

Self-Study on the Journey to Success of a Teacher With a Learning Disability

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Abstract

This self-study narrative sought to highlight the researcher's educative and professional experiences as a teacher with learning disabilities (LDs) and the strategies she used to help her get to where she is today. This study examined: (a) specific strategies a teacher with LDs used in order to be successful in her teaching; (b) how the strategies were implemented and how they changed throughout the teacher's LD learning journey; and (c) effective coping mechanisms a teacher with LDs used to overcome her weaknesses. Data were gathered through an examination of artifacts that included archival medical and school documents, critical reflection, stories, and an interview with the researcher's mother. Four themes emerged from the data analyses: "School Struggles," "Challenges Within Education," "Supporters," and "Strategies Leading to Success." This study has brought forth a new perspective to the literature by exploring the lived experiences of a teacher with a LD and the contribution of others in her journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Special education has changed in its meaning and understanding over the past decades. Within a short time, special education has become an integral part of Ontario's schooling system as it changed how students with exceptionalities would be educated in Ontario's publicly funded schools (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). According to Statistics Canada (2001), there are over 23 million individuals with exceptionalities residing in Canada. Therefore, approximately, one in every five elementary-aged children obtains help from special education programs which are most often in the regular classroom in their school (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). In general, the overarching definition for special education programming includes individuals with visual impairments, sensory disorders, behavioural disorders, developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and learning disabilities (Learning Disabilities Association of Peel Region, 2016); approximately 2.3% of the adult population (representing 622,300 individuals aged 15 and older) reported a learning disability (Statistics Canada, 2012). Students with learning disabilities (LDs) generally receive part of their instruction in a resource room and spend the rest of their day in their classrooms (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

The term "learning disability" was first used in the 1960s to explain "mystery kids"—students who did not succeed in school, despite what their parents and sometimes even they knew was not a lack of intelligence (Bennett et al., 2013). Individuals with LDs are said to have average or above-average intelligence; however, due to a "processing error" they are unable to achieve at their academic age/grade level (Wong, 1996). The exact cause of a LD is not known; however, it has been reported that both genetic and biological factors can contribute to this disability (Wong, 1996). In 2001, over 100,000

children ages 5-14 in Canada were diagnosed with LDs (Statistics Canada, 2001). When this group is divided by gender, there are twice as many males compared to females with LDs (Bennett & Dworet, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2001).

Every LD is unique to the individual in its own way, as it does not affect every aspect of learning the same way. Instead, individuals with LDs may have specific difficulties that relate to the attainment, preservation, organization, and or use of oral and nonverbal information (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2015). Therefore, students with LDs may have deficits in one, or more than one, of the following areas: oral language, written language, math skills, organization skills, and/or social skills (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2015).

Being diagnosed with a LD may provide families and the individuals with some answers to their learning, but it does not always lead to improved learning. Students with LDs need to be working within school teams to learn the strategies to not only make them successful to their fullest potential in education, but also in the real world. Adults with LDs stated that their disability directly impacted their educational experience. The most common impacts reported by those with a LD were the following: taking longer to achieve education milestones, changing their choice of courses or career, and taking fewer courses (Statistics Canada, 2012). Many educational supports are in place for these students, such as extra time, tutor/teacher aid, and modified curriculum. Yet many individuals with LDs do not feel confident in school, do not obtain their high school diplomas, and therefore are less likely to complete postsecondary studies or have successful employment (Statistics Canada, 2012).

Even though LDs are more understood now in the educational field, I have always

been sort of ashamed to be different. I did not want any of my peers to know I had a disability and needed help. As I grew and became older, I knew that my disability was special and I was beating a lot of odds, and yet, I still felt the need to keep it quiet (or secret) as I was worried this would affect my ability to reach my dream of becoming a teacher. How could someone with a communications LD in written communication become a teacher?

Preparing for the Educational Journey

Yet, I was able to become a teacher. I graduated with honours and at the top of my class from the Concurrent Education Program. I thought: what next? Professors were encouraging me to tell my story and continue in the field of educational research and mentioned the prospect of doing a Master of Education. Again, I asked myself a very similar negative question, how can someone with a communications LD write to the level of Master's Degree? I gave it some thought and knew I must try, like I had tried and succeeded in the past. Remembering all that had benefitted me and built me up to the success of where I am today, all of the people I had asked for help, the journey on my own and with my support team using the tools necessary, working together and all of the strategies I had used would not only facilitate me to obtain my Master of Education degree, but also help demonstrate to others what is helpful for students with LD.

Throughout my schooling I learned quickly who I could share my secret about having a LD with and who I did not want to know. I informed the teachers on my own and only went to the resource worker when I felt I needed the extra support. I did not want any of my peers to know I was different or could get extra help, even though any school task I did needed much more time and effort than the average person. Once I got

to university, I still did not want peers and colleagues to know. I went to my Case Manager every month to check-in and made sure to go and meet the professors during office hours to discuss the course and my learning style and some of the accommodations that I required (e.g., extra time on exams, note takers, processing software). This ensured a good relationship in case I struggled and needed more support on assignments.

As I began to build friendships and study groups, I wanted to work with more like-minded people and less with random, anonymous note takers. I stayed with the same group of girls for 5 years and it took until the third year for me to even feel ready to share my secret. By that time, I felt they knew my work ability and would not focus on the “dis” ability and therefore, it would not affect our friendship or our working relationship. We were taking a Programming for Special Education course together when I kept informing them on ideas that would and would not work for certain disabilities. I then shared my secret. I was shocked that they did not believe me. They informed me that they would have never guessed I had a LD and were impressed and expressed feelings of envy that I was not only able to understand and plan for someone with a LD, but also able to connect and identify with them and really understand tasks or strategies that would or would not work. Even though a few girls knew my secret, I still kept it from the general school population and never used it as a crutch. I do think they were aware how much work, outside of our sessions, needed to go into my tasks to stay at the level I needed for the program, or the tears that were shed when I did not feel I had a handle on the workload. My mum knew though. She watched me grow up and learned with me. She helped me finalize and edit every assignment I ever had, and will have (even at the Master’s level). Not only was she my biggest support system, she is also someone who I knew would have my back, be in my

corner, and help me in any way she could. My mum was my first “strategy” in being a successful student with a LD. This strategy, among others, is what I am most thankful for in the outcome of my schooling and beginning of my career.

For this Master of Education Major Research Project, I have used narrative inquiry to explore the past educational work that I have completed and I have obtained the experiences from my mother’s perspective on my learning journey. This narrative inquiry was not meant to present a fairy-tale ending but rather to understand the process and journey from being a struggling student to successful teacher while looking through the necessary strategies and coping mechanisms. I intend for readers to come on the journey with me as I explore my skills, strengths, weaknesses, and my participant support system as I reflect on who I am as a beginning teacher.

Statement of the Research Problem

Individuals with LDs are often labeled and, therefore, put into categories most often attributed to the student’s deficiencies or cumulative disadvantage. A troubling possibility is that special education placement can be known to limit rather than expand a student’s opportunities (Shifrer, 2013). The negative effect of being labeled with LDs on adolescents’ educational expectations is partially mechanized through parents’ and particularly teachers’ lower expectations. This has also affected how society views individuals with LDs and therefore, also affected the way the individuals feel about themselves (Shifrer, 2013). There is legislation that now guarantees that the rights of individuals with disabilities will be respected in the institutions of education and employment (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

LDs are never outgrown and can affect all aspects of life even though individuals

may learn how to partially compensate for deficits (Wong, 1996). Even as adults, the choice of whether or not to disclose the disability can be stressful and individuals often face enormous challenges and social stereotypes (Polloway, Schewel, & Patton, 1992). It is imperative to assist not only our students but also adults with LDs through accommodations, modifications, support, and understanding in order to give them an opportunity to achieve their full potential and realize positive self-esteem (Bates, 1997).

With respect to the workplace, under section 15(1) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice, 1982), individuals with exceptionalities are to receive equal treatment without prejudice. The *Canadian Human Rights Act* (Department of Justice, 1985) and *Ontario Human Rights Code* (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1990) state that individuals with exceptionalities cannot be deprived of job opportunities and employers must provide their employees with necessary accommodations. Furthermore, one of the functions of the *Employment Equity Act* (Department of Justice, 1995) is to ensure that an individual is not denied a job based on his/her exceptionality. These laws exist to ensure that individuals with exceptionalities, such as LDs, are not faced with discrimination and have equal job opportunities as the rest of the population; however, individuals need to be open with their disability and feel comfortable that they will be supported and not judged even though there are laws set in place.

The career of teaching is also supposed to follow these laws as well; however, a teacher must be qualified for the position. Interestingly, research on individuals with LDs in the teaching profession is not common and fairly new. Teachers with LDs are a distinctive group of individuals because they are not only able to draw on their own childhood experiences and use this information to reach their students with LDs, but also

work with a variety of learning styles and abilities (Ferri, Connor, Santiago, Valle, & Volpitta, 2005). This study took an in-depth narrative approach as the researcher looked into her journey of becoming a teacher with a LD and the supports that helped her to achieve success and get to where she is today.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use narrative inquiry to contribute to explore the experiences and strategies used by a student (who became a teacher) with a LD. I have shared my journey of learning in the school system and uncovered the strategies and coping mechanisms to becoming successful. I have interviewed my biggest supporter to understand the mother's perspective and challenges of raising and helping her child with a LD. There is apprehension that individuals with LDs have in disclosing their stories, therefore, sharing their experiences is often rare. It was imperative to share the findings of this research with the public in order to break the silence surrounding teaching professionals with LDs.

It was my goal to add to the body of literature. I wish to describe the success that has come to me to not just help a few students that I come across in my classroom, but to help professionals and parents understand the obstacles faced by students with LDs, and possibly help to create more effective special education programs.

Research Questions

This narrative research on the success of a teacher with a LD was guided by the following research questions:

1. What specific strategies does a teacher use in order to be successful in her teaching?

2. How have the strategies been obtained and how have they changed throughout the teacher's LD learning journey?
3. What effective coping mechanisms does a teacher with LDs use to aid in overcoming her weaknesses?

Rationale of Study

As the researcher, I have a personal connection with this topic: I am a teacher with a LD. For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a teacher, and I was determined to reach my goal. I was being let down by the school system and the only reason I was passed through the elementary grades was because I was a compliant student. My mum was not happy with this reality and could not afford private assessment. She worked with me for hours at nights and hired tutors and even went to classes to help. Finally, when I was in Grade 4 my teacher teamed up with my mum and got me the services I needed. I was even beginning to have my psychological testing done.

When the results were in, the psychologist and the school thought I was “faking it” as the scores were so low they felt no one could get as far as I had in school and they wanted me to re-do the testing. Once these second set of results came in, they knew that I had huge deficits but I also must have the ability to create strategies to help me get that far in school. These strategies, which I learned with the help of my mum and myself, I thought were innate. As a teacher now, I am seeing many students do not have these strategies and they are not able to advocate for themselves and they get discouraged. I want to share my experiences and strategies to show that success is possible. I am an individual with a Communication Learning Disability who has not done the impossible, but has worked hard, struggled, tried many options, and is making it in the real world.

Schooling never came easy to me. I watched not only my peers but also my siblings float by lessons with ease, putting little effort into their work while achieving high rewards. I remember always trying to fit in. I knew I was not able to read the same books my peers were and I even faked reading them making up stories in my head while looking at the pictures. When it was time to move onto chapter books, this became an even bigger struggle because I would look at the words and could not “fake” it in the same way. Sometimes, I would go home and ask my mum to read the books to me just so I could attempt to keep up, memorizing the pages and words in case I was questioned on it by the teacher or my peers.

