart. This often is seen as “I succeed due to luck; I fail because I am not smart (prescribed or perceived attributes that are unable to change).” Learned mastery is the positive of the two, associating success with hard work and acquired capabilities, and that failure can be overcome (Beck, 2013). If success within the classroom is difficult for a student to meet and is constantly being told they are “failing,” the results can lead the student down a path of which they believe they cannot change. Often, learned helplessness leads to decreased academic involvement or effort, setting them up for possible occupational and daily life interference. This, amongst other reasons, is why it is exceptionally important to diagnosis and provide intervention for students with specific learning disorders as early as possible.

## **Educational Design**

Traditional classrooms within primary education institutions, habitually encompassing children ages five through twelve, are empowered to utilize pedagogical techniques of varying degrees and impact (Arrow et al., 1997; Johnson & Pugach, 1990). Traditional classrooms through this work will be constituted as groups of students inclusive to all students, regardless of

disability or behavioral issues. Traditional classrooms have the capacity to teach many students standardized information with some respect to pedagogical efficiency (Arrow et al, 1997).

However, students learn at various paces with varying levels of difficulty.

The contemporary educational system reform in both the United States and Canada also expects the additional component of assessments that require educators to integrate these assessments into their teaching schedules (U.S. Department of Education, 2009; DeLuca & Hughes, 2014). These academic measurements are used as the primary, if only, measurement of academic success. Advancement in knowledge is seen in changes from pre-year test and post-year tests, and then standardized and compared amongst peers within the local area, state, and even country. If a student fails to meet these prescribed achievement rates, then they are labeled for additional teaching resources.

Further assessment can occur to better target individual needs and general strategies (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Rich & Duhon, 2014). Lane et al. (2015) claim that a tiered approach to intervention are particularly effective. These tiers provide increasing support for and based on academic, behavioral, and social needs. Lane et al.'s pedagogical methodology allows for both student and educator engrossment in the process that will inevitably allow a student to tailor their academic needs while “maximizing the amount of time students spend engaged in high-quality instructional activities” in addition to “offering them a sense of control that may improve the quality of their life.” Student within this model remain in the classroom, providing a less significant alteration to the traditional classroom model. According to Hughes and Dexter, additional response to intervention models (RTIs) also utilize general assessments, known as universal screening, that occur traditionally three times throughout the school year (2011).

Not only does this process require reduced instruction days, but can also produce false positives. These RTIs, while also tiered, require the removal of the student from traditional classrooms partially or entirely thus causing a significant school day alteration and disruption (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Significant results were found in a study conducted by Hessel and Schwab (2015) that students with a mathematics specific learning disability who remained in an inclusive classroom had the lowest assessment performance, with non-learning disability students performing highest followed by special education classroom only. Generalizing this study could pose problems, however, as it was taken from a single school with a limited population of students with learning disabilities.

It has also been found that integration of interests within intervention time can greatly increase of retained taught information, and therefore success (Wells and Sheehy, 2013). Various intervention times, activities, group size, subject, and teaching method differ greatly and depend on the school, state, and special education department. There is no current “right way” for these interventions, but it is shown that intervention does, in fact, produce greater rates of academic success than that of students with documented learning disorders remaining within the traditional classroom with no intervention techniques. Test taking skills can also be taught to improve the student’s academic standing, and therefore, success (Scruggs, 1986; Kretlow, Lo, & White, 2008; Biedel, Turnerr, & Taylor-Ferreria, 1999). It has also shown to reduce test taking anxiety and can increase self-concept within their academic setting (Biedel, Turnerr, & Taylor-Ferreria, 1999).

With the exception of Hessels and Schwab, little emotional and social integration and consequences of varying intervention models have been explored. Research still needs to be furthered in additional education models. Additional qualitative research will also be sought.

Limited data, either qualitative or quantitative, however, is found when addressing the mundane, yet important, daily life of the primary student. Assessment data is important for identifying pedagogical methodologies that are effective and students who might benefit from these additional intervention techniques. It is, however, important to also identify emotional and social barriers or benefits from different education intervention models. Perhaps, amongst several intervention models available, a student is able to excel in academics only, leaving their emotional and social wellbeing to suffer. Another technique may provide advancement in all three areas, leading to a more balanced route of development.

