

**“Personal and Educational Experiences of
Post-Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities”**

by

Cheryl Nicholson

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the personal educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities currently enrolled in post secondary education in the Province of Manitoba. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a theoretical model using the grounded theory approach, for understanding the challenges and barriers post secondary students with learning disabilities face throughout their educational experiences. Findings highlight the meaning students with learning disabilities attach to the challenges and barriers experienced during various educational points in their lives. Further explored is what students identify as solutions for promoting educational success from elementary school through post secondary education.

Findings from this research suggest that students with learning disabilities experienced a number of challenges and barriers during their K-S4 educational years that reached across an array of developmental domains. These challenges and barriers appear to be largely misunderstood within the educational system and participant narratives suggest that at times the educational system to some degree perpetuated their difficulties. Narrative stories suggest that often the key to obtaining the necessary help to prepare students to meet these challenges and barriers required gaining access to private resources such as tutoring or private education. Narrative stories provided by participants describe dismal experiences during their K-S4 educational years with regard to academic achievement, interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, social isolation, and

emotional, social, and psychological difficulties descriptive of the associated features highlighted in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000).

Participant narratives highlighted a variety of situational conditions that they found helpful or unhelpful within education at different points. In general participants who did not have access to private resources or an individualized transition plan within the public education system tended to report that experiences in high school became a turning point for them with regard to some of the domains in which they were experiencing difficulties. Other participants reported not gaining access to these positive experiences until they were in an employment position, an adult education program, or college environments.

The theory developed from the narrative data provides an in-depth understanding of the lived educational experiences of students with learning disabilities. This theory defines the core category, its properties and the dimensions of these properties to establish a relationship between the core property and subsidiary categories. Also highlighted are participant identified solutions for meeting the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities often experience.

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My appreciation is extended to Lorraine Kaczor of Literacy Works for her ongoing encouragement and assistance with final formatting. My gratitude is extended to the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba, with whom I am employed, for their support and flexibility during the writing process of this thesis.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to three individuals who have been central motivators in all my endeavors, my children Tinsa, Angel, and Joseph. Your continuous support and encouragement is very much appreciated. I would like to thank all of you for your patience during the many hours in which the television could not be turned on, unless it was on closed caption, because I was studying, especially you Joe, seeing how you couldn't read. I would also like to thank you for your understanding during those times in which course deadlines required late starts to things like Christmas preparations or a late birthday wish.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

An extensive review of the literature that focuses on post secondary students with learning disabilities reveals that research on this topic is extremely scarce. Existing literature points to a number of issues that are socially pertinent, warranting an increased research focus on the topic. Two main themes emerge from the literature. The first theme looks at the difficulties of transitioning from high school to work or post secondary education. The second theme looks at the social marginalization individuals with learning disabilities face in general.

The literature clearly points out the under-representation of students with learning disabilities enrolled in post secondary institutions. In recent years, however, findings also suggest a continued increase in enrollment of students requesting support for learning disabilities (Clark 1996; Cox and Klas 1996; Towell and Hollins 2000; Stodden and Dowrick 2000). Several research studies report a continued misunderstanding among faculty, administrators, and student special services department personnel about the accommodations that are necessary to promote educational success for students with learning disabilities (Barga 1996; Cox and Klas 1996; Towell and Hollins 2000; Stodden and Dowrick 2000; Troiano 2003). Qualitative research focusing on post secondary students with learning disabilities that describes what learning disabilities mean to these students is limited. Only two studies Barga (1996) and Troiano (2003) using grounded theory research methodology to examine the experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities surfaced in the literature review. This

thesis uses grounded theory methodology to enquire into the phenomenon of the educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities, as did Barga (1996) and Troiano (2003). The theoretical models developed in these two studies (Barga 1996; Troiano 2003) are significant for comparing to the theory developed in this study.

The literature review begins by discussing the recent history of the development of concern in Canada about learning disabilities. Mention is given to the importance of the new definition of learning disabilities, as established by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) in January 2002. The resource reference used among qualified professionals for diagnosing learning disabilities, The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed. Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), (American Psychiatric Association 2000), is also reviewed. The diagnostic criterion outlined in this manual for diagnosing learning disabilities is discussed and the descriptions of learning disabilities and relevant consequences are described. These documents were instrumental in the participant selection process for this study and therefore warrant attention.

The literature review then turns to discussing literature that addresses the importance of providing youth with educational and transitional support to help combat difficulties with transitioning to adult roles, work, and post secondary educational programs. The discussion highlights what we already know about students with learning disabilities attending post secondary institutions, and briefly describes, in the Canadian context, current research by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. The discussion continues with a look at the

role played by the Province of Manitoba in recent Canadian research. The studies undertaken by Barga (1996) and Troiano (2003) are highlighted in respect to methodology, findings, theoretical models developed, and practical implications. Finally, the literature review describes the research methodology used in this research undertaking the grounded theory approach.

This thesis employed the qualitative research design of Grounded Theory developed collaboratively by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. This approach uses systematic techniques and procedures of analysis to enable the researcher to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing “good” science: significance, theory observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor, and verification (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Grounded theory that is well constructed will meet four central criteria: fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This research methodology has been used for the purpose of building rather than testing theories.

Data collection involved one face-to-face screening interview and two in-depth, tape-recorded interviews to obtain narratives with ten participants registered in post secondary institutions located the city of Winnipeg in the Province of Manitoba. The purpose of the investigation outlined in this thesis is to develop a theoretical model for understanding what it means to have a learning disability at different educational points by highlighting the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities report experiencing as well as to determine their identified solutions that address these difficulties for successful high school completion and participation in post secondary education. In addition,

there was an interest in exploring the current trends in Manitoba for students with learning disabilities attending post secondary education over the past three years, to determine if the trend found locally was the same as or different from the trends reported within the literature.