Testing would always bring me high anxiety, especially when it was unplanned or I was not given any notice. For example, instructional practices such as “around the world math minute games” or “each person needs to read one paragraph” were classroom activities that highlighted the fact that I knew I was behind and would not be able to keep up with my peers or appear normal. My Grade 2 teacher knew of my struggles and yet she continually singled me out in front of my peers, making me feel stupid. Years later, my mum told me that she even told my parents in a parent–teacher interview that they just had to learn to accept I would not amount to anything in life. I would ways be a “D” student or lower and be prepared for me not to finish school. Subconsciously, I must have known about her derogatory statements because I fought back, together with my mum and would not accept her predictions. We worked with tutors and my mum did lots of reading and became a relentless advocator with the school to get me seen for further specialized help. Three years later when I was with one special teacher (Grade 4), I received the diagnosis that made the school required to provide extra help.

I started with lots of support, both in and out of the classroom, and slowly the program started to be tailored to meet my needs. I was becoming self-conscious of this and was willing to put the work in outside of the classroom in order to be normal inside the classroom. My special education teachers were willing to work with me all along the way. I had some great help, and I think that is why I wanted to specialize in special education, because not only have I seen first-hand how much benefit it can do, but I can also speak with personal experience. Sometimes, I would have to tell my teachers that the strategy would not work because my brain would not allow it. I knew if I could do that then maybe I could also start working with my teachers on my own to tailor the program.

I have always been a goal setter and made steps in order to attain each goal. In Grade 8, I decided to make my first big goal and that was to go to a specialized high school for the arts. Not only would I have to audition for the dramatic arts program, but I would also have to have high grades in order to be accepted. Still working with the special education department, but on my own terms, I learned how to be a self-advocate because up to that point my mum was my advocate, and then from that point, my goals and milestones were being met. I was on the honour roll, I was accepted in a double university degree with an entrance scholarship for my high grades, made the Dean's list, and then graduated top of my class all while using my strategies and supporters along the way.

Because of my LD, I have struggled both academically and emotionally throughout my school career. Yet, my personal experiences have shaped and affected the way that I now teach, especially when dealing with students with exceptionalities. There are days when I question my ability to teach, and there are times when I feel that my exceptionality isolates me from my colleagues, but I am passionate about highlighting the

uniqueness of a teacher with LDs and how I got here. This research has allowed me, a teacher with a LD, an opportunity to voice my story with my struggles and success in education and hear not only from my perspective but also a family member's perspective on how it has affected us.

The Role of Narrative Inquiry

I have chosen the inquiry method of narrative with a self-study component to explore my journey as a student and teacher with a LD and the strategies and coping mechanisms that were used. I will also be sharing my mother's experiences in raising a child with a LD to gain perspective on what the schooling experience was like before I was aware of what was going on. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained that "narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon 'story' and the inquiry 'narrative'" (p. 2). It is important for me to explore this topic through a self-study narrative approach to ensure that the voices of experiences are not just heard but shared in the exact way they were meant to be. This allows meaning-making and discovery to happen.

Essential to narrative inquiry is the understanding that people are in a process of change; they have a past and they are shaping their future. The events of their lives can be explored for meaning, which takes into consideration not just the events that have occurred but also the events that came before. Craig (2011) argues that teacher education is inextricably linked to teachers' lives where narrative inquiry studies live; therefore, the link between teacher education and narrative inquiry could not be stronger. Narrative offers a way of gaining access to knowledge through stories that are explored for their

meaning which is developed over time. The meanings are often attributed to the three dimensional commonplaces—temporality, sociality, and place—which are woven within the theoretical components of narrative inquiry and also carry importance within the research.

Temporality is essential to this study because it contextualizes all events and people as having a past, present, and future (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This study is about the journey of becoming a teacher while expressing the issues I have faced because of my LD; however, it will highlight the strategies that have been used in the past and present and suggest how they might help in the future. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), understanding *sociality* requires an examination of the personal conditions, “the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person” and the social conditions, “the existential considerations, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form an individual’s personal context” (p. 480). This helps balance the research from being too much of a personal study but at the same time prevents it from becoming too much of a social analysis. This is why not only will the researcher’s perspective be presented but also the mother’s and then corroborated with artifacts from the researchers schooling experiences.

Lastly, the commonplace of *place* requires understanding that events take place in places (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) refer to place as a “specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). This is important to be aware of because even though most of the experiences that will be discussed have taken place in school, there have been many effects that have been in other locations. Also hearing from

my mum will reveal how the family was affected and where she went for answers as well. Even though our experiences are shaped by the places in which they occur, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explained that sometimes inquirers want to resist place because it can limit the generalizability of the study.

Scope and Limitations

The findings of this research are dependent upon the narrative of the researcher and the researcher's mother. The results are also dependent on recollections from childhood to adulthood from the mother and researcher, as well as their critical reflection. This information was gathered from a collection of artifacts that were past educational information from the researcher and an open-ended interview with the mother. For confidentiality, my mother's specific name will not be mentioned; however, it was made clear to her that the relation would be made public as it is of high importance to the information gathered. When mentioning past teachers and influential people, no names will be given to ensure privacy and anonymity.

My mother was given the option to not answer or withdraw from the research at any time and this was made clear in the consent form and by my research advisor. However, seeing the excitement from me about being open with my journey and sharing my success and strategies made it easy for her to also want to join in. The limitations of this research are the researcher's and participant's (my mother's) ability to remember previous experiences and reflect. Narrative research is often longitudinal, the interview and research collection was done over a few months, and the data collected reflected from early schooling to university and career.

Research has indicated that the population of teachers with LDs who choose to

disclose their disability is very limited, as individuals tend to conceal their disability for fear that others will misunderstand them (Valle, Solis, Volpitta, & Connor, 2004). However, I have gotten to a place with myself that I am confident that sharing strategies and experiences may help other students or teachers with LDs, or other teachers of students with LDs. This research may not be representative of all individuals with LDs and their relationships with their mothers. This study also does not explore race and LDs or other factors that may influence the experiences of individuals with LDs, such as socio-economic status, gender, or physical disability.

Outline of Remainder of the Document

Chapter 2 of this document reviews the literature related to individuals with LDs. This review highlights the need for further study on the topic of teachers with LDs. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods and procedure that was used to conduct this study. This chapter begins with an explanation of the design and discusses the participants and how the research was gathered. Chapter 4 presents the results and reflection on the artifacts. Chapter 5 discusses the findings along with implications of the research on this topic.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review begins by providing background information on LDs as it relates to the educative experiences of students, adults, and teachers. It will also examine the role a family plays when parenting a child with a LD, as well as some strategies students have used to improve their learning. Lastly, teacher identified challenges for their own learning and teaching will be analyzed to understand the journey a teacher goes through before, during, and after obtaining their degrees.

Defining a Learning Disability

The term “learning disability” literally defies all definitions. Many professionals can argue over the exact meaning, however few are commonly aware of the characteristics (Wong, 1996). This is because many conditions can elicit the signs of a LD such as sensory impairment, emotional disturbances, and physical disabilities, but these must all be eliminated as they are not the primary cause of the student’s inability to learn successfully (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). It is important to note that this disability is not a global impairment in which all elements of students’ performance are affected, and that it is not a consistent, easily measured and clear exceptionality (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). However, once diagnosed, this is a lifelong disability that can be managed with proper strategies and coping mechanisms (Wong, 1996). The exact cause of a LD is not known and has been argued by many. However, it is likely that genetic and biological factors may both contribute to this disability (Wong, 1996). The common characteristics that individuals often share are an average or above-average aptitude score, with a difficulty in dealing with information, particularly language-based, and academic achievement scores are 2 years below chronological age (Bennett & Dworet, 2013;

Wong, 1996). No two cases are the same as some students will show all signs while others just one or two; with some individuals, a LD even affects their organization ability, focus, and resistance to change, and they are easily led off task (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

In order for a student to access special education services in school, identification of a LD must be determined through a set of standardized tests administered by a registered psychologist. These assessments compare the student's aptitude and academic achievement to his/her peers and report on developmental level, strengths, weaknesses, and behaviour (Wong, 1996). The results from these tests, along with information supplied from the teacher and parents, are then put together to create a report on the student, and the psychologist determines the student's identification (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). An Independent Planning Review Committee (IPRC) decides on the programming and placement for the student, and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is created (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

An IEP is a written document that explains the programs, accommodations, modifications, and services that a student will need during the school year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). It also contains specific information about the student such as: date of recent IPRC, grade, subjects or courses to which an IEP applies, medical conditions, and the student's disability. Within the document, a list of the student's strengths and needs will be written to help create an appropriate and manageable/attainable program for the student with goals that will be addressed during the school year and a list of the instructional strategies and accommodations for the parents and teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). This document is also flexible and ongoing so changes can be made as anyone sees fit, which also means that

each IEP must be read by all members who will be teaching the individual and made available to teachers, assistants, resource personnel, administrators, parents, and the student (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

IEPs have been a requirement for students with exceptionalities since 1998 in accordance with Regulation 181/98 of the *Education Act* (Bennett & Dworet, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). The principal of a school is obligated to make certain that students who are deemed exceptional by the IPRC process each have an IEP created to meet the individual student's needs within certain timelines and ensure that all educators are adhering to the recommendations made in a student's IEP (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

Supports and Strategies for Students With LDs

Just because there is a diagnosis of a LD does not mean that individuals will not be successful; however, this does mean that they will most often need to be working harder than the average person in order to get equal or below standard results. It is important that students are given the opportunity to experiment with different strategies and supports in order to know which one(s) work the best for them in order for them to be successful (Adebisi, Liman, & Longpoe, 2015). Generally, once students are set up with the IEP then they are also going to receive services from an in-school support team, also known as a special education teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). There are many placement options that can be provided to students with disabilities, however, it is suggested that placement be in the best interest of the students (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). Some elementary students are placed fully in an education resource classroom or withdrawn from their regular classroom for one period of the day for special education

resource assistance that is directed toward one specific academic skill (Bennett & Dworet, 2013).

In elementary school, special education resource work is done in small numbers and quiet settings so the environment is set up for more individualized support which can help show students that they can do the work which builds up their confidence (Bennett & Dworet, 2013). At the secondary level, students with LDs may also take a class to teach them study skills such as test-taking skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). This is because as the students move through the grades and get older, support is still provided but becomes more about student self-advocacy and less teacher-directed.

It is critical that students with LDs get offered and experiment with several different strategies to determine which ones are most effective for them. Givon and Court (2010) interviewed high school students over a three-year period to identify students' core coping strategies. It was found that the four emotional-cognitive strategies that were most commonly used were: avoidance, rebellion, reconciliation and determination. These were used by students in a hierarchy order which lead to students' coming to terms with and integration and acceptance of their difficulties (Givon & Court, 2010). Students mentioned that once these strategies were gained through social supports and remedial teaching, they felt they were able to attain emotional and academic success more easily (Givon & Court, 2010). However, given recent advances, meeting the needs of students with LDs can also be done through the use of technology (Adebisi et al., 2015).