**A cultural case study.** Within the last decade, Japan has begun the process of mandating special education, particularly for that of the “developmental disabled,” of which students with specific learning disorders are categorized. In earlier history, Japanese students with severe disabilities were cast aside as useless and were not granted a formal education. While equal opportunity education is now evolving, strong stigma still surrounds academic disadvantaged children. A study surrounding parent, teacher, and student perceptions explored how the stigma from parents affected child performance and how their student’s teachers could help reduce the stigma associated with their child’s learning challenges. It was seen that parents own perceptions and worry about what other’s thought of their child’s challenges proved to be an obstacle for their student to receive the additional intervention advised (Kayama & Haight, 2014). Although intervention techniques began several decades ago, American schools are still struggling with stigma surrounding educational difficulties and challenges. The education system is constantly in progress, as well as intervention techniques to strive to provide the best possible situation for the student. However, depending on state and school, resources and home support may not be in the students’ favor. A 2014 study reflecting on 2011 learning disorders state by state indicated that

Kentucky lagged behind about 12 percentage points from the national average of SLD students out of all students enrolled in special education, and also had identified the lowest percent of total students with learning disorder out of total enrollment. Kentucky has also remained stagnant in its number of SLD students since 2006, with no statistical significance change in numbers of number of SLD students out of total students or the percentage of SLD students out of the state's special education population. This is the only state to have no change across the board. (NCLD, 2014).

### **Methodology**

When faced with this gap in current research, an exploratory, qualitative study was created and executed. It was found that in 2015-2016 school year, 88,199 students in Kentucky were enrolled in some form of special education. Of this, students with a specific learning disorder accounted for 15,704 of these students (Kentucky Department of Education,2016). Thus, elementary school aged students were selected as the primary age of investigation. A public-university lab partnership school in Kentucky, a semi-private K-12 school within this county, was selected for participation. This particular school serves 720 students. (School Demographics, 2016). The U.S. Census that approximately 17,934 households had at least one child under 18 within the county. (School Demographics,2016; Census Bureau, 2010). After approval by the university's research board, investigators worked with the special education department of this school, in selecting students with a specific learning disorder for which they are receiving educational intervention. The severity and type of specific learning disorder was not disclosed to the investigators. Two children were selected from each second to fifth grades. The first student

selected was a student with a specific learning disorder, the specifics of which were not disclosed; the second student was a student with typical learning selected as to match the first in gender, grade, and class to the best of the investigators ability. Ten students were initially selected, seven of which were interviewed. 43% of students interviewed were female; 71.4% had a specific learning disability diagnosis; all but fifth grade had a pairing. The fourth grade student matched in grade/class but not gender. A majority of the students had a parent work closely with the education system at various levels, as well as had siblings and a two parent household. Students were all Caucasian, and of a middle-to upper middle class socioeconomic status. All but a single student had been attending this school since kindergarten.

There are multiple avenues of qualitative data collection and analyses. Creswell depicts various qualitative research forms and discusses the manner and limitations of each (Creswell, 2012). A phenomenology was found to capture the essence of an experience. Its traditional design asks only a single question from which the interviewee could highlight what they thought as foundational, even vital to the explanation of the experience in question. However, when interviewing children ages seven through twelve, we felt that more structure was needed to support expression yet limit digressions in the conversation. Within a semi-structured interview, questions are developed that have the potential to be expounded upon by the interviewee. Some questions may strive to lead the participant toward a certain topic; answers may be brief and factual unless prompted further by the interviewer. As this is a pioneering study, results could only be hypothesized and were unable to reference previous work. One of the more appealing characteristics of the semi-structured interviews is that the discussion could be taken where the participants saw important (regardless of the investigators preconceived thoughts) and changes could be made in real time to the discussion, rather than having a strict script to be followed to

the letter. Therefore, an initial phenomenological statement “Tell me about school” began the conversation. This enabled the students to think and discuss what they initially thought about school without any prodding or suggestion from the interviewer- their concept of school in its purest form. From that point, questions concerning favorite and least favorite subjects, how they approach the school day, responsibilities and home life, and to describe school in two words were foundational to the interview. Interviews were audio recorded and found to average about eleven minutes. The interviews were later transcribed. Grounded theory was used to analyze the themes of the individual, in addition to overarching themes within each group and the overall sample. These transcriptions were analyzed by the primary investigator and an Eastern Kentucky University professor of psychology and licensed psychologist of 20 years. The interviews took place within a secluded room, from which the participant and interviewer sat across from each other while they had their recorded conversation.