The first objective of the screening interview was to ensure participants met the outlined participation criteria contained in section A. Criteria required that participants were enrolled in post secondary education and were registered with the Disabilities Services Department. Participants needed to have English as a first language, be eighteen years of age or over, diagnosed learning disability by a professional qualified to diagnose, and educated within the Manitoba school system at some point during the K-S4 educational years. The second objective of the screening interview was to gain insight that would allow for participant selection that increased sample variation. The data collected was entered into the statistical analysis software program SPSS in order to organize the data.

Developing this data-base allowed the researcher to organize the data and develop frequency tables in order to determine if variation existed within the sample with regard to initial experiences such as age and the grades of diagnosis, type of learning disability, as well as specific educational approaches experienced in terms of interventions and accommodations, high school completion, and workforce participation. Analysis of this material did show variation with regard to: initial experiences of age and grades of assessments and diagnosis; types of learning disability; specific interventions and accommodations participants accessed or were provided; high school completion; and workforce participation.

The second interview in this study involved participants sharing narratives about their early educational experiences from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-S4) to explore the challenges and barriers participants often experience in education at different points in their lives as a consequence of having a learning disability. The third interview involved gathering in-depth participant narratives that described participants' post secondary education experiences. Participant identified solutions to the challenges and barriers often experienced were also explored. The narratives shared by participants uncovered story lines that reflected shared meanings to participants about early education in terms of personal thoughts about their learning when compared to peers, feelings of stigmatization, social isolation, the assessment, diagnosis, and intervention processes and the meanings they attached to these experiences.

The overall findings of this study are reported in chapter's four to eight of the thesis. Findings that explored the trend in Manitoba of students with learning disabilities attending post secondary education will be reported in chapter four. Chapter five reports data collected from the First Interview: Participant Screening Questionnaire, and includes demographic and the quantified descriptive data collected in the first face-to-face, closed ended survey interview. Chapter six reports the findings of the Second Interview: Early Educational Experiences K-S4 which involved collecting in-depth narrative data that focused on the K-S4 educational years to explore the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities often experience at different points in their lives. Chapter seven examines the findings of the Third Interview: Post Secondary Education and

Identified Solutions that involved collecting narrative data that focused on what it meant to be a student with a learning disability attending post secondary education and the identified solutions participants had to offer to help students with learning disabilities succeed at all educational levels. Chapter eight, the last findings chapter, describes the theoretical model that emerged from the transcribed narrative data collected in the second and third interviews.

The theoretical model developed in this study suggests that the meaning of having a learning disability shifts over time. Specifically, it appears to change from where these early educational experiences are best described as *Unique Learning Dispositions* to being better described as *Unique Learning Styles* during post secondary educational experiences. This shift appears to occur after students with learning disabilities experience successes in education, an employment position, an adult education program, or college environments. Regardless of the environment in which the turning point occurred for participants it was positive experiences, understanding from others, increased knowledge about their learning disability, and the incorporation of strategies or accommodations that exposed them to the successes they needed to change the course of their experiences with a learning disability.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview

Learning disabilities have plagued children and adults in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, and math since schooling became mandatory in the late 19th century. Dr. W. Pringle Morgun first documented dyslexia in the British Journal of Medicine in 1896 (Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba 2002). The article described a boy with a profound problem learning how to read. At that time, learning to read was erroneously linked to being intelligent. Unfortunately, this myth is something that children and adults with learning disabilities continue to face today. Samuel Kirk, a professor of special education at the University of Illinois, who coined the term “learning disability” when addressing a group of concerned parents in 1963, suggested that the term be used to describe children who have disorders in development of language, speech, reading, and associated communication skills (Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba 2002).

What are Learning Disabilities?

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada developed a new national definition of learning disabilities in 2002, which states:

A Learning Disability refers to a number of disorders, which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency (see appendix A for a complete definition).

This new national definition is based on research conducted across Canada six years prior to its development. The research involved specialists from neural psychology, educational psychology, law, special education, nursing, and genetics. The purpose of the definition is to generate a more educated and research-based understanding of learning disabilities, to give clinicians, educators, and laypersons the foundation for a shared understanding of learning disabilities that is based on empirical knowledge, helping to dispel commonly held myths about people with learning disabilities.

Characteristics associated with learning disabilities, as outlined in this new definition (LDAC 2002) include:

- Learning disabilities occur in individuals with average to above average intelligence
- They are life long
- They are neurologically based
- They are genetically based
- They are never exactly alike for any two individuals
- They are not limited to educational domains but rather affect all areas of life

The main objective of the new definition is to stimulate change that will enhance accessibility to more equitable opportunities for individuals affected by learning disabilities. The widespread adoption of the new definition will hopefully open doors to earlier and more appropriate interventions, lead to more equitable and appropriate treatment in schools, post secondary institutions, and the

workplace, which will help prevent individuals with learning disabilities from living on the margins of society. Unfortunately, there is no evidence in the research conducted by Learning Disabilities Association of Canada in 2007 that indicates this new definition has been adopted by provincial school divisions across the country. In fact research conducted by LDAC (2005) suggests inconsistencies in how learning disabilities are defined from one region to another, if in fact a formal definition of learning disabilities does exist within provincial school divisions. Also, access to assessments or defined action plans for intervention or accommodations to help students with learning disabilities differs greatly across provinces and within provincial districts.

The LDAC (2002) definition is comparable to the description of learning disabilities outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) manual is used in a number of fields by professionals with the credentials to diagnose learning disabilities. The definition of learning disabilities found in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) is a more comprehensive definition than found in previous Diagnostic and Statistical Manual editions. Most definitions of learning disabilities outlined in the literature are comparable to the descriptions of learning disabilities found in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000).

The DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) outlines a number of conditions and criteria required for the diagnosis of a learning disability. The DSM-IV-TR breaks reading (accuracy, speed, or comprehension),

mathematics (calculation or reasoning), and written expression disorders (sentence structure, putting thoughts into written form) into separate learning disabilities under the umbrella of learning disorders (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The criteria for diagnosis, although specific to each area of academic functioning, requires that achievement be substantially below that expected as measured on standardized tests, given the chronological age, measured intelligence, and age-appropriate education of the individual. The disturbances must interfere with academic achievement and with activities of daily living that require these skills (American Psychiatric Association 2000).

Academic functioning “substantially below” intellectual potential is a key factor in a learning disability diagnosis. A central problem with this aspect of the diagnostic criteria is that “substantially below,” according to the criterion, means a two standard deviation discrepancy between intellectual potential and academic functioning (American Psychiatric Association 2000). To meet that criterion, children are generally in grade three or higher, depending on the severity of the learning disability and environmental demands. Problematic to this requirement is the lack of opportunity for early intervention to address academic difficulties, which helps prevent further development of outlined associated features such as low self-esteem, feelings of demoralization, depression, or behavioural problems. Often the teachable moments or windows of opportunity for turning things around are replaced with learner frustration, social emotional difficulties, and avoidance of tasks associated with the area of difficulty, and poor school attachment.

The current version of the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) is improved when compared to previous editions because it outlines associated features that describe the global impact that learning disabilities have on aspects of personal (self-esteem, self-confidence), social and emotional development, and the psychological consequences of depression and anxiety that many children and adults with learning disabilities develop. The DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) recognizes the risk of school drop out is higher for children and youth with learning disabilities than it is for their non-learning disabled peers. The school dropout rate for students with learning disabilities is estimated at 40% or 1.5 times the average drop out rate (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The risk of social marginalization and employment difficulty among adults with learning disabilities are also recognized as consequences within the manual. This edition also outlines the underlying causal factors associated with learning disabilities more adequately than previous editions, which is beneficial for the development of intervention strategies (see appendix B).

Challenges and Barriers Reported in the Literature

In the mid-eighties, the importance of preparing students for adult life became a central area of focus when data started emerging that painted bleak outcome pictures for adults with disabilities who had been in special education programs (Clark 1996). As a solution to the emerging findings, educators, administrators, and government responded by developing the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). The original ITP focused on bridging students from school

to work without considering other transitional experiences youth face, such as independent living, community participation, interpersonal networks, social skills, vocational training, or post secondary education participation (Clark 1996). ITP's were directed solely at students with multiple and severe visible disabilities excluding from the focus of transitional preparation from high school to work or post secondary education participation for students with invisible disabilities such as learning disabilities.

In the mid-nineties, it was recognized that failing to support students with learning disabilities with a transition planning process contributed to the barriers faced in future employment opportunities and post secondary education participation. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) voiced concerns in 1994 that many students with learning disabilities do not consider post secondary education options because they are not encouraged, assisted, or prepared to do so with transition plans. It was further acknowledged that transitional outcomes for high school completion, to work, and to post secondary education could improve with the accomplishment of quality transition plans for students with learning disabilities. The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (1994) echoed these same concerns in the Canadian context.

Significant research findings at the time stimulated concerns by the NJCLD (1994) and the Learning Disabilities Association Canada (1994) that inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the transition plan process was important for turning experiences that students with learning disabilities faced, such as; barriers to vocational experiences, employment, college and university participation, and

access to community resources. Benz and Halpern (1993) pointed out that 25% of these students received no vocational instruction or school-related work experience, and that assistance finding employment was absent. Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler and Newman (1993) raised awareness that approximately 12% of students with learning disabilities attend two-year college programs, and an estimated 4% enter four-year college programs five years after leaving school, concluding that only 16% of these students attend vocational schools.

It is unclear, in the Canadian context, the extent transition to which planning for students with learning disabilities has become common educational practice. What is known from recent research findings is that individuals with learning disabilities continue to face the same challenges and barriers as they did in the past. Current research findings continue to report high unemployment rates, long-term underemployment, minimal participation in post secondary education, an inability to live independently, limited social experiences, restricted participation in community activities, and inordinately high arrest rates among individuals with learning disabilities (Blalock and Patton 1996; Stodden and Dowrick 2000; Mellard, Hall and Parker 2000; Wells, Sandefur, and Hogan 2003).

In the Manitoba context, transitional planning for students with learning disabilities is an uncommon practice. In fact, transition plans for students with learning disabilities are rarely developed, even in cases where students have individualized education plans outlining educational adaptations or the implementation of curriculum modifications. Since students with learning disabilities do not qualify for level II or level III funding, therefore Manitoba

Education, Citizenship and Youth does not mandate individualized education plans or transition plans for these students (see appendix C.) with respect to funding criteria. Students with learning disabilities fall under Level I funding. This is a base-funding rate provided to school divisions that is calculated by the student enrollment numbers and the location of each division. How each school division uses Level I funding varies from one school division to another. Often this funding is used to supplement shortages from other funding levels. When this funding is directed at students with learning disabilities, it is directed at those with extreme learning struggles, leaving others to fall through the cracks.

Funding is prioritized for students that meet the criteria for Level II and III funding. Students that qualify for funding at these levels generally have multiple disabilities. The province tracks how schools spend Level II and III funding. However, the proportion of all funding that is spent on clinical assessments and support for students with learning disabilities or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is not clear. Preliminary inquiries with relevant officials of the Government of Manitoba in the departments of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth and the Minister of Healthy Child Manitoba office indicated that statistics on students with learning disabilities receiving assessment or support services is unavailable. The lack of available information is the result of not tracking of level I funding, which school divisions independently decide how to spend. Additional inquiries to the Child Guidance Clinic found the same tracking problem existed. Although, it is known how many new assessments are done

annually, the number of assessments undertaken to determine if students have a learning disability that interferes with their academic performance is unknown.