There are various assistive devices that have been designed and used to help students with LDs cope with written language, reading, listening, memory, and mathematic problems (Adebisi et al., 2015). Technology such as a spellchecker,

calculators, video cameras, tape recorders, scanners, and editing and notetaking software can improve the quality of life of students with a LD in their education setting and work life, however, it is essential to select the right technology tool for individuals' ability to enable their achievement and targeted goals (Adebisi et al., 2015). Adebisi et al. (2015) also discussed that working with technology needs to be a team effort and all who are working with it need to be trained and given time to test the tool(s) to see its full potential. The process of requesting support for assistive technology requires self-advocacy on the part of the student with a LD and at times this can affect the individual's self-confidence and well-being.

Children's Experiences With LDs

Children with LDs can go through a wide range of emotions when discovering their disability and taking on tasks that are in areas of weakness. They may also have a difficult time dealing with failure and disappointment (Panicker & Chelliah, 2016). However, the perceptions of students with LDs and the perceptions of their teachers can contribute to determination in students to work hard(er) or in some cases perpetuate a negative effort cycle for the student (Manassis & Young, 2000). Therefore, for those students who feel less of themselves, a LD can be extremely frustrating and some even begin to show a variety of levels of reliance, depression, anxiety, and stress (Panicker & Chelliah, 2016).

Educators and parents need to be aware of the comorbidities that students with LDs may be facing and should be aware that early diagnosis and treatment of any of these other disorders can help a child or adolescent become a more successful learner (Manassis & Young, 2000; Panicker & Chelliah, 2016). In many cases students with LDs

have low academic confidence and due to the marks they receive they may display less effort in class and feel that school is more challenging for them than their peers (Holdman, 1997). Furthermore, students with LDs often attribute good grades to external factors such as luck or a teacher just being kind, and do not relate their good grades to their amount of effort put forth. It has also been documented that students with LDs often have a difficult time dealing with failure and disappointment and, therefore, it can affect their ability to continue to try (Holdman, 1997). Therefore, it is important that individualized interventions be given to help with remedial training in class work. As well, parental awareness of their child's ability and needs are also necessary to be too incorporated so that all supporters can be involved as a team (Panicker & Chelliah, 2016).

Parenting a Child With a LD

Caring for a child with a LD can be both rewarding and difficult, as it can be highly demanding and frustrating at times. Parents' experiences are very similar. They feel that the high-time demands play a big role in their ability to parent and they have a lack of leisure time to themselves or enough time with other family members. They feel a strong struggle to balance the conflicting roles of parenting and teacher (Padeliadou & Chideridou, 2013). Parents feel the need to go into teacher mode to help their child get to the same level peers are at, because parents fear for their child's future and potential failure (Kenny & McGiloway, 2007). Parents also have a tendency to feel a sense of retrospective regret and guilt. Parents looking back retrospectively even suggested that they strongly regret pressure they had put on their children, and often in some cases this even led to verbal or physical abuse (Padeliadou & Chideridou, 2013).

As mentioned above, the exact knowledge of how one gets a LD and its definition

is still under review. Accordingly, parents often feel that they are not fully knowledgeable about their child's learning ability and need to rely on supports that are offered to them through a range of facilities and departments (Kenny & McGiloway, 2007). Some parents even begin to create a range of strategies to help them cope more effectively. Adaptive forms of coping may include: maintaining an optimistic attitude and positive perceptions of the child; seeking information about the child's condition; and developing family cohesion (Kenny & McGiloway, 2007). Even though having a child with a LD may put stress on the family, parents value family time and try many activities and hobbies for their child with a LD (Kenny & McGiloway, 2007).

Once a child is diagnosed, parents receive information from school or professionals who have diagnosed their child. At time, unfortunately, this leaves parents with more questions and they might be unsatisfied with a lack of information and/or resources for their child (Kenny & McGiloway, 2007). Parenting a child with a LD never seems to end no matter the age, as behaviours can often be more challenging than normally developing children and some even need to be taught life skills such as interacting with others, managing money, and shopping (Kenny & McGiloway, 2007).

Narrative research can be useful to illuminate about personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, having the voice of the mother can shed light on the perspective of raising a child with a LD. Gross (2011), an educator herself, decided to share her journey and story in hopes to evoke in other teachers an understanding for the child and the family who are dealing with LDs. Within her narrative, Gross discusses similar feelings to parents in other studies, such as fear, stress, maintaining a positive attitude, and pushing for supports and guidance only to benefit her

son both now and in the future through all milestones (childhood to adulthood). She also details her son's disability and how specifically he shows his disability and how she, as his first teacher and parent, needed to learn about his disability, so they could both find coping strategies (Gross, 2011). Gross's article shares their journey, both the successes and the failures that came along with it. It is important to remember that children who have LDs become adults with LDs, who need to learn new strategies for ordinary life requirements (Gross, 2011).

Adults With LDs

Similar to children with LDs, some adults with LDs may have difficulty with social skills, time management, and retaining friendships (Wong, 1996) and tend to experience anxieties and depression (Manassis & Young, 2000). Research with adults with LDs has attempted to determine their coping mechanisms, job stability, positive influence, school experiences, and how it affects their day to day life (Polloway et al., 1992; Shellenbarger, 2006). This field of research is under studied and not often talked about as most feel that LDs can be outgrown (which is not the case) and often adults do not want anyone to know about their disability as they feel they will be stigmatized (Shellenbarger, 2006). Some adults stop showing signs of their LD, as they have built up their learning strategies and coping mechanisms that then help them lead a successful life and they use their strengths to compensate for their weaknesses (Polloway et al., 1992).

Being diagnosed as a child with a LD, the majority of adults have had a positive influence in their life, such as a person or interest, which helped their self-confidence and ability to cope. Yet, all the participants in a seminal study by Polloway et al. (1992) reported some sort of negative school experience. The study concluded that family

members were crucial supports in helping children overcome obstacles and to become who they are today (Polloway et al., 1992). Research about adults with LDs can provide students with LDs a glimpse of what could be expected and it can also help provide information to parents and teachers about efforts to help students with LDs succeed.

A few studies have looked at the factors that contribute to the success of individuals with LDs (Holdman, 1997). Individuals with LDs can thrive if they have a positive attitude, are motivated, and believe in their own abilities (Polloway et al., 1992). Additionally, some professionals believe that people with LDs can attain success if they ask for assistance and have support from family, friends, and professionals (e.g., teachers) (Holdman, 1997; Polloway et al., 1992). However, not all adults have positive experiences and, therefore, do not feel that success and life status is attainable. Shellenbarger (2006) discusses that some people with LDs find their niche and become highly successful while others lose many of their jobs which are often part-time or in the service or retail industry.

Individuals with physical impairments, such as being bound to a wheelchair, are often granted accommodations (as required by law) by their employers that help with work load; however, workers with LDs or hidden impairments are hard to actualize and, therefore, accommodations happen only if the individuals advocate for themselves (Shellenbarger, 2006). Coping with one's exceptionality can be exhausting even if they have already gained strategies that have helped make them successful. Individuals with LDs in the work force often feel they need to continue to work at the same rate or better than their colleagues and, therefore, try to hide their impairment (Polloway et al., 1992; Shellenbarger, 2006). This hiding strategy often backfires as the work and pressures build

up and their performance starts to fall causing for termination. Adults with LDs in the work force are also concerned that if they start to slack or get behind on work they cannot tell their employer the real reason because they fear they will just take it as an excuse and, therefore, they take the termination and move onto a new job with new skills to try and start again (Shellenbarger, 2006).

Teachers With LDs

Gaining strategies is crucial for the development of school skills, but it is also important for individuals with LDs to take them beyond the classroom to help find jobs that they are passionate about so they can excel and be successful. Gerber (1998) states that “when a teacher with a learning disability is also teaching a class of students with learning disabilities, an extraordinary opportunity for study exists” (as cited in Ferri, Keefe, & Gregg, 2001, p. 22). Researchers state that individuals with LDs often make great teachers because they connect to their students on a unique level and are willing to accommodate to most if not all of the needs of their students (Ferri et al., 2001; Riddick, 2003). Yet, Riddick (2003) indicates that some institutions for teacher training courses were even excluding admissions, based on a policy, for students with dyslexia, a form of LD, and deny them the chance to show if they met the requirements or would be good teachers.

Schooling History

It is only recently that studies have been undertaken to document the experience of teachers with LDs (Valle et al., 2004). Although we are in the 21st century, individuals with exceptionalities can be looked down upon by society even though educational institutions tend to be supportive of these individuals (Riddick, 2003). Studies have also

indicated that there is an increase for individuals with LDs entering into teacher preparation programs and even higher rates of successful completion of college or university programs (Ferri et al., 2001; Valle et al., 2004). Therefore, this current research might elicit discussions about the nature of special education services and how to better support individuals in the academic success of students who intend to pursue a profession in education for a truly inclusive society (Riddick, 2003; Vogel & Sharoni, 2011).

Informing Others of Disability

Similar to other adults, teachers with LDs also struggle with whether they should disclose their disability, not only to their employer or colleagues but also to the students they are teaching and their parents (Valle et al., 2004). It is interesting that most research done with teachers with LDs are teachers that primarily teach special education. This is due to the fact that the teachers with LDs have personal experiences and it helps to understand the obstacles and create effective programming for others with similar learning impairments, who better to teach about accommodations than those who have had to use them (Ferri et al., 2001).

Valle et al. (2004) conducted a study that investigated the factors that influence whether teachers with LDs choose to disclose their disability status within the school setting. Through narrative, four special education teachers with identified learning disabilities discussed the complex issues that disability disclosure raises in the educational environment. The participants ranged in age and experience and were from various socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. Each participant was interviewed three times about her or his experiences being a teacher with a learning disability. The

teachers then all came together for a focus group where they describe self-negotiated decisions about why, how, when, and with whom to disclose and how they felt it was very difficult dilemma about whether to talk or not (Valle et al., 2004).

The participants' personal stories also described their circumstances and the decisions that they made with respect to disclosing their LD (Valle et al., 2004). Many of the participants revealed that they did not disclose their disability to colleagues for fear that they would be rejected or misunderstood and would have their qualifications and abilities questioned. The decision to disclose a LD is a choice that is affected by numerous personal factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and life experiences (Valle et al., 2004). The teachers in Valle et al.'s (2004) study perceived that if others were aware of their LDs, they would no longer be treated or seen as normal. Valle et al. concluded that it is imperative to understand the consequences that a label of learning disabled has for both teachers and students, however, if individuals with LDs begin to express more positive sides then maybe the stigma can start to become eliminated, but this can only happen if they are willing to share.

Positive and Negative Outcomes

Society has the expectation that those who teach should be knowledgeable about all topics and academically exemplary (Holdman, 1997). However, these negative attitudes towards individuals with LDs who choose a career in teaching could be beneficial for the students who also have LDs. Ferri et al. (2005) conducted a study that incorporated teachers with LDs who could speak from both sides of the special education desk. Four teachers identified with LDs throughout different periods in their life were participants in the study. They varied in age, race, socio-economic status, and teaching

experiences. Participants were interviewed individually and in a focus group. The majority of their comments related to how they deal with the attitudes of others and society as a whole. Similar to Valle et al.'s (2004) findings, these teachers with LDs discussed how difficult it is for others to understanding their LD. They also discussed their personal and professional experiences teaching students with LDs and the effect it made on them (Ferri et al., 2005).