## **Results**

One must first explore the themes of each individual child to explore the educational experience of the elementary school participants with and without specific learning disorders. Themes can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 on pages iv and v.

### **Individual Child Themes**

The first student, a second grade male student without documented learning disorders, was particularly shy. He stated he had no friends, however, was involved in many team sports- his stated main interest. This student didn’t particularly express any strong likes or dislikes about



academic topics outside of expressing his like of math and reading (no reason attached) and stated he didn't have a least favorite topic. The brief conversation indicated he was content with his short educational experience, having neither vehement love or disdain for attending school.

A second grade male with a specific learning disability deflected most all talk about academics, but discussed at length safety concerns within the academic setting. When discussing a favorite location on school grounds, the response was tied to possible safety alcoves; his favorite recess activity was maneuvers to get back into school incase his friends as well as him were locked out in an emergency. He discussed friendships, but friendships appeared selective as he tried to push others away to "leave him alone" through discussion of "gross or violent" things or engaging in inappropriate activities at recess, despite commenting that his favorite thing about school is being with friends. This student was held back a year and expressed sensitivity to age. He did indicate a favorite topic of music after school, when instruction was done in a small group. During the allotted music time during the day with a greater majority of his peers, he stated that was his least favorite topic, an interesting comparison.

When most participating students were prompted to discuss school initially, many explained their day-to-day routines or launched into their likes and dislikes without further questioning. However, when a third-grade female student with documented special learning needs, she began to discuss her perceived deficits. She did not define her experience in terms of likes or dislikes, but rather ability. Even her favorite subject was stated in reference to her perceived deficit in reading- stating that in science one does not have to do much reading. The participant expressed a desire to go home half way through her school day, yet she also recognizes the importance of learning. It is interesting to note that although she recognized the importance of school, the purpose of school and subsequently learning as she described it, was to

know the correct answer. Granted, the participant is eight years old, but perhaps this speaks to the power we as America place on a standardized testing system- putting the emphasis on the correct answer over the tools for further knowledge acquisition in addition to the correct answers. She does not lack in friendships based on our conversation. She was involved in many sports, and discussed various friendships within the school community and out.

Our third grade female without a documented learning challenge was verbally expressive. Excited about most everything we discussed, she did not have any identifiable concerns about academics, friendships, or home life. It is interesting to note that her answers came readily, and sounded as if discussed before.

For fourth grade, the female participant with a documented learning disability was aware of her challenges, but also was willing to express her interests and academic strengths. Unlike the third grade student with a Specific Learning Disability, this participant's experience outlook indeed discussed struggles, but understood the need for the least favorite subject. Her favorite subjects were discussed in terms of why she liked them or what was intriguing about the topics. She readily conversed about her friendships and enjoyment of school.

Conversely, the male fourth grade participant without documented specific learning disabilities was aware of the value of a holistic education, despite any possible disliked topics or lack of desire to go to school. He identified some responsibilities at home with two parents and siblings, like all of the other students. Truly, the interesting point was he was focused not only on the present, but also on the future. This participant was looking down his academic road to identify what will be useful for his life and possible careers.

Lastly, the lone fifth grade participant was male and was identified as having a specific learning disorder. He answered the interview questions, but did not deviate or elaborate much. He remained positive through the interview, and his learning challenges were never brought up. This student did emphasize what he enjoyed about school, but any line of questioning related to dislikes was sidestepped. He did respond that tests sometimes are not fun.