Current Canadian Research

Obtaining learning disability prevalence rates has been a long-standing problem in the Canadian context because of the lack of a national definition and national policies on the issue, and as mentioned above, the vast variation in recognizing, assessing, accommodating, and tracking students with learning disabilities regionally. The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada attempted to gather statistics from across the country that would indicate the prevalence rate of learning disabilities in Canada. They also wanted to gain insight into how learning disabilities are being defined regionally and gather information on the assessment and accommodation processes used for students with learning disabilities nationally. However, this endeavor only resulted in the collection of confusing information about prevalence rates and programs because of the lack of a common definition across regions, and/or the lack of an existing uniform approach for dealing with students with learning disabilities. How learning disabilities were defined, understood, and categorized across regions differed. Tracking systems, if they existed, varied, as did the extent to which provincial departments of education recognized learning disabilities formally, or had a formal plan of action for assessing and accommodating students with learning disabilities (C. Larocque, 16 May 2005, personal communication).

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth do have a formal description of learning disabilities. However, lack of a formal tracking process and varied

intervention approaches consequently gives some students with learning disabilities access to diagnostic assessment and accommodation while others have no access unless parents are in the position to pay for an assessment through a private psychologist. The waiting period for diagnostic assessments within the educational system are lengthy and after receiving a learning disability diagnosis a consistent plan of action to accommodate these students is lacking. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth have formal guidelines that suggest specific approaches for dealing with learning disabilities. The approach to dealing with learning disabilities appears to be dependent on the learning disabilities knowledge base of the school resource teacher, teachers, and school administrations, rather than a consistent action plan.

It is rather disappointing that Manitoba is in this state of disorganization, when it comes to dealing with students with learning disabilities, given that research on the topic and development of an assessment process occurred approximately six decades ago. Reavis (1948) conducted an extensive study that involved assessing all Winnipeg children and youth to determine what proportion of schoolchildren would require specialized educational support. Findings from this study led to the release of a report that suggested approximately 15% of all students would require some form of specialized educational support (Reavis 1948). It was this report that led to the development of the Child Guidance Clinic to ensure that diagnostic assessments were available to identify school children requiring educational support. It is fascinating that the report placed the emphasis on ensuring the availability of diagnostic assessment when the educational

ideology of the day was to screen and segregate students. Nevertheless, the model developed in Manitoba because of the Reavis (1948) findings was a model that other Canadian provinces and North American regions examined for developing assessment and intervention programs.

The problems that surfaced in the attempt to gather learning disability prevalence rates among Canadian school children and youth sparked another research endeavor by Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. The research project is referred to as “Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities” (PACFOLD). This research investigation involved participatory action research in five Canadian provinces including Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan (C. Larocque, 16 May 2005, personal communication). The research methodology used in this study involved a focus group approach to gather information about the experiences of learning disabilities from parents of children with learning disabilities, youth with learning disabilities, and adults with learning disabilities.

Research findings from the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2007) study reported that the difficulties experienced by individuals with learning disabilities are both linear and cyclic in nature because early difficulties if left without detection and intervention, feed into an individual’s ability for taking on the increasing demands and expected roles of adult life. Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2007) suggests the issues are linear because there is a direct correlation between the problems not identified in school or not accommodated with low literacy levels, which has an impact on future

employment opportunities and financial stability. Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2007) also suggests that the situation is cyclic in that these challenges feed into one another because low literacy levels result in higher rates of unemployment, lack of independence, and greater problems with mental and physical health. These research findings that were released in the fall 2007 have lead to an array of recommendations for policy makers, educators, and employers. While recognizing that the educational system is where most Canadian children discover they have a learning disability and begin the long process of dealing with the academic difficulties the argument is made that it is necessary to look at other public policy areas for remedies to the lifelong challenges people with learning disabilities face.

This new research endeavor undertaken by Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2007) did not provide any new insight into the previously made arguments found in the literature (Blalock and Patton 1996; Stodden and Dowrick 2000; Mellard, Hall and Parker 2000; Wells, Sandefur, and Hogan 2003). The findings of this recent research supported previously stated arguments of the life long consequences and social marginalization individuals with learning disabilities experience if they do not receive the appropriate intervention and supports that promote educational success. These findings are important for individuals who are marginalized as adults because they fell through the educational crack and consequently did not receive the appropriate interventions that favored transitions to adult roles and responsibilities, as these findings justify requests for program funding to support these adults.

Their findings do confirm the need for more research in this area to develop a better understanding that goes beyond describing the life long consequences individuals with learning disabilities often experience to determine a best practices approach within education to decrease the number of individuals experiencing the negative life long consequences of learning disabilities. Throwing more money at the problem is not a solution without developing approaches within education to prevent the negative life long consequences often experienced within adulthood. Research endeavors that help determine how to best help these students by increasing the overall knowledge among educators with information that does not stop at describing the characteristics and overall potential negative outcomes but rather provides information about the researched based methods for instruction, intervention and prevention that promotes educational success is needed. One example of research based material that provides insight into appropriate courses of instruction and intervention comes out of the field of neuroscience by David Sousa (2007) How The Special Needs Brain Learns.

It is essential to develop a better understanding of the experience of students with learning disabilities at different educational points for developing a better understanding of the experience from the student perspective. Students who have struggled within the educational systems have important experiential knowledge to share that can guide professionals in the field with best practices program development. Adopting identified solutions based on student personal experiences holds the potential to increase successful educational outcomes for students with

learning disabilities that lead to high school completion and post secondary participation. Increasing educational success among students with learning disabilities theoretically should result in a decrease in the number of adults who require supports because they did not receive interventions that lead to successful educational outcomes or stable employment opportunities.