All the participants in Ferri et al.'s (2005) study indicated that for each of them there was a turning point in their lives when they came to terms with and accepted their LD. Interestingly, not all of the participants chose to disclose their LDs in their professional or academic lives because of the perceived risks, which were mentioned by Valle et al. (Ferri et al., 2005). Ferri et al. found that there were few occurrences of individuals with LDs portrayed positively in the media, and as a result there were negative attitudes with respect to teachers with LDs.

The participants in Ferri et al.'s (2005) study felt that there should be an increase in the number of people with LDs in the media because it might give others the message that they are not alone. With that, Ferri et al. believe that the participants' experiences offered insights to students who have LDs and as a result, teachers with LDs were then able to set goals and strategies which suited the needs of their students with LDs. It has been suggested by researchers that when teachers with LDs do disclose their disability to others, they often reveal their own struggles which provides a positive role model for students with LDs (Ferri et al., 2005; Valle et al., 2004; Vogel & Sharoni, 2011). Teachers and students alike with LDs can then build productive and professional

relationships through past lived experiences from the teacher that benefit the student to have a positive impact (Duquette, 2000; Ferri et al., 2005).

Challenges Faced by Teachers With LDs

Teachers with LDs are faced with a number of potential challenges that stem from disclosing their disability to their school board, colleagues, parents, and students (Valle et al., 2004). Throughout the lives of teachers with LDs, they also have had to express their needs to obtain appropriate accommodation for themselves in order to be successful and get where they are (Papalia-Berardi, Hughes, & Papalia, 2002). Duquette (2000) conducted a study that set out to determine if and how a disability and previous school and life experiences influence early teaching practice. Since individuals with LDs are entering into teacher education programs in increasing numbers, more information on the type of assistances needed and potential challenges that they face needs to be researched and added into the program (Duquette, 2000).

In a Canadian university, Duquette (2000) examined the experiences of four teacher candidates (two males and two females) with LDs, and some had a few other exceptionalities (physical and vision). Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and observations. The questionnaire was designed to see what type of supports participants required during their education placements. During the interviews, teacher candidates were asked to recall past schooling experiences, comment on the accommodations that they required and the support they had received, and reflect on their teaching experiences (Duquette, 2000). Duquette also observed participants during their last placement, documenting the teacher candidates'

actions and words while conducting lessons. Throughout the interviews the participants discussed their teaching experiences (Duquette, 2000).

Duquette's (2000) findings indicated that the teacher candidates had a lot of similar common situations, which were negative incidents in elementary and secondary school, and subsequently while teaching, they did not use the same methods that were used on them as students. Two of the teacher candidates even confessed that they wanted to become teachers just to ensure that students with exceptionalities did not encounter similar negative experiences in school as they had experienced when they were in school (Duquette, 2000). Duquette indicated that the participants' elementary experiences were filled with embarrassment about their disability and a lack of confidence in their academic abilities, which may be why participants in Valle et al.'s (2004) study were worried about disclosing their disability to others.

Duquette (2000) reported that all of the participants' previous education and work experiences created a desire in them to become teachers. These teacher candidates had other jobs that complemented their strengths and contributed to their confidence in their abilities to pursue teacher education. During their placements, the teacher candidates with LDs did not receive any educational accommodations, however, some did feel that their families were big supporters and helped encourage them (Duquette, 2000). All participants observed their mentor teacher and involved some of the teaching methods that they witnessed into their own lessons. Once the teacher candidates started to teach, they used methods that incorporated skills they had learned and they had found effective as former students, such as verbal instructions and hands-on experiences (Duquette, 2000). The teacher candidates wanted to ensure that the students with exceptionalities

would have the opportunity to have a successful educational experience and felt motivated in the classroom (Duquette, 2000).

Overall, the teacher candidates in Duquette's (2000) study were successful in their teacher education programs because they were aware of their own needs and they accepted their exceptionalities . These teacher candidates with LDs possessed the ability to overcome obstacles and attain their ambitions to become teachers. Although the participants had negative school experiences, they were able to use these experiences and became skilled, confident, and successful teachers (Duquette, 2000). These teacher candidates' narratives provided information that can be used to increase the confidence and success of students with LDs.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The outcome of this research was for me to further my understanding of my experiences becoming a teacher with a LD not only from my own perspective but also from that of my biggest supporter, my mum. Together we engaged in an interview and deconstructed artifacts from the past. Uncovering the stories will not only improve my own practice but also may help others learn and recognize some of the strategies and coping mechanisms. This chapter will outline the methods and procedures that were used in this research. A description of participant selection, instrumentation, collection of data, proposed analysis of data, and presentation of findings will be established. The goal of the research was to determine: (a) What specific strategies does a teacher use in order to be successful in her teaching? (b) How have the strategies been obtained and how have they changed throughout the teacher's LD learning journey? (c) What effective coping mechanisms does a teacher with LDs use to aid in overcoming her weaknesses?

Research Design

The goal of this study was to present the strategies and coping mechanisms used by a teacher with a LD through narrative inquiry, critical reflection on artifacts, and interview with a parent. In order to fully appreciate each of these stories, the participants' experiences must be shared and re-presented (Ferri et al., 2005). Therefore, the methodology that was used on this self-study consisted of narrative inquiry and qualitative interview.

Self-study research is a mode of scholarly inquiry in which teachers examine their beliefs and actions within the context of their work as educators and explore pedagogical questions (Whitehead, 1993). It allows educators to renew their instructional tools, as

well as discover new tools to convey the rich and changing complexity of knowledge in a discipline (Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy, & Stackman, 2003). One of the benefits of self-study research is that the researcher is not a passive participant, but engaged and actively in control of the purpose, agenda, and timing of the work, as well as the outcomes (Louie et al., 2003). In education, self-study helps to create tangible products that have been tested first hand by the users and creator. For over a decade, self-study has been used as an effective tool for both teaching improvement and knowledge discovery (Louie et al., 2003). The research in this study was about discovering how to be successful in the classroom, which has benefited my learning and teaching. This story needs to be shared with others from my perspective in order to fully understand where I have come from and how I have gotten to where I am today.

Artifacts from the researcher's childhood were collected and analyzed by the researcher and her mother to understand how LDs influenced schooling trajectories and the strategies that were used throughout her schooling experience. There was also an interview with the researcher's mother to understand the experiences that having a child with LD had on the family dynamics, as well as, her ability to help her child realize success. This gave insight into the relationships between the mother and her daughter, as well as a better memory of events that contributed to the researcher's education. Questions like this were critical to the study as they helped provide background to the researcher prior to when she has memories. They provided clearer insight because these discussions may not normally happen in families when children are young, and now that the researcher is open minded and older she is now willing to ask to become more aware and draw links to her adulthood and career as a teacher.

Participant Selection and Description

For this study, the participants were specific to the research questions and therefore not randomized; hence, by doing purposive sampling, two participants were selected and due to the nature of the study no recruitment methods were needed as the self-study narrative was about the researcher and her mother. Coming from a very open family, my parents (and whole extended family) knew I was going to complete a Master of Education program and they all wanted to know what it was about. Before I started the program, I knew my research would be about teachers with LDs. After meeting with my advisor and telling her my story and about my support team, we decided to cater this research project to be specific to me and my biggest supporter, my mum. Right after that meeting I called my mum with excitement and before even asking her she was in tears and wanted to know what she could do to help (like she has always done in the past). Once the formal work began, my mum was sent a Letter of Invitation outlining all of the expectations, which were cleared by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB# 15-199; see Appendix A).

It is obvious that the researcher and participant have a positive relationship as child and parent. They have both worked together in the past on many school tasks and extracurricular activities. Since there is a family relation, the characteristics are homogenous and do not represent the population; the strategies and mechanisms discussed do not represent the characteristics but rather the disability and schooling experiences which may be relatable to other individuals with LDs and/or their family or teachers.

When working on the research data collection the participant suggested reviewing the artifacts and holding the interview in the family home. This was convenient as the artifacts were in the researcher's family home basement and this was also where the

participant felt most comfortable. The researcher and her mother both live and grew up in Southern Ontario. The researcher has been a student in the same large, advanced, diverse school board for all of her elementary and high school experiences. Both the mother and researcher have worked for this school board in a variety of capacities (teaching assistant, parent council, literacy coordinator, etc.) and now the researcher is working towards being a full-time teacher in this board.

The participant (the researcher's mother) is in her early 50s and her primary role has been a stay-at-home mum for 25 years. Before she left her career for motherhood, the researcher's mother went to a specialized business college and became a legal assistant. Along with her husband, it was decided that staying home with the children would be more beneficial as they wanted a big family that was nurtured by them and not caregivers. No one else in the researcher's family is diagnosed with a LD, but it was shared by the participant that school did not come easy for either the participant or her husband. In particular, language was a struggle for the participant's husband, but testing was not an option or performed when he was in school. When the participant's children went to school she became very involved in the classroom and ran extra programs that would benefit not just her own children, but all of the children who attended. Being a stay-at-home mum helped her stay involved and in touch with what was going on in her children's lives and, therefore, she knew when there was a need for her to get involved or advocate for her children.

Data Collection and Analysis

In narrative research, the data are derived from a variety of informal ways that do not have a certain step procedure process. For example, stories can be gathered from

journals or diaries, letters, or even personal-family-social artifacts that are examined for the life experiences (Creswell, 2007). Data collection for this inquiry was obtained from artifacts and an interview session. The artifacts were collected from the researcher's family home and include items from a childhood memory box of old school work and health documents. The artifacts were then analyzed from both the researcher's point of view and also from the mother's perspective as she was able to provide some depth that the researcher may not know due to the time period of certain artifacts.

Twelve artifacts were chosen ranging from material such as psycho-educational reports, report cards, school work, and IEP. The artifacts were broken down one by one from detailed descriptions, dates, reflections from the past, and current feelings of both the researcher and the participant (See Appendix B). The artifacts were organized by chronological order in the chart to help create and build a framework. This method of restoring helps to create a link between the artifacts and order as it is hard to remember the order of events in one's life (Creswell, 2007). Each artifact was analyzed for the validity of grade level expectations and possible strategies that had occurred for the completion of the work. Both the researcher and the participant were active in this aspect and were required to reflect back to when the artifact took place and think about how the artifact made them feel now to help put the story into perspective of time, as well as discover the key turning points.

There was also a 45-minute scheduled interview with the researcher's mother (see Appendix C) to further gather information about the family dynamics, understanding her view of her daughter's learning, and her role in helping her child with a LD become successful as a teacher. The interview was conducted by the researcher in the family

home during the middle of the day as she was home alone during that time. The interview was more of a conversation as the questions were emailed to the participant beforehand and only some notes were taken during the process as the interview itself was audio recorded and transcribed. The participant was not expected to prepare answers before the interview. Instead, the questions were to give the participant a sense of what may unfold in the interview.

After the researcher transcribed the participant's interview, it was read several times to detect common themes. Coding began by separating the data into categories and identifying or naming the categories which were compared for similarities, differences, and commonalities. Once the categories had been re-examined to determine how they were connected, the data were presented and clustered into common units of meaning or themes. Data were then broken down using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional approach to understand the interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places) to create the themes and understand the depth that each one carried. The themes represent the key reoccurring categories that aligned with the participant's responses, the researcher's experiences, and the reflections of the artifacts. These findings are presented in Chapter 4, and the discussion and implications of the findings are presented in Chapter 5.