### **Themes for Students with SLD as a Group**

Students identified as having specific learning disorders and who were receiving interventions were thematically similar in various aspects. Favorite subjects tended to be outside of the traditional classroom, such as music, science, or P.E. This is also reflected in favorite location at school. When prompted to discuss school freely, school was identified to be often fun with some distastes that were not thematically based. Often these dislikes or “least favorite” subjects were framed in perceived lack of ability- the degree of this personal assessment varied across students. Students were then asked about any changes to school they would wish to make, and it was found that they would like to change the rules to allow more freedom. Prompted about the importance of school, students placed emphasis on learning. Each child relayed a valid reason to be at school, even with dislikes, distastes, and difficulties. Participants with specific learning disorders summarized school in a few words revolving around “friends”, “difficulty”, “learning”, and “fun” to describe their educational experience.

### **Themes for Typical Students as a Group**

Students who remained in the traditional classroom throughout the day also had thematic similarities to one another. Their favorite subjects were largely taught within the traditional classroom (traditional, academic topics such as science, math, or reading), where there was no

thematic basis for least favorite topics or academic distastes. Generally, these students discussed what they were learning about readily. As they were prompted about the importance of school, participants responded by highlighting learning outcomes, but also discussed why they would need various aspects of their education in future careers or additional academic levels. Describing school in simply two words, students thematically classified their educational experience as “good/fun” and “learning”.

### **Themes Common to SLD and Typical Students**

Similarly, both groups of students requested rule changes that would enable more freedoms in areas such as talking, dress code, and more recess time. Both groups discussed the importance of school, and there was a common interest in the practical topics the school was teaching- such as “math is useful so you know how much money you will be able to spend on groceries!” However, no true, universal themes or significantly opposing themes were identified.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Each of these children shared independently attributed particular outlooks on school that when asked broadly about manifests differently. As system theory commentates, no individual can be analyzed in isolation. Participants, regardless of their learning needs have a unique background and individual relationship with the education system and those supporting or interacting with their education endeavors. As a majority of the students interviewed come from a household closely associated with education due to parental careers, this can be distinguished as a possible reason that students are able to differentiate difficulties and importance of

education, giving these participants' predominantly resilient attitudes. Despite any difficulties, working hard and understanding hard work elsewhere in academia and within their difficulty area, these students seemed to feel that they could still achieve success and are valuable learners.

At the ages included for this study, children are developing self-efficacy; developing their identity, their self-image; developing socially; and developing cognitively (Beck, 2013).

Therefore, if a student with a specific learning disorder begins to develop a perceived lack of educational ability at a location where they spend most of their day, how might that affect all of these vital points of development? Research indicates that for parenting, goodness of fit between parent, child, and environment are extremely important for the development of a child (Berk, 2013). If that is the case, then surely a goodness of fit should be enacted in the educational system as well. Children within the United States spend on average 6.64 hours a week within school walls, and an additional half to single hour or more on other academic endeavors outside of their designated school time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008; National Education Association, 2015). This totals to at least 7 hours on average spent engulfed in their elementary school education. Developing minds and selves should be given the best change at developing all aspects and have a right to equal education as stated by the U.N. Implicitly, this could be taken to indicate that they should also be given a track of learning that will help them develop in the arenas of cogitation, social, and identity development.

Diagnosis and intervention are also key in this development of educational identity and other fields of development. If a child grows and goes through school without the knowledge that remaining in the traditional classroom is not an effective learning tactic for them, they are at risk for developing learned helplessness. This has the possibility of coloring the rest of their educational experience, placing success as luck rather than attributing success, achievement, and

the ability to change on their own ability and work. These students could be left without possible coping mechanisms, alternative methods, and with lower academic accountability which will affect future education and employment (high school dropout rate is higher, college prospects, work prospects, etc). Conversely, if a student is identified with a specific learning disorder and placed in an intervention that is not needed or is not of good fit, the student may become isolated, feeling inadequate in their gains or misplaced within school. This would affect more of their social development, which can be argued to be as equally important as educational development.

### **Future Research**

As this was a pioneering study, future research avenues are extensive. The first steps for continuing this line deal with formalizing the analyses further. Increased sample sizes spanning several states and urban/rural areas would be needed to gauge additional information and possible environmental interactions in regard to students' educational experience. Preliminary qualitative data would be gathered to further develop themes and theory. Structured interviews could be administered based on those findings, or quantitative analyses could be brought in. Elements such as relationships within school, parent perceptions, teacher perceptions of student academic success should be explored. Further analysis of self-actualization of academic success would also be a point of interest.