In addition, a recent Statistics Canada report based on data from the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) released December 3, 2007 indicates an increase rate for both children and adult reporting learning disabilities between the 2001 survey findings and the more recent 2006 reported findings. Learning disabilities were reported as the most common form of disability among children between the ages of 5-14 years, in which 69.3 % of all child reported disability was a learning disability. This finding indicates that learning disabilities affect 121,080 children or 3.2 % of all children in this age range. Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder was one of the three most common chronic conditions among children under age four. Among adults the increase of learning disabilities reported was 40% for Canadians age 15 and older, which is estimated to be affecting 631,000 adults according to the 2006 PALS findings.

Universities and Students with Learning Disabilities

All of the literature reviewed points to an under-representation of students with learning disabilities enrolled in post secondary institutions (Cox and Klas 1996; Barga 1996; Stodden and Dowrick 2000; Mellard, Hall and Parker 2000; Wells, Sandefur, and Hogan 2003; Troiano 2003). On the positive side, the literature also points to a continuous increase in students with learning disabilities

attending post secondary institutions (Cox and Klas 1996; Barga 1996; Stodden and Dowrick 2000; Mellard, Hall and Parker 2000; Wells, Sandefur, and Hogan 2003; Troiano 2003). As mentioned in the introduction, research in this area is scarce and all authors reporting on the topic recommend an increased research focus.

Cox and Klas (1996) report that during the mid-eighties the provision of services to post secondary students was established through the development of specifically designed centres throughout Canada. These centres involved a number of universities including St. Mary's University, the University of Alberta, the University of Western Ontario, University of British Columbia, Memorial University, and York University. McKee's (1987) study, which involved a survey of the available supports to students with learning disabilities in universities, revealed the following statistics; ten percent of institutions surveyed neglected to provide support to students with learning disabilities, eighteen percent of the sample had written definitions of learning disabilities, and nineteen percent had written policies on learning disabilities. This same research study reported many students with learning disabilities did not obtain support services because of the need to self-identify for the provision of these services. The credibility of these findings requires further investigation. The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (1994) reported that in any college or university of 10,000 students as many as 1000 had some type of disability. It should be noted the above estimated prevalence rates are based on what was known to be the reflective rates of learning disabilities among students in the U.S. context.

Some accommodations underscored in both the Canadian and U.S. contexts as being available to students in post secondary institutions include increased testing times, private testing areas, increased time period to complete a degree, note-takers, scribes, readers, use of technologies such as computer software, calculators, or spell checkers, taped textbooks, use of tape-recorders, and the provision of student advocacy. These accommodations are commonly reported in the literature as being available to post secondary students (Mellard, Hall, and Parker 2000; Stodden and Dowrick 2000). If providing these accommodations increases the success rates among post secondary students then they need to be more readily and consistently available during primary school years to increase educational success rates and post secondary participation of students with learning disabilities and to decrease the reported negative consequences of learning disabilities.

Studies Examining the Experiences of Post Secondary Students

Two studies that surfaced in the literature review were of particular interest because their focus was to examine the experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities using a grounded theory approach. The first, Barga (1996) examined factors that contributed to the success of students with learning disabilities to explain how students with learning disabilities manage their difficulties from kindergarten through college. This study was undertaken in response to the recognized high school drop out rates of students with learning disabilities estimated at 40% compared to a 25% drop out rate for their non-learning disabled peers. Barga (1996) had two main objectives. The first objective

was to describe how students with learning disabilities managed their learning disabilities in education at different point in their lives. The second objective was to examine the factors that contributed to the academic success of students with learning disabilities.

The sample in Barga's (1996) study was obtained through the Director of the Learning Disabilities Clinic at a mid-size undergraduate university. Students with learning disabilities were defined in the study as those diagnosed by a school psychologist or educational institution that followed the U.S. government description and categorization of learning disabilities. Successful students with learning disabilities were defined as those who had graduated from high school and were currently completing a college degree. A screening interview was established with individuals who responded to the participation request letter circulated through the disabilities service clinic. This interview served to both screen participants and explain the nature of the study.

Students ranged in age from 18 to 45 years of age with a median age of 27.5 years. The sample size in this study was nine university students (n=9). Data was collected over a six-month period and consisted of semi-structured, open ended, taped interviews, classroom observations, and a review of academic files and other documents that related to the participants. Interviews focused on exploring student history and educational experiences from their primary school years through to their post secondary educational experience (Barga 1996).

The theoretical model developed from the analysis found themes embedded in the data that suggested students experienced various interrelated forms of

labeling, stigmatization, and gate keeping that created barriers for them in education (Barga 1996). Labeling was linked to both positive and negative aspects of the concept. Labeling was perceived as positive when it helped students make sense of their academic struggles and involved getting help, therefore labeling in this sense provided relief (Barga 1996). Labeling was perceived as negative when it created conditions of being set apart from peers or receiving differential treatment from others (Barga 1996). Students described this type of negative consequence of labeling occurred when being removed from their classrooms to receive special education, being chastised by peers and teachers for being different (Barga 1996). Findings associated with the concept of labeling are thought to suggest that students define themselves in terms of “normalcy” at a young age, based on how they measure up to peers academically, and school success is an early benchmark of how students view “normalcy” (Barga 1996:415).

Stigmatization is defined as receiving differential treatment based on others perceptions and generally explains, or accounts for, a labeled individual’s feelings of inferiority and the rationalization of differential treatment (Barga 1996). Labels are social definitions placed on others that represent a departure from the commonly held values of the majority within the wider population. Stigmatization occurred in both primary and post secondary educational levels and took on different terms depending on the context. The theoretical theme that emerged around the concept of stigma suggested two distinct types of stigmatization, either self-imposed or forced stigmatization. At the primary school level, stigmatization

occurred in the form of name-calling, accusations, and low academic expectations by peers and teacher. This stigma justified the differential treatment, tending to be more indicative of forced stigmatization.