Limitations

Given the procedure and characteristics of the study, narrative research is a challenging approach to use and recreate. Common issues with narrative research stated by Creswell (2007) are that researchers need to collect extensive information about the participant(s) and have a clear understanding of the participant(s)' life. In this case, the

researcher is also part of the journey and, therefore, was required along with the participant to recall information from the past and make connections with it in the present time. However, this process may have been difficult for the researcher or the participant due to memory deficit or decay or emotions that create gaps or fabrications in the story.

The participant was also the mother of the researcher and, therefore, the information presented could have been biased or held back to protect the daughter. Bias could also be represented as other members of the researcher's life were mentioned, such as other family members and past teachers/support staff, and their perspectives were not obtained. As well, this research topic is highly emotional and may have affected the answers of both the participant and researcher. However, the researcher is highly motivated to share her story and her mother was willing to support this endeavour; therefore, since both the topic and participant were selected with this in mind, it could affect the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The Brock University Research Ethics Board granted permission to conduct this study (see Appendix A). Details of the study, methods, and intent were provided to the Ethics Board and revisions were made in order to ensure all steps were ethically sound. The participant was aware of this process and was sent a Letter of Invitation with all of the expectations which were cleared by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB# 15-199). In order to participate in this study, the participant also needed to sign the consent form which clearly included the purpose, data collection methods, benefits, and understandings that the participant agreed to. There was also potential for the participant to feel obligated to participate; however, it was made clear to her in the

consent materials that her participation in the study (and all of the benefits associated with that) would not jeopardize her daughter's other data collection (i.e., artifacts) associated with the self-study. Furthermore, even though the participant was the researcher's mother, she was made aware that she was able to withdraw from the study at any time and or choose to not answer certain questions. Due to the relationship between the researcher and the participant, the participant could also reach out to the research advisor for counsel.

The participant's name was not disclosed in order to maintain confidentiality; however, the relationship was identified as it was important to specify details of the research questions and study and therefore be included in the write up. The researcher and the participant discussed family matters, sensitive subjects, and medical/educational documents and may have felt some psychological emotions and, therefore, were aware of support services contact information if they felt the need to help manage their emotions.

Trustworthiness of Data

In order to ensure that the data used were accurate, the recorded version was transcribed within a week after the interview and then sent electronically to the participant for her verification that the notes read the way she meant them to mean. As well, the research was shared with the participant during the writing process, as was the final manuscript copy. This was to ensure that the research was kept authentic, but also because the strategy that I find most useful, still to this day, is to have my mum read over my work for grammar and clarity.

The artifacts were from my childhood and some from a time when I was very young. Consequently, I do not recall much and therefore my mother's reflections and

perspective was essential. As the researcher, I had to ensure that my mother's comments were representative of the data and not just biased remarks. Given that she is my mother, and informs me of how proud she is of how far I have come, the tendency for bias is real.

I also had to ensure my own trustworthiness by returning to the common places to bring more depth to my stories, taking time to reflect on past experiences, and searching for artifacts that provided more insight. It was also essential for me to develop more confidence in telling my story, and the willingness to examine my past and become forthcoming to all I encounter or all who will read this with the knowledge that I have a LD. This was possible through working with younger students with LDs and their families, hearing their stories of struggle, and asking for my help in tutoring. By sharing my story that I have a LD with them and seeing their surprise and expression, I have become more aware of my disability as a positive attribute and not a negative one; coming to this realization has made me stronger person.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

When I was younger my disability was discouraging, however, reflecting on where I am, the purpose of this study is to share what an invisible exceptionality is and how far one can go when using the right strategies and coping mechanisms. This narrative inquiry uses stories to gain insight into the often hidden experiences and identity of a teacher with a LD and her journey in school and in the classroom. This study also focused on the relationship with her mother to understand how family played a role in her success as an individual with a LD. It is imperative to share the findings of this research with the public in order to create more positive information surrounding teachers and professionals with LDs. Through the deconstruction of previous school work and documents, an interview with my mother, and personal stories, I explored the three research questions: (a) What specific strategies does a teacher use in order to be successful in her teaching? (b) How have the strategies been obtained and how have they changed throughout the teacher's LD learning journey? (c) What effective coping mechanisms does a teacher with LDs use to aid in overcoming her weaknesses?

The themes that were created after reviewing and analyzing the data describe the barriers and strategies that a teacher with a LD uses in her schooling and career. The results are supported with past schooling documents that were also referred to in the interview with my mother. Each topic is connected to its relevance in my career as a teacher working towards a full-time classroom contract. The information that was gathered was clustered into common units and was related to difficulties in school, the challenges to obtain diagnosis and extra help, the supporter who made a difference and the strategies that lead to success. Namely, the four themes that are described next are:

“School Struggles,” “Challenges within Education,” “Supporters,” and “Strategies Leading to Success.”

School Struggles

Experiences in education come to each person differently. A family’s experience in educating their child can be affected by many types of external factors. I only ever remember education not coming easy to me and my family being there for me. There was not one subject that did not have its challenges for me since they all required the language skill of reading. After viewing old school documents, I see the challenges that I had such as not finishing tasks, confusing the instructions, and working on the wrong spaces provided. This was my way to do the work, like my peers; however, I was only able to rely on the instructions that were verbally given and not the ones written on the page. My ability to follow verbal instruction was good, however, when these were lengthy, I would become overwhelmed with trying to keep instructions straight in my mind and they were often lost in translation. Figure 1 (also described as Artifact 1 in Appendix B) is a worksheet from junior kindergarten where not only did I not draw the correct picture in the right location, but also was unable to show detail or choose the correct colour. As I reflect on this, I assume that I was getting frustrated as the work was not fully completed. It is evident that one picture has a description and the other just has the dotted letters from where the teacher expected me to copy.

My mum was concerned about the work I would bring home and how it did not match the task or it was not finished. She was always reassured by the teachers that it was fine and that I was just busy minded and had too much to do too always stay on one task.



Figure 1. Not following instructions.

At first she did not even think this could be related to something more serious like a disability, “No, never did I think it was that [disability]. You hear about that kind of thing happening to other people’s children, but you never think it will happen to your child” (Mum, Interview, April 26, 2016). She decided that maybe I needed more help outside of school and began to work with me each night to try and improve my reading and writing.

This led to a lot of tears, by both of us, and a lot of one-on-one time with my mum. This meant time that she did not spend with her other three children. I look back and do not know what they might have thought, as my brothers were younger than me and I do not think they really had any idea what was going on and although my older sister probably knew what was going on, she enjoyed the time to herself, reading on her own. My mum did what she felt she had to do: “I saw that she was struggling to learn to print and read and she was getting farther behind her peers and no one wants their child to feel inferior to anyone or not be able to be successful” (Mum, Interview, April 26, 2016).

I now know that my siblings joke that I am the favourite child and that I have become what my parents wished of me, to be successful and happy, but I wonder if this stems from the extra one-on-one time my mum spent with me when I was younger. These struggles helped shape me into the person I am today and looking back I know it was not always easy, but those challenges have given me a large sense of satisfaction. My hope is that, one day, when I am working with a student who is struggling, I can reflect on my own experiences and struggles and how I felt at those times so that I can really connect with each of my students on a deep level.

Challenges Within Education

Interestingly, academics were not the only area of challenge in education for me. I was struggling in all areas from the time I entered kindergarten and throughout the other

grades. As far as the school was concerned, I was not struggling enough and was grasping just enough of the material that it didn't place me too far academically behind my peers. I was pushed through each grade, barely meeting the expectations and teachers would not fail me as they worried it would affect me emotionally and socially. My mum knew something was going on as I was not progressing similarly to my older sister, but knew she should not compare the two of us and at first she just assumed we all learn at different times. However, once I began attending school and my peers seemed to be progressing beyond my learning abilities, she became more worried:

I thought you were super intelligent and seemed wise beyond your years socially, but when it came time to read or colour, or anything that was remotely academic based, you appeared way behind your sister at the same time frame and behind the kids in your class. (Mum, Interview, April 26 2016)

She thought back to her own schooling and remembered that school did not necessarily come easy to her: "I was an average learner who had to work hard to get good grades while my peers seemed to get better grades without putting in anywhere near the effort I did" (Mum, Interview, April 26 2016). My mother simply thought that maybe I would be the same type of student as she was.

My biggest weaknesses (known by me, my mum, and my teachers) were spelling, writing, and reading: "I was aware of the challenges that reading, writing, and spelling posed for you and I saw how increasingly frustrated you became when attempting any of those skills" (Mum, Interview, April 26 2016). I remember always having to ask how to spell words and when I was told to go look them up or when teachers were tired of telling me to look them up, they told me all the letters at once. I found this to be overwhelming and frustrating, which resulted in me either giving up or guessing phonetically how to spell words.

In Grade 3, I remember weekly spelling tests which I dreaded. They always followed a theme and were words that were used all week in the morning tasks to help us remember them better. However, even working with the words, it seemed that there were too many letters and words that sounded the same and I still struggled to remember how to spell common words, let alone words that were at the Grade 3 level. As seen in Figure 2 (also found as Artifact 8 in Appendix B) the theme for that week's spelling words might have been homonyms, words that sound the same but have a different meanings and, therefore, my results on that test were very low. This is because I could not hear a difference in the sounds of the word and, therefore, could not sound it out in different ways. I did know, from the sentences provided in the word description, that the words were different, I just did not know the different ways of spelling the words.

This spelling test was a difficult task. I needed to study hard and was pushed by my mum to study every day, as she feared my friends would notice and I would be picked on. I relied on phonics to help get me through the spelling, but learning the complexity of the English language is difficult and phonetics did not always mean success. Still to this day, spelling is where I struggle and I find I need to sound out a lot of words and do not feel comfortable when I am asked to write on the board or how to spell a word even for one of my students. This happens often, when you are a teacher, and I have had to come up with ways of being successful, while not letting on to my students that I am struggling to come up with the spelling of the word they have asked me and sometimes that means looking it up together, or trying our best to sound it out together. Often times, if it is not a language task, I feel students should get their work down to the best of their ability and spelling does not always matter when we have technology that corrects it as we type.

Oct 21 11:00

Steph
Guest

Spelling pre test

1	pawes	X	Pawes	185ir	X	f ^u ir
2	root	✓		Canada	19	Canada X
3	hair	✓		nobody	20	nobody X
4	paws	✓				
5	root	X	route			
6	haer	X	hare			
7	alowed	X	allowed			
8	siur	X	fur			
9	borde	X	board			
10	aloeab	X	aloud			
11	hores	X	horse			
12	chaws	X	chews			
13	chors	X	chores			
14	chaos	X	chose			
15	chores	X	chose			
16	bored	X	board			
17	hore	X	horse			

3
15
20

Figure 2. Failed spelling pre-test.

Lastly, one of my biggest challenges was working independently. I had so many ideas and thoughts in my head that I always had trouble not only starting a task and getting the ideas down on paper but also completing it as well. This is not to say that I wanted to work with my peers, as when this happened, they would take over all of the written work as they knew I was not capable of handling the written part, but rather of only sharing ideas. When I did receive teacher assistance, I was able to be successful, as the teachers would help add missing words or correct spelling or even scribe for me, but as soon as I was left on my own, the work would fall off the tracks and get unrecognizable. As I got older, I would often sneak the work home and ask for my mum's help with it to ensure it was completed so I would not fall behind, but this meant many hours spent on it in school and out of school for the same task that only took my peers time in class. As a teacher, I now know that one-on-one work is so crucial for all students, but with the class sizes large, it is hard to get individualized time with each student, let alone all the ones who may need it.