Taking this preliminary study and expanding it into further study of the socio-emotional response to academic intervention would be key to future research. To truly understand the crux

of how a student with a specific learning disorder's educational experience differs from that of a student who remains in the traditional classroom throughout the day, it is key to understand how their intervention plans affect these experiences, in addition to other socioemotional factors that can contribute to the differences.

### **Limitations**

Some limitations about this study should be discussed. First, while the sample size was deemed appropriate by Creswell for a qualitative study, the sample was not diverse (Creswell, 2012) . As stated above, each student came from similar backgrounds, had above average contact with education within their home life, and were all Caucasians of mid to upper-middle class socioeconomic status. A more diverse sample would be needed to further generalizations outside of similar schools.

The school used also has a novel daily schedule. While most schools encourage students in other, non-traditional academic areas through exposure times (often known as electives), this school had built in time for "enrichment." Enrichment was a half-hour set aside in which students from multiple classrooms were split and sent to learn different things- this is often when group or individual intervention takes place. This eliminates much of the time students would be removed from other academic instruction and taken from class in front of the class. In addition to this added slot of time, the school created a program that encourages the discussion of health (physical, emotional, social, mental) topics and provided possible tools and outlook for students to express and promote self-reflection. This has the potential for students to recognize other ways to think and act on their self-perceptions and provide greater social and emotional development and stability, though no research has been done to support this assertion.

## **Conclusion**

Defining academic success based purely on academic standardized tests to gauge ability needs to be expanded to include emotional and social measurements as well. Intervention techniques and evaluations need take these other aspects of education into account as the student's educational system is devising a plan for each individual student. Despite having possibly the best strictly academic gains, perhaps a student may make significant head way in another intervention that enables them to also develop positive social, self-esteem, and identity. Although no true themes were identified, it is important to still note that the individual experiences of the students differed greatly. One in seven defined most all of their personal academic experience based on perceived academic deficits. Many did, in fact, show personal resilience when confronted with various social and academic difficulties. While there are limitations on this particular research, it begins to build the foundations on an area that has yet to be developed for this age group, a pivotal time in human development. This time is the building blocks of their academic career, so how an individual develops a relationship with school, comfort in the academic setting, and perceived mastery are exceptionally important. Future research within the educational experience of elementary students with specific learning disorders can be fruitful and add to the already growing amounts of research done within the field of educational psychology. Students of all capabilities are entitled to equal education that empowers them and enables them to be successful in their future daily living, occupational and academic success.



## References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Specific learning disorder. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. 5.*
- Arrow, A. J., Behrman, J. R., Crawford, D. L., Grossman, M., Kaestner, R., Maynard, R. A., McGrath, D. J., Smith, V. K., Stacey, N., & Witte, A.D. (1997). The social benefits of education, *The University of Michigan Press, 4*, 1-6.
- Berk, L. E., (2013). *Child development*. New York, NY: Illinois State University.
- Burns, M. K., Walick, C., Simonson, G. R., Dominguez, L., Harelstad, L., Kincaid, A., & Nelson, G. S. (2015). Using a conceptual understanding and procedural fluency heuristic to target math interventions with students in early elementary. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 30*(2), 52-60.
- Cowan, R., & Powell, D. (2014). The contributions of domain-general and numerical factors to third-grade arithmetic skills and mathematical learning disability. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 106*(1), 214-229.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, inc.
- DeLuca, C., & Hughes, S. (2014). Assessment in early primary education: An empirical study of five school contexts. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 28*(4), 441-460.