At the post secondary level, labeling was self-imposed, or forced, because students were required to self identify their learning disability to receive accommodations. Self-imposed stigma occurred when students had to self disclose the nature of their learning disability to department professors for securing the accommodations required to promote their academic success, such as extra test time, or test readers (Barga 1996). The worst stigmatization occurred when faculty or departments would suggest students with learning disabilities change to another field of study because the current field would be too difficult for them to succeed academically. The student's learning disability became linked to their intellect rather than to the need for accommodations. An important finding in this study was that students whose learning disability hindered their ability in their major area of study experienced stigmatization because they were forced to self identify in order to receive accommodations. In contrast, students whose learning disability did not hinder them in their major area of study did not experience stigmatization, as they were not affected to the same degree by their learning disability. Therefore, they did not face the need to self identify to receive accommodations.

The process of gate keeping emerged as a concept in this study.

Gate keeping is defined as a barrier process that serves to maintain the status quo of an organization. Gatekeepers could be individuals or institutions that act on behalf of preserving or maintaining quality control of a program or department (Barga 1996:416).

Gate keeping according to Barga (1996) occurs when students with learning disabilities are either denied access to a post secondary institution or allowed access based on a set of conditions. Barga (1996) found a positive relationship between stigma and gate keeping; in essence, forced self-identification tended to result in stigmatization and the experience of gate keeping. However, students that could manage their learning disability without accommodations did not self identify as having a learning disability and therefore did not experience the process of gate keeping.

The theoretical model found labeling, stigmatization, and gate-keeping to be interrelated and these interrelated themes have coping implications for students with learning disabilities. These coping strategies were found to be both positive and negative in nature. Positive techniques were divided into three subcategories that included benefactors, self-improvement techniques, and study skills and management strategies that help students to manage their disability in a positive way (Barga 1996). Benefactors function to provide understanding and emotional support, act as sounding boards for personal problems, help with homework, act as advocates, and drive students to appointments (Barga 1996). “The most frequently cited benefactor by 5 of the 9 students was his or her own biological mother” (Barga 1996:417). Benefactors were identified and relied on by all students in the study.

Students developed particular techniques to help them realize their potentials and increase their academic success that included; extended breaks away from college system demands, seeking and initiating help when needed, use

of positive affirmations for motivation, seeking growth producing situations, and usually establishing classroom seating within the first three rows (Barga 1996). Study skills and management strategies were the most commonly used strategy for academic success among students with learning disabilities. These varied according to specific needs and included management strategies such as use of computer technology, time-management skills, doing relaxation techniques before tests, taping classes, and maintaining a day planner or calendar that organized classes, tests, and appointments (Barga 1996). "Study skills involved utilizing tutorial assistance, test readers, and reading specialists, and setting aside time each night to study" (Barga 1996:418).

Findings from this research have posed practical implications on a number of levels. Firstly, students were able to identify a number of coping strategies that included both personal self-management techniques and use of technologies to accommodate learning weaknesses. Better knowledge of what students with learning disabilities find effective for learning success is important knowledge for educators, administrators, and policy makers to develop early interventions and prevent the negative consequences many students with learning disabilities experience, to increase post secondary participation of students with learning disabilities, and to assist those participating in post secondary education.

Secondly, the study posed implications for best practices in formal school settings at the early, middle, and high school levels as well as post secondary institutions. Increased awareness and understanding about learning disabilities can only lead to

increased educational success for students with learning disabilities and decreases in the negative consequences reported throughout the literature.

The second U.S. based study relevant to this thesis was conducted by Troiano (2003) using the grounded theory approach to examine the phenomenon of experiencing a learning disability in post secondary education. The emergent theory of this study pointed to “self-style” as a means to operationally define the construct of learning disability (Troiano 2003:404). This study was undertaken based on the recognized reality of the increase of students with learning disabilities attending post secondary education. Troiano (2003) recognized that the definition of learning disabilities used throughout the U.S. provided a theoretical basis for conceptualizing learning disability he argued that it fails to provide an operational framework that might guide student affairs practice. Troiano (2003) argued that the recognized confusion and fragmentation that exists in the field of learning disabilities could be traced to the basic problem of operationally defining the construct. Troiano’s (2003) research goal was to develop a framework to explain the phenomenon of experiencing a learning disability in post secondary education from the perspective of the student.

Troiano (2003:405) explored the question, “How do college students with learning disabilities make meaning of their college experience and their diagnosed learning disability”, using the grounded theory approach methodology. The sample obtained in this study consisted of nine undergraduate students (n=9) with learning disabilities enrolled in a large public university. Participants were recruited through the Office of Disability Support Services with forty-one

students expressing interest in participating. Participant selection involved maximizing variation in the sample to ensure diversity with regard to age, gender, academic major, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, type of disability, and time of diagnosis (Troiano 2003).

Data was collected through in-depth participant interviews. The first of these interviews were informal conversations with participants to explore the phenomenon of learning disability and to test some of the tacit theories or assumptions held by the researcher (Troiano 2003). Follow-up interviews consisted of a predetermined outline of topics that were developed from the initial informal interviews to explore the phenomenon of learning disabilities among post secondary students. The interview schedule involved three interviews that each lasted approximately one hour. Permission was requested to audiotape the interviews and participants were told they could stop the tape at any time during the interviews. The grounded theory coding process was used to break down the data, create meaning, and then put data back together in new and different ways (Troiano 2003). The analysis of data consisted of three major types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Troiano 2003).

The theoretical model that emerged at the end of the coding process consisted of one core category and seven subsidiary categories. The core category consisted of a complex set of thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions that for each participant came together to form what was labeled the “self-styled learning disability” (Troiano 2003:407). The core category “self style learning disability” consisted of four main properties: definition of the learning disability, orientation

of the learning disability, condition of the learning disability, and impact of the learning disability. The subsidiary categories that emerged consisted of time of diagnosis, perceived support, level of stigmatization, attributes of personality, willingness to disclose, ability to self-advocate, and level of self-determination. These categories relate to the core “self-styled learning disability” in terms of context, conditions, and consequences. Troiano (2003) found time of diagnosis to relate to a causal condition, perceived support, level of stigmatization, and attributes of personality related to intervening conditions, and willingness to disclose, ability to self-advocate, and level of self-determination to relate to consequence.