Supporters

I feel that I am who I am today because of the supporters in my life. I have had many teachers in my years of schooling who have said negative things about people with disabilities or low grades. Here I am now, writing my Major Research Paper with a LD, talking about my struggles, but more importantly, my strategies that got me here. Part of why I am here is because my Grade 4 teacher finally agreed with my mum that something wasn't quite right and I needed extra support. This teacher played an important role in battling the school board to help get me seen by the school psychologist which resulted in getting me formally tested. This teacher went above and beyond to help me that year and

in my final year at that school. She recorded the popular books my friends were reading so I could listen to them and follow along. She also worked with me and retaught lessons and worksheets so I would be able to do the same work, but at my level. She was the first teacher to accommodate to my needs.

Once my documentation was formalized, I began to get more support and worked with the school's special education teacher. It was not until middle school, 2 years later, that I learned of my disability as my parents, at first, wanted me to not feel different and ashamed, but realized that the supports would only help if I became more of a self-advocate and knew how to access them. My parents have always supported me, especially my mum, as she stayed at home and took care of us while my dad worked, and she was the liaison between school and home.

I pushed to have you tested through the school board; I attended learning disability workshops whenever I could. I met with numerous teachers, principals, support teachers and worked closely with them to support you, both at home and at school. I met with psychologists and social workers and would try anything they suggested. (Mum, Interview, April 26, 2016)

I hardly remember the day when they sat me down and told me the extent of my LDs and the amount of accommodations I was permitted to receive. I do remember my dad telling me that I should never stop reaching for my goals and I should never, ever use my LD as a crutch, but to embrace it and accept it and always reach for the stars. They both told me that I was special and that they would do anything in their power to help me and they have always been in my corner:

We also loved you unconditionally, believed in you and encouraged you to never,

ever let your disability hold you back from achieving your dream of becoming a teacher or doing something that others told you, you wouldn't be able to do. We never allowed you to use your disability as an excuse to not get school work done or not be able to finish it. (Mum, Interview, April 26, 2016)

My mum is my number one supporter and helper, not only in school, but in life. She has assisted me along the way with all school tasks and of course even with encouraging me to complete my Master of Education degree and believing that I could. My mum attended workshops on how to build the perfect IEP and information sessions on LDs. She met with numerous teachers, principals, and social workers just to ensure she could help me reach my fullest potential. She never gave up on me even when it meant more work for her and she would not let me use my disability as a weakness or an excuse. Together we are a team and if I could add her name to some of my degrees I would, because she not only helped me emotionally but also with the school work by editing all of my assignments, even if she did not know or understand the topic.

This does not mean that the schools I went to were not helpful and supportive; I just knew my mum, after living and working with me for years, knew the way I wrote and worked, and we seemed to have developed a pattern that worked well. The high school I went to had strong teacher support that I worked with on my own. When I graduated, she requested I come back and talk to other students about being an advocate for themselves, which I have done. In high school, my social status meant more to me than working with the special education teacher and I think that is why I learned how to become my own advocate. In university, my case manager was a great resource and I met with her every month to discuss my progress, but there was not a special education team

to help with the course work and, therefore, the foundation of strategies had to already be in place.

Strategies Leading to Success

Of course, not only do I feel that the supporters in my life were important to the success I have had, but I also have had to adapt many lessons, strategies, and coping mechanism in order to complete school and work in the teaching field. These strategies have been built and developed over time, and although some were known, others have been discovered through this present study. When I was in middle school and high school the strategies were more basic and were ones listed on my IEP under accommodations, such as: no deduction for spelling and grammar, preferential seating, notes, use of a computer, scribe, use of a calculator, and extra time for tests/assignments and exams. I did use most of these accommodations, but only when I felt I needed them. I did not even ask the special education teacher to ask for me, but instead set up a meeting before or after school to meet with the teacher and discuss my needs to ensure that it was a private conversation that only we knew about.

Being an advocate for my learning has really helped me get respect from the teachers and professors, as well as my other colleagues. I have also been told by many teachers, parents, and colleagues that my ability to advocate and teach advocacy is a huge strength:

I am so impressed with how well you adapted and advocated for yourself. You never gave up on searching for answers, or support/help, or information or knowledge and I believe that this came from seeing all of my work searching and advocating for you when you were too young and my continued encouragement

for you to advocate for yourself. (Mum, Interview, April 26, 2016)

I still do not feel the need to tell everyone about my LD, as it is not necessary, but I do help teachers teach students with LDs from the mind of a student with a LD, as I can personally be on their level and understanding. I believe that I have a special connection that I can offer and I am sure will continue to be of benefit as I get more experience in my teaching career.

The most beneficial strategies and accommodations that I used were extra time, quiet work space, and use of computer/technology tools and notes. These tools were not only used throughout schooling (even in university) but even used when I am teaching. Sometimes I would not need the extra time or additional notes taken by others but these accommodations were there in case I needed them or was having an off day. My goal was to always try to do the work that was asked of me with the same guidelines provided for everyone, but knowing that with my thought process and spelling skills, a computer was always helpful on written tasks and the extra time in a quiet space helped keep the thoughts focused and orderly.

As a teacher I still rely on my computer. I like to know what I am doing ahead of time so I can prepare the sheets or board work before the students get into the room to ensure that the spelling is correct and it makes sense. Often times, in my classroom, we have technology and that helps when I have to work on the spot, as the computer offers the spell check option which I rely on, but I still have to be careful to double check the word when using this tool: “Technology has been a huge benefit, especially spell check, however, you frequently required a second reader or proofer as sometime you would choose the wrong word thinking it was correct one, or just to clear the red underline”

(Mum, Interview, April 26, 2016). I have also been up front with my students and have expressed how we all have our strengths and weaknesses and it is important to know how each of us learns so when they see a mistake, they can help me fix it. This also makes my students warm up to the idea that they can also have mistakes and to really watch my lesson work.

Lastly, and probably the most cliché strategy that I know has helped me in my career, as a student and a teacher, is learning skills. In Grade 9, I did not have to take French, as English was a hard enough subject for me to learn, so I was required to take a course called GLE which was a course designed to teach learning strategies for a successful secondary school experience and at the time I was totally embarrassed to have to take this. I know now that it did not just set me up for success in secondary school, but also postsecondary school and graduate school. This course taught me skills that I now teach my students, at an early age, so they can develop a good, solid base to their own learning. We learned about our learning styles and how to improve the areas of weakness, how to take notes, how to study, how to manage our time and life and work skills (e.g., budgeting, planning, conflict resolution, teamwork). These skills that were supposed to help us be successful in secondary school really helped foster a good foundation for postsecondary studies and got me off to a strong start instead of trying to catch up. For the first time ever since I started school, I felt confident and felt that I was ahead of my peers and more prepared to master the challenges of learning. I am proud of what I have been able to accomplish, and even though I have a LD I have never used it as a crutch and have never let it hold me back.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Society's misconceptions of people with exceptionalities force these individuals to work toward overcoming a host of challenges and barriers (Pope, 2001). Individuals with LDs often have academic and/or social challenges, and because this exceptionality is not seen from the outside, these individuals can be stereotypically viewed by society as unintelligent, lazy, or different. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers with LDs are often hesitant to disclose their exceptionality to others for fear of being misunderstood or judged unfairly in their profession (Valle et al., 2004).

Teachers with LDs are a discrete group of individuals with lived experiences that deserve to be explored and documented in order to better understand their perspectives (Ferri et al., 2005). However, there is little documentation of the educative and professional experiences of teachers with LDs (Valle et al. 2004). To date, the generated literature has begun to provide insights on best practices for students with LDs and considerations for effective special education services. However, we are lacking information on the paths and careers that individuals go into and what skills they still require in their work.

When I started this journey, I thought that I wanted to research multiple teachers with LDs and how they manage in the classroom; but looking deeper into my own life choices, I realized that I had a story to tell. I would be able to not only share stories, but discuss the characteristics that made me resilient and build the strategies that I used to cope with my exceptionality (Polloway et al., 1992). Using narrative methods I was able to not only share this body of information from my perspective, but also from my mum's perspective while creating a conversation for both teaching improvement and knowledge

discovery for myself and others (Louie et al., 2003). This information could shed light on how an individual with a LD can overcome adversity and create positive strategies in her pursuit to become a teacher.

Summary of the Study

Due to my LD, I have and still struggle both academically and emotionally in my school, life, and career. Given my personal learned experiences, I have been able to reach my goals of succeeding through school, with honours and in top standing to become the teacher I have always wanted to be. I use my strategies to not only help me but also the students I encounter, especially when dealing with students with exceptionalities. There are days when I question my ability, and there are times when I feel that my exceptionality isolates me, but I am passionate about highlighting the uniqueness of a teacher with LDs and how I got here. This research has allowed me, a teacher with a LD, an opportunity to share my story complete with my struggles and success in education.

This study was a qualitative narrative inquiry focused on the researcher's journey with a LD and the strategies that were used to help her become successful in her teaching career. A key informant was the researcher's mother who helped the researcher with memories that she would not have remembered due to her age, and to also describe the role that the parent plays with a child who has a LD. The participant and researcher first examined artifacts from the researcher's childhood and created reflections on the pieces based on when the work was done and its implications on the present. The participant was also interviewed to understand how her role, as the mother, helped her daughter succeed and where she thought her daughter's biggest strengths and weaknesses were and what coping mechanisms were used. The interview was transcribed and viewed by the

participant for accuracy through email communication.

The transcribed data were coded and categorized into common phrases and ideas. These ideas were then clustered into themes. The themes were then presented in a narrative form which highlights the researcher's and participant's perspectives. Four themes emerged: "School Struggles," "Challenges within Education," "Supporters," and "Strategies Leading to Success." These themes were created with the commonplaces in mind, but also from drawing on the information and finding the similarities and artifacts that could support the interview and researcher's personal experience and learning.

Discussing the Findings in Relation to the Literature

This study has contributed to the existing knowledge on the experiences of teachers with LDs by reinforcing the findings presented in previous work (e.g., Ferri et al., 2005; Pope, 2001; Valle et al., 2004), and it has contributed unique discoveries for further discussion and research. Once I obtained the correct documentation to my formal diagnosis, due to the laws and regulations in place for students with disabilities, the classroom services and protocol mentioned by Bennett and Dworet (2013) were followed. These were the foundations for the skills, coping mechanisms, and strategies that I learned and used in the rest of my schooling. The strategies most effective for me were the support from my family and the use of technology. Adebisi et al. (2015) also found that using technology can improve the quality of life for students with LDs and help them reach their targeted goals.

My mum also discussed that she went to many workshops so she could learn how I worked best and then each night worked with me on school tasks. Padelidou and Chideridou (2013) found that parents of children with LDs feel they must run double duty

of mother and teacher to help their child succeed. Other research also indicated that parents tend to feel a sense of guilt (Padeliadou & Chideridou, 2013), but this study did not go into details on the mother's feelings, only that she did mention how proud she was of her daughter and how far she had come. I also feel that if my mum did not persevere with all of the things she did to help me, I do not know if I could have achieved what I have and gotten to the place where I am today. Without question, I appreciate all of the extra time she spent with me and all that she did to assist me.

Often LDs can also be comorbid with other disabilities and mental health concerns. Manassis and Young (2000) found that individuals with LDs can also have difficulty with social skills, depression, and anxiety. However, these were not factors that I experienced in my education and, therefore, not mentioned within this study. This research was very specific to me as a student and subsequent teacher with a LD. When I was younger, I experienced the apprehension of telling people about my LD, as Valle et al. (2004) mentioned. I now see how I have helped other students with LDs in my classroom and I want to continue to be able to share that even with a LD one can still be successful with strategies.