- Desoete, A., Praet, M., Titeca, D., & Ceulemans, A. (2013). Cognitive phenotype of mathematical learning disabilities: what can we learn from siblings?: *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 34*(1), 404-412. Doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2012.08.022
- Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., & Compton, D. L. (2012). The early prevention of mathematics difficulty: Its power and limitations. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 45*(3), 257-269. Doi:10.1177/0022219412442167
- Hessels, M. M., & Schwab, S. (2015). Mathematics performance and metacognitive behaviors during task resolution and the self-concept of students with and without learning disabilities in secondary education. *Insights on Learning Disabilities, 12*(1), 57-72.
- Hughes, C. A., & Dexter, D. D. (2011). Response to intervention: A research-based summary. *Theory into Practice, 50*(1), 4-11. Doi:10.1080/00405841.2011.534909
- Jitendra, A. K., & Star, J. R. (2011). Meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities in inclusive mathematics classrooms: The role of schema-based instruction on mathematical problem-solving. *Theory into Practice, 50*(1), 12-19. Doi:10.1080/00405841.2011.534912
- Johnson, L. J., & Pugach, M. C. (1990). Classroom Teacher's views on intervention strategies for learning and behavior problems: Which are reasonable and how frequently are they used? *The Journal of Special Education, 24*(1), 64-84. doi: 10.1177/002246699002400106
- Jordan, N. C., & Hanich, L. B. (2003). Characteristics of children with moderate mathematics deficiencies: A longitudinal perspective. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice (Wiley-Blackwell), 18*(4), 213-222. Doi:10.1111/1540-5826.00076

- Karande, S., et al. (2007). Clinical and psychoeducational profile of children with specific learning disability and occurring attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Indian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 61(12), 639-647.
- Kayama, M., & Haight, M. (2014). Disability and stigma: how Japanese educators help parents accept their children's differences. *Social Work*, 59(1), 24-33.
- Lane, K.L, Royer, D. J., Messenger, M. L., Common, E. A., Ennis, R. P., Swogger, E.D. (2015) Empowering teachers with low-intensity strategies to support academic engagement: Implementation and effects of instructional choice for elementary students in inclusive settings. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 28(4), 504-573.
- Lubar, J. F., Bianchini, K. J., & Calhoun, W. H., Lambert, E. W., Brody, Z. H., Shabsin, H.S. (1985). Spectral analysis of EEG differences between children with and without learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 18(4), 403-408.  
Doi:10.1177/002221948501800708
- Rich, S. H., & Duhon, G.J. (2014). Using brief academic assessments to determine generalization strategies. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 23(4), 401-420. Doi: 10.1007/s10864-014-9212-x
- Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (1986). Academic characteristics of behaviorally disordered and learning disabled students. *Behavioral Disorders*, 11(3), 194-190.
- Scruggs, T. E. (1986). The administration and interpretation of standardized achievement tests with learning disabled and behaviorally disordered elementary school children. Year three final report. *Special Education Programs*.

- Sternber, R. J., & Grigorenko, E. L. (2002). Difference scores in the identification of children with learning disabilities: It's time to use a different method. *Journal of School Psychology, 40*(1), 65-83.
- Tabassam, W., Grainger, J. (2002). Self-concept, attributional style and self-efficacy beliefs of students with learning disabilities with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Learning disability quarterly, 25*(2), 141-151.
- Tomblin, J. B. (2006). A normativist account of language-based learning disability. *Learning disabilities research & practice (Wiley-Blackwell), 21*(1), 8-18.
- Tremblay, P. (2013). Comparative outcomes of two instructional models for students with learning disabilities: Inclusion with co-teaching and solo-taught special education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 13*(4), 251-258. Doi:10.1111/j.1471-3802.2012.01270.x
- Wells, J., & Sheehey, M. (2013). Harnessing the power of technology: increasing academic engagement of elementary students' with learning disabilities and ADHD. *Insights on Learning Disabilities 10*(1). 73-86.
- Weiler, M. D., Forbes, P., Kirkwood, M., Waber., D. (2003). The developmental course of processing speed in children with and without learning disabilities. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology. 85*(2), 178-194.

Witzel, B. W., Ferguson, C. F., & Mink, D. M. (2012). Strategies for helping preschool through grade 3 children develop math skills. *Young Children*, 67(3), 89-94.

United Nations. (1948). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*.

United Nations. (2014). The Right to Education. *Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*.

Zumeta, R. R., Zirkel, P. A., & Danielson, L. (2014). Identifying specific learning disabilities. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 34(1), 8-24.