Troiano (2003:416) concluded that the theory that emerged in his study “offers a complex view of the developmental tasks associated with experiencing a learning disability in post secondary education”. He suggested that his model also clarifies “several conditions that influence students self-perceptions and several consequences that should be treated as desired outcomes” (Troiano 2003:416). As did the theoretical models that emerged in Barga’s (1996) and Troiano’s (2003) studies, we will see in later chapters, the theoretical model that emerges from the current study poses practical implications for educators, student special service advisors, administrators, and faculty members to increase professional understanding of students with learning disabilities at different educational points. These practical implications can be used for guiding programming policy that provides appropriate academic accommodations, social-emotional, and psychological supports for students with learning disabilities at different

educational points. The emergent theory of this study also clarifies several conditions that influence student perceptions and consequences that should be treated as desired outcomes similar to those uncovered in Troiano's (2003) study. It is these desired outcomes that promote the change in the meaning of learning disabilities in which educational experiences are best described as *Unique Learning Dispositions* to being better described as *Unique Learning Styles*.

Barga's (1996) and Troiano's (2003) theoretical models provide insight into many of the problems reported in the literature that students with learning disabilities are thought to experience and that some individuals are unable to overcome. They also elaborate on some of the solutions necessary to combat these problems. The theoretical models developed in these two research inquiries are pertinent to the current study because essentially the same phenomenon has been examined utilizing the same research methodology. The theoretical framework that emerged in this study has been compared with the theoretical models that emerged in Barga's (1996) and Troiano's (2003) undertakings to determine how the models compare and if the lived experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities in the Canadian context are the same or different from our U.S. counterparts.

The purpose of the investigation outlined in this thesis is to develop a theoretical model for understanding what it means to have a learning disability at different educational points by highlighting the challenges and barriers participants with learning disabilities report experiencing as well as to determine their identified solutions that address these difficulties for successful high school

completion and participation in post secondary education. The findings of this research endeavor will have best practice implications within education for the development of a formal intervention approach to help students with learning disabilities succeed, thrive and reach their full potentials based on the voices of those with a shared experience that have succeeded.

Barga's (1996) theoretical model will be compared with what has emerged in this study to explain the challenges and barriers experienced by students with learning disabilities within education. Troiano's (2003) theoretical model will be compared with what has emerged in this research inquiry to explain what it means to have a learning disability within post secondary education.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**Research Statement**

This thesis explored the personal educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities currently enrolled in post secondary education in the Province of Manitoba. The purpose of this thesis was to develop a theoretical model for understanding the challenges and barriers post secondary students with learning disabilities face throughout their educational experiences and their identified solutions that address these difficulties for successful high-school completion and participation in post secondary education.

Research Design

This thesis employed the qualitative research design of Grounded Theory developed collaboratively by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. This approach uses systematic techniques and procedures of analysis to enable the researcher to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing “good” science: significance, theory observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor, and verification (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Grounded theory that is well constructed will meet four central criteria: fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This research methodology has been used for the purpose of building rather than testing theories.

This research approach incorporates inductive guidelines for the systematic analysis of data to build theoretical frameworks that explain the collection of data. The relationships between categories and their subsequent properties,

action/interaction, and their consequences within specific contextual situations derived inductively during the data analysis process of constant comparison will paint the picture of participant's experiences with learning disabilities. Use of this approach involves comparing different people's views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences to develop an explanation of the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Open coding was the first step in breaking down, examining, conceptualizing, and comparing data. Coding generates the conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Systematic comparisons of the emerging concepts within the data are made one against the other to develop categories and further comparisons give way to the properties of the emerging categories (Glaser 1992). The analytic process from which the emerging theory is derived involves rigorous comparisons of data-to-data, concept-to-concept and category-to-category (Glaser 1992).

Initial or open coding procedures involve the examination of each line of data for defining actions or events within the data through the process of line-by-line coding. According to Glaser (1978) line-by-line coding keeps us studying our data, helps us generate ideas inductively, remain in tune with participants views of their realities, and deters us from imposing our own beliefs and biases on the data. This coding sharpens our use of sensitizing concepts (background ideas that inform the overall research problem) offering ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience (Glaser 1978). Line-by-line coding keeps us thinking about what meaning we make of our data, asking ourselves questions of it,

pinpointing gaps, and leading the focus on subsequent data collection (Charmaz 1993).

Theoretical sampling is the process of comparing data with data to develop the provisional set of relative categories for explaining the data. The emerging categories bring the researcher back to the data to gain more insight about when, how and to what extent they are pertinent and useful. The process of theoretical sampling helps define the properties of the categories that identify contexts in which they are relevant, specific conditions under which they arise, in which instances they are maintained or vary, and help identify specific consequences that are associated to experiences. Axial coding is a way of putting the data together in different ways based on the properties, categories, and subsidiary categories that emerged in the data.

The processes used to conduct theoretical sampling occur in the various coding approaches, constant comparison of the data, linking the categories, examining under which conditions and situations specific consequences occur. The method of analysis employed in developing grounded theory is the constant comparative method. This has four aspects: comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Constant comparisons will be central in the data analysis process of this study for developing a theoretical model that is free of researcher bias and reflective of participant perceptions.

Theoretical saturation occurs when new data fit into categories already devised. When analysis of the data was not yielding new categories, properties or

consequences the process of theoretical saturation was satisfied and the data collected deemed representative of the phenomena. Theoretical saturation is the process used in this methodology to signal the researcher that the information gathered significantly represents the phenomena under study. Theoretical saturation is the last stage in the grounded theory approach to data analysis and theory development.