Implications for Future Research

Narrative inquiries are also generally longitudinal, but the data collection for this study lasted approximately one month. It should be noted that the artifacts used were from all ages of the researcher's life. Due to the nature of this study, the results in regards to the strategies and coping mechanisms that lead to a teacher's success are not generalizable to all teachers with LDs. The relationship with the mother may not also be representative of all parental relationships with a child with a LD; however, it would be

interesting to determine if other parent–child relationships that had support have led to success. It would also be worthwhile to pursue a study with a larger number of teachers with LDs participate to see if strategies are common across the board.

Further research could also be conducted in a longitudinal way to follow students with LDs, discuss their goals, and watch their journey through education while they determine which strategies are successful for them. Another longitudinal study could attempt to determine if the exceptionality of a LD specifically impacts teachers’ practice. This could be done as a narrative or conducted by a researcher in a case study method to see how the teacher is handling the workload and responsibilities. This study could also focus on how teachers with LDs work with students who also have LDs.

Research could be furthered by examining the experiences and beliefs of other stakeholders in the teaching profession, such as teacher associates, instructors, and administrative persons in relation to LDs. This could not only further inform policy development, but also show the possible careers for individuals with LDs. Bringing in more perspectives through a narrative approach would offer new knowledge, while still addressing the complexities that have been identified.

Concluding Thoughts

This has been the biggest project I have ever worked on, but also one of the most rewarding. As I write this last section of the last chapter, I feel a sense of closure and satisfaction in myself. I discussed earlier that I used to be ashamed of my disability and I have grown to accept it, but even more so now. If it was not for the way I learn and complete school work, I would not have been able to add to the research and literature in such a personal way. Through the analysis of stories, artifacts, and an interview, I

attempted to break through the understanding of the journey of a teacher with LDs and the strategies used in order to become successful. Although I never did intentionally define what success means, I truly feel success cannot be measured but is just felt by each individual. I believe that as long as your own personal goals are met, then you have in fact become successful. We all have our own definition of success.

What I find the most interesting is that now that I have become more comfortable expressing my disability, I often get statements and questions about how I beat the odds. In others words, how did I achieve success when others with LDs have not? I think back to Carl Rogers's (1961) premise that every human being has the potential to be great and the desire to reach their full capabilities. Rogers added that even though life offers some challenges, individuals can achieve their goals when supported. The idea of support is critical, and I believe that students should feel they are supported, both at home and in school, and should not have to wait to go through a long process to get their testing done, as the earlier the supports are in place the sooner strategies can start to form.

I also feel a strong connection with the special needs of the students that I have encountered and will continue to encounter in my classroom. My own academic struggles and experiences are assets that make me a unique and empathetic teacher who can plan from first-hand knowledge. I will not only be their teacher, but I will support them in their educational goals, similar to the way I have been supported by my mum and family, my Grade 4 teacher, and a few special education/resource teachers. However, in the interview with my mum, she did not take credit. She knows that she supported me, but she also made sure I knew that I needed to take responsibility for my success from my own abilities and strength in my desire to push through, create and find strategies, and

meet my goals. Overall, this self-study highlighted the educative and professional experiences of a teacher with LDs and the strategies that were used to facilitate her drive and determination to get her to where she is today.

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Appendix A

Research Ethics Approval

DATE:		3/7/2016
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:		GALLAGHER, Tiffany - Teacher Education
FILE:		15-199 - GALLAGHER
TYPE:	Masters Thesis/Project	STUDENT: Stephanie Guest
SUPERVISOR:		Tiffany Gallagher
TITLE:		Self-Study on the Journey to Success of a Teacher with Learning Disabilities

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 3/7/2016 to 3/31/2017.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 3/31/2017. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Kimberly Maich, Chair
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix B

Artifact Reflection Chart

Artifact type	Artifact description	Date of artifact	Mum's feelings from past memory	Mum's feelings from revisiting	Stephanie's feelings/ understandings from past	Stephanie's feelings/ understandings in present
School Work	<p>Drawing/ Writing Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On the blank paper teacher wrote "Draw Something..." Top half "Hot" bottom half "Cold" - The pictures are both box like with little colour - Temperatures were mixed up and therefore teacher crossed out and rewrote -no words about picture were attempted on own -dots of letter formation were provided only "cold" letters were filled and one letter in "hot" was filled. 	<p>Date: Feb 27th 1997</p> <p>Grade: JK</p>	I remember being very curious as to why all of Stephanie's work contained "black" or "grey". It was always lots of black scribbling and it made me feel curious and a bit anxious. It surprised me she mixed up the Hot/Cold and that she would choose black for snow	<p>Still very much find it interesting to note that a lot of her work was black in colour and very scribbly and wild looking.</p> <p>Looking back it re-enforces to me that my gut instinct about Stephanie's development was correct.</p>	NA	<p>Assumption – I did not remember the instructions fully but knew I had to draw cold and hot things and therefore got the locations mixed up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little colour and detail in picture and colour does not match the words in the cold picture (black snow)
<p>Rationale: This piece of early school work may or may not be a strong indicator as many young children are unable to follow directions and have difficulty following simple instructions. However, this work adds to the growing knowledge and hindsight is one of the first indicators we have of my ability to do simple tasks. Teachers may have thought I was trying to rush my work or was impatient to wait for specific colours, but the date should have been an indicator as it is after the new year. I was already in school for 4 months and still making careless mistakes and did not have accuracy with letters or colours. There wasn't a note about how many times I was sent back, if any, and I do not remember any assistance in kindergarten (only one teacher in room only went half days).</p>						
School Work	<p>Drawing/ Writing Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On blank sheet of paper teacher wrote "What do you wear on a hot day?" -Stick like pink figure with detailed face, hands and feet - Dot letter indicate shorts and a t-shirt, 	<p>Date: Mar 4th 1997</p> <p>Grade: JK</p>	I remember being thrilled that the picture wasn't black! I wondered at the time how much instruction or one-on-one time Stephanie received from the teacher to help her complete this task, or did the teacher suggest	I feel like Stephanie must have had a significant amount of help to complete this picture along with the printing. This work was very	NA	<p>Impressed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One month later and more work put in – is that effort, guidance, with help –not sure -did I just draw a picture of a person because that was verbal instruction and then when asked

	traced letter -under teacher printing of task, attempt to re-wrote the question		different colours for her to use?	inconsistent with other work she was completing and bringing home.		what 'she' was wearing on the hot day I knew <u>verbally</u> how to respond. (verbally was always a stronger aspect for me and still is)
<p>Rationale: By March this piece of work has come farther, does this mean I pick and choose when I want to do work? What was I thinking and feeling when doing this work? The work is still messy and very much one colour, the picture also does not look like clothing but a person is noticed however, the printing showed more of an effort. This is important in my development as it shows that there is potential for improvement and work can be better, however why it was better is hard to answer as I cannot go back in time, I can make assumptions, but that is all.</p>						
School Work	<p>Worksheet Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - numbers from 1-9 are listed on the sheet -there are pictures of ants climbing over hills -goal is student counts ants and write the correct number of ants -instructions are in long sentence form -Fully completed 	<p>Date: April 14th 1997</p> <p>Grade: JK</p>	<p>Looking back at this, I remember thinking at the time that there is no way that Stephanie completed this sheet by herself. She did not know her numbers, although she could count to 10. There was definitely some sort of teacher influence on this sheet.</p>	<p>It still makes sense to me that Stephanie was receiving some type of teacher support in order to partially complete this worksheet. Numbers are backwards and not in the right place which implies that there was some type of self-figuring out as well. I find it interesting that she has done some printing on the back of the sheet that doesn't appear to have anything to do with the activity but it has clearly been "copied" from somewhere and some of the letters are backwards.</p>	NA	<p>Assumption – frustration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Looking at my numbers many are not correct form (6, 3 backwards, 7, 5, 9 unclear) and even needed to use numbers up top to trade (strategy by myself or teacher influenced) - where to write the number was not clear and therefore numbers don't all seem to match up on the right hill
<p>Rationale: Not only did I struggle with letters and colours my numbers were also off. This worksheet has all the correct answers; however multiple attempts at numbers are obvious. This is important because multiple numbers are wrong, however I can see on the number line at the top of the page certain numbers are traced. I predict this was my first attempt at making an accommodation/ using a strategy for myself and my ability to copy the correct answer.</p>						

School Work	Worksheet Task - Printing lines on a bordered sheet - No instructions - Marker E/e solid and in dot form -Traced some letter and only did one row on own interchanging capital and lowercase instead of a line of each -3 full lines empty	Date: April 29 th 1997 Grade: JK	It looks like Stephanie has attempted to do the work but I would guess that she was left on her own to complete the task, and therefore, didn't. She attempted to copy some words from somewhere on the back of the sheet but lots of the letters are backwards, not entirely unusual for this age	I can still see the value in having teacher support at a young age but I also feel that it is important to leave a child on their own for a bit so that they could accurately be assessed as to their progress – are their letters progressing, are they able to follow outlines and then duplicate on their own?	NA	- Lowercase e is better than capital - wonder: is the line on my own copying off a wall that had uppercase beside the lowercase -Why was work not done?
Rationale: Work that was clearly meant to be finished all the way down the page again was not finished and even not done to the standards of teacher. This is end of April and only one row of dotted E were done and 4 e with one row below it on my own not in proper spacing and capable and lower cases interchanged. What is a great step is all the E/e's are in the right direction, however they are messy and have some extra line motions. This is important because even though this was obvious assigned work it was never finished, was there a struggle to complete, or did I not get it checked.						
School Work	Worksheet - 11 pictures down the sides of the page -boxes in the middle -no instructions -first letter of the picture written in each box	Date: ND (After March 28 th 1998) Grade: SK	Looking at this sheet, I am remembering that a lot of sheets came home that were clearly completed with teacher help. Verbally Stephanie was able to identify pictures and could tell you what things were, but could not even begin to write them on her own.	I am grateful for the amount of teacher support Stephanie was receiving but I have to wonder if this slowed down the process to have her identified. I also understand (and remember) the frustration of how verbally smart she was but was unable to get things down on paper without teacher/pare	NA	-Mostly capital letter written -Doll (said d but wrote b) in teachers writing which means task was done only with teachers help -k for cup -teacher even had to write out what some of the pictures were for me to get the letter

				nt support.		
<p>Rational: It is near the end of SK now and I am still having letter direction issues. It is also obvious that the teacher had assistance in this task as she wrote down what some of the pictures were, giving me the ability to see the picture and the words to know what the first letter would be. There are also notes from teacher that indicated that I said some sounds and wrote others, however again further guidance was offered or mentioned.</p>						
School Work	<p>Cut and Colour Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no instructions -images of people cut out (not sure who by) coloured and glued in -words on top stating "my family" -listed who was in family "mom, DAD, siser*, Siser, baby, baby" 	<p>Date: No Date (After March 28th 1998)</p> <p>Grade: SK</p>	<p>Remembering thinking that Stephanie started this task on her own as it is upside down. Was excited that the people were colourful and not all coloured black. She had the right number of people for our family but wondered why she didn't have names for her siblings.</p>	<p>Printing is quite neat for her, how much support did she receive for this activity? Lots of spelling mistakes, but clearly the words must have been copied as she would not have known how to spell these. Also curious as to who cut out the people as she would not have been able to cut that clearly.</p>	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -must have had more freedom with this task -the people are glued in upside down -refer to myself as a sister and not "me" did not use siblings names -said baby for brother -right number of people -impressed with sounding out and even colouring of people
<p>Rationale: Growth is beginning to happen. This indicates that colours and neatness are happening, the work is upside down and spelling is off, however the attempt is very close and has phonetic sounds "siser" the t was replaced with an s. The family however does have some issues with the names, brothers were considered babies and indicated myself as a sister which means I might have picked up these terms from family members in conversations and was not able to place/change them in my own voice.</p>						
School Work	<p>Creative Story (Writing Task)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -lined paper with construction paper cover (front and back) stapled together - title and author -drawing matches title -page one great introduction and story line -page two story falls apart 	<p>Date: Feb 16th –Feb 23rd 2000</p> <p>Grade: 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -angry and frustrated with the teacher and her attitude towards Stephanie's progress or lack thereof! -discouraged that the school was still unwilling to agree there were problems -angry that a teacher would even think about writing off a student and their future success without any help! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -still to this day I am angry and frustrated with this teacher and with the school's lack of support -would love to have a face-to-face with this teacher, with Stephanie ... a "look at me now" conversation and a "thanks for nothing" to her! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Frustrating year with little support -teacher very belittling and compared work/ let other students mark and see peers work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -page one must have been guided and worked with help -as writing continues teacher has added a few words (I make this to be starting to get frustrated with attempts) -teacher left support and sentences don't make sense words are very much spelt wrong and lots of teacher writing to try and fix the story -shocking to see how much work

						the teacher needed to help in sentence writing yet still nothing was being done
<p>Rationale: Critical story and work. At first glance this story looks like a typical grade 2s work, very little comments on the first page by teacher, however once you flip the page you can see the 'guidance' I was given to stay had left and many corrections were needed. The story also falls apart where key words are missing to help make the story make sense. This helps show that words from brain to paper were not always clear but when helped with how to form sentences they would make sense and ideas were able to turn into work.</p>						
School Work	<p>Spelling (pre)Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on lined paper -name and title -date determined based on book order was not listed -20 spelling words -3 correct (Root, hair, paws) -wrote in pencil -marked in marker (not sure who by) - corrections in pence and marker (not sure logic there) 	<p>Date: Oct 27th 2001</p> <p>Grade: 3</p>	<p>- was worried about how Steph would do and frustrated that I had to push her so much to "study" the words. Also stressed about her peers teasing her because they saw her as "dumb"</p>	<p>-still makes me angry that the teachers/school kept insisting that everything was fine and not too worry</p>	<p>-hated spelling tests</p> <p>-even with studying the finals were never much better</p> <p>-pretests always nervous and hated if we didn't get to mark ourselves</p>	<p>-quite a low mark</p> <p>-words are phonetically spelled and some with misusing sounds (Canda – Can-A-Da)</p> <p>-looking back the words are hard 'sounds the same, different spelling words'</p> <p>-board –bored</p> <p>-not only did I need to know the words I also needed to know the definition</p> <p>-hard concepts and still have difficulty with at times depending on the word</p>
<p>Rationale: This is a key example that shows my ability to sound out and verbally understand meaning of words. Even either clarification of meaning I was still unable to know how each word was spelled. However I was able to know that there was a different way to spell it and letters were changed around or new ones were used. Another form of my ability to cope was sounding out and hoping I was close. It shows that phonetically I was close but in the English language I was wrong</p>						
Report Card	<p>Grade 4 Final Report Card</p> <p>(the year before testing/ identification)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for the most part, my marks indicated that my achievement reaches the provincial standards (level 2) but some marks even fall below (level 1) the provincial standpoint particularly in reading and writing. - the comments 	<p>Date: June 26th 2002</p> <p>Grade: 4</p>	<p>I remember feeling very frustrated and confused looking at Stephanie's actual marks because they did not seem as bad as we were expecting. I did not feel though that her marks accurately reflected her progress in the reading and writing areas and wondered if she was just being pushed through.</p>	<p>I find it frustrating that kids are pushed through and that marks do not always accurately reflect what a student knows. I remember feeling relieved and scared when this teacher agreed with me that there was something not quite</p>	NA	<p>- I remember having a tutor for a lot of the language aspects of schooling and wonder how much of this tutor helped.</p> <p>- I did not enjoy working with him because it was extra language work that I already had to spend lots of time on in school</p> <p>- Comments make it sound like I was more capable of completing the</p>

	match the marks to some extents noting that teacher assistance is required frequently - learning skills are a range of mostly satisfactory, with some good and excellent			right with Stephanie's development and suggested that we should "fire" her tutor and allow Stephanie to get further behind so she could receive testing and help.		necessary skills in reading and writing than I actually was and that I actually felt I was. (especially since I now look back and see some of the things she did she was already accommodating for me and my learning eg taping herself readings books so I could 'read'/listen to the books my peers were) -insecurities becoming more present (anxieties)
Rationale: This report card is a good example of how marks can be changed in order to continue to push students through the system. Even though my language skills were below average I was given marks that made it appear like I was more at grade level than I know I was. This was also a big year as this teacher made a connection with myself and my mum as her son had similar schooling issues and she wanted to ensure that the education system actually helped me.						
Psycho-educational Report	Formal Document - lists symptoms of inattentive and hyperactive both from teacher and parent stand point - confirms diagnosis of ADHD and recommendation -academic programme modification, referral to outside agency, advised to see family doctor - Tests *Wechsler intelligence s *Wechsler Individual Achievement *Wide Range Assessment of Memory and Learning *Rosner Test of Auditory Analysis Skills *Bender-Gestalt	Date: January 14 th , 2003- March 24 th , 2003 Grade: 4	-thrilled that Steph was finally going to be tested and relieved that the school/board was finally agreeing that something wasn't quite right. Also scared and worried once there was a diagnosis and we didn't want her to be "labelled" -surprised with the results somewhat as it was much worse than I had thought. -was also very important to us that Stephanie NEVER use her diagnosis as a crutch or an excuse not to be successful!	-still angry that she had to be so far behind before the testing took place. -angry that there was so much focus on the ADHD portion -hugely proud at how far Stephanie has come and the strategies that she has learned and developed on her own! -still believe that just because one has a diagnosis, it should not be used as a crutch or an excuse!	At the time I had no idea I was being tested. I knew I was leaving the room to go and do tasks with another 'teacher' but I did not know why.	Shocked - results are low 14%ile in reading 6%ile in written expression grade 2 - in some aspects I am overwhelmed with my accomplishment but also shocked that one has to be this low before getting scene -schools seemed more worried about ADHD than the LD and wanted that 'dealt' with first (disappoint) -Medication became a big push

	Visual-Motor *Test of Written Language -ultimate diagnoses communication learning disability (CLD)					
<p>Rationale: This document is the document that started the ability to get help in school. It needed to be formally done in order for the school to recognise my ability to get accommodations and make modifications. After viewing the results it is sad that I had to be so behind before they would agree and recognize that there were serious issues. I remember having tutors and being in tears night after night trying to do work just to catch up. On the other hand, it is amazing I was able to get through that much of schooling without any accommodations or modifications. I was already accommodating for myself before I even knew I was or how to.</p>						
Lecture Notes (Mum's Additional Information)	<p>Power Point Slides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lecture notes on Individual Education Plans -discuss standards for developing, program planning and implementation -held by an educational consultant -many notes throughout the slide 	<p>Date: No Date (Best assumption after March 2003)</p> <p>Grade: 4</p>	<p>-now that we had a diagnosis I had to do everything in my power to help Stephanie be successful</p> <p>-I needed to learn everything I could about IEPs, LDs, processes and be even more of an advocate for her to help get absolutely everything we could for her to be successful!</p>	<p>-I would still to this day do everything in my power to get her the help and support she needs! I would attend every workshop and info session available to me!</p>	<p>-Was probably unaware and just told she had a meeting</p>	<p>Impressed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -cannot believe the length my mum/parents went to ensure they fully understood what was going on and how they could help me succeed academically -also note there are IEP forms that the school asked to be filled out and there are pages of notes with many additional comments
<p>Rationale: Even though this is not my work, it needed to be included. This shows the lengths my mum would have gone to in order to help better my education experience. She not only worked with me night after night but also went out and took her own courses so she was knowledgeable in school meetings and knew all her (and my) options. There was no way the school would be placating her again and not helping with every accommodation necessary and available to help me be successful.</p>						
IEP	<p>2 Versions of Individual Education Plan</p>	<p>Date: May 14th 2003</p> <p>Grade 4</p> <p>Date: October 18th, 2006</p> <p>Grade 9</p>	<p>Because I had attended workshops about helping to develop an IEP and we had such fabulous ISSP support, I was very happy with everything</p>	<p>To this day I still feel it was so important for me to attend all of the workshops I did and read every article I could on developing the IEP and advocating for students with LDs so</p>	<p>Middle school did not want to be sitting with resource teacher at all, would only see her if it was out of class – did not want to be different from peers</p> <p>High school was able to self-advocate for things I needed</p>	<p>-lots of possible accommodations provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -some I used and others I did not (scribe very little use, extra time more frequent) but always given the ability - personally I feel these accommodations were what I needed to be able

			that we were able to have noted in the IEP and very thankful for the suggestions and assistance Stephanie had in the development of this document in order for her to be successful!	that they can be academically successful! I also feel that some of the support she received would benefit ALL students – in particular the Learning Strategies Class in high school. I still feel it is very important for parents to work in collaboration with teachers and support staff to develop the best plan for their child to be successful!	and did not want anyone in the school to know I had an LD or got extra help	to get where I am, started at 50% modifications with page long accommodations in elementary school, high school not as detailed but still relayed on specific accommodations
<p>Rationale: this is the document that started to make my accommodations come to life. I originally was not informed of some of the options because my parents did not want me using it as a crutch. They wanted me to be successful and never give up on something because I had an LD or was told 'I couldn't do it'. Once I went to middle school they saw the benefit of informing me and helping me become an advocate for myself. I then learned different tools and things I could do and tested out which ones I felt would benefit me the most. I still, to this day, use some of these strategies and others I would not want to try again. It is crazy to see all the options that can be listed and given to someone once they have a formal diagnosis, yet most would be beneficial for all students (preferred seating, rewording of questions..etc.). It is interesting that I feel I take these accommodations and not only use them, but also have adopted many into my teaching philosophy, because every student deserves to be successful and should be given everything they need to do it.</p>						

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Participant

1. At what point did you know you and your husband wanted to have children?
2. Did you have any thought in your mind you would have a child with any disabilities?
3. What was your schooling like while growing up?
4. At what point did you know your child was learning differently?
5. Why was your child's learning a concern for you?
6. Where did you go to look to look for help?
7. Who did you find to be helpful?
8. Where did you run into roadblocks?
9. What did you do to help your child succeeded?
10. If you could change something about the schooling or process would you? What would you change?
11. When did you notice that your child was turning around educationally speaking?
12. What would you say was the most beneficial strategy you and your child learned in order to be successful?
13. What do you feel your daughter's biggest weakness is as a student?
14. What do you feel your daughter's biggest weakness is as a teacher?
15. How do you think she accommodates for these weaknesses?
16. What do you feel your daughter biggest strength as a teacher is? Why?
17. What help have you been able to provide to her?
18. Is there anything you feel I should know that we did not cover?