This approach is referred to in the literature as the “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:62). Theory development involved constant comparisons of participant narratives that could be analyzed and coded for common themes and the variations within these themes. This thesis will explore the theoretical frameworks derived from the data to specify relationships among concepts, which are the basic units of analysis to develop an analytic interpretation of the data in which to focus further data collection, constant comparisons, and analysis for the emerging hypotheses and generation of theory.

Procedures

Sample (n=10)

Participants are university and college students registered for services with Student Disability Service Centres at the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg or Red River College. Participants were recruited through Student Disability Service Centres at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, and Red River College, participants were also recruited through the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba. A request was made to the Disability Services Coordinators at the University of Manitoba, the University of

Winnipeg and Red River College and to the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba Executive Director (see appendices C-F) to distribute a request for research participant's letter to post secondary students that participate in their services (see appendix H). The researcher asked that the attached participant request letter be distributed through regular correspondence occurring between students and these service providers (see appendix H) and that they post a recruitment poster (see appendix I).

The Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) of the University of Manitoba had approved the current research undertaking therefore the ethical committee at the University of Winnipeg granted an ethical approval certificate based on a review of the submitted research proposal that had been submitted to PSREB at the University of Manitoba under the Tri Counsel agreement. Red River College does not follow this protocol and required that a full research proposal and ethics application be processed through the College's research board therefore it was decided to recruit interested Red River College students through the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba's regular correspondence.

The participant recruitment letter explained the nature of the research, informed students of the researcher's ethical obligations of confidentiality, and described participant incentives. Students were asked to contact the researcher by e-mail or telephone to set up an appointment for participation screening and selection. The targeted number of participants for this study was ten ($n=10$).

Participants received a twenty-dollar restaurant gift certificate honorarium as an incentive to participate.

The researcher set up an initial screening interview (see appendix J) to select participants based on the predetermined criteria of a diagnosed learning disability and post secondary student status at a university or college in Manitoba. Learning disability in this study is defined according to the diagnostic criteria outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) and reflective of the definition developed by Learning Disabilities Association of Canada in 2002. The diagnosis must have been obtained through a professional qualified to administer and interpret standardized psychometric tests such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, reading clinician, or speech and language pathologist and considered as acceptable documentation by Student Disability Service Centres to receive accommodation at the post secondary institution the student attends. Other criteria included; that the student was previously a student in the Manitoba education system, that he or she speak English as a first language, and he or she must be eighteen years of age or older. Educational success in this study is defined according to the perception of the participant and current participation in post secondary education.

Participants were provided additional information about the research study before the initial screening interview began. They were encouraged to ask any questions that they had with regard to their participation in the study, and given a consent form that provided them with information about the study and what their participation in the study would involve. Once it was determined that they had a

full understanding of the study participants were asked to sign a consent form in which they were provided a copy for their personal records (see appendix K).

Participants were selected on their ability to commit three hours to participant in this study. The screening interview took approximately forty-five minutes and consisted of two sections. Section A determined participation eligibility and the section B gathered background information on the phenomenon (see appendix J). Once participants were selected, they were asked to participant in two additional semi-structured interviews to collect their narrative stories about their past and present educational experiences. They were informed that each of the additional interviews was expected to take one-hour in duration per interview. They were also informed that to avoid having participants feel pressured to share their narrative stories within a restricted time frame that they could take as much time as they felt they needed. Actual interview times for the second and third interviews were within the one-hour per interview anticipated with all participants.

Participant selection aimed at maximizing variation in the sample to ensure diversity with regard to age, gender, academic major, type of learning disability, and time of diagnosis. Response to the participant recruitment letters was small and sporadic, therefore the sample ultimately was a sample of opportunity in which variation of age, gender, academic major, and type of learning disability existed by chance. Initial screening involved twelve potential participants in which ten participants were selected to participate in the additional two narrative interviews. Two participants were screened out because they did not meet the

participation criteria in section A of the screening interview as one individual was not previously educated in Manitoba during the K-S4 school years and the other individual was not currently a post secondary student nor were they a resident of Manitoba. Participants were given the option of completing the interviews in my office at the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba or in a quiet space at the University of Manitoba. Nine participants came to my office at the Learning Disabilities Association for all three interviews one participant met with me at the University of Manitoba to complete the second and third narrative interviews.

Data Collection

Data collection involved one face-to-face, close-ended screening interview and two in-depth, tape-recorded interviews to obtain participant narratives with ten participants registered in post secondary institutions located the city of Winnipeg in the Province of Manitoba. Data was collected from Disability Services Centre personnel; of the three post secondary institutions participants attend, to explore current trends of post secondary students with learning disabilities registered for services. Disability Services personnel were provided with a questionnaire consisting of nine questions (see appendix L) and met with the researcher to discuss the current trends among students with learning disabilities within their educational institutions over the past three years.

First Interview: Participant Screening Questionnaire (n=12)

The first objective of the screening interview was to ensure participants met the outlined participation criteria obtained in section A. The second objective of the screening interview was to gain insight that would allow for participant

selection that increased sample variation. Eligible participants were given section B of the screening interview, which provided participant background information that highlighted differences in initial experiences such as age and the grades of diagnosis, type of learning disability, as well as specific educational approaches experienced in terms of interventions and accommodations, high school completion, and workforce participation. Variations in participant experiences occurred by chance rather than through selective screening for differences in participant experiences. Initially it was hoped that selection could occur from a potential sample of twenty interested individuals. However, the response of students with learning disabilities expressing interest in participating was limited to a total of twelve individuals. The participant-screening questionnaire consisted of forty-six, closed-ended questions within ten topic sections.

There were twelve students who contacted the researcher expressing interested in participating in this study. Ten of these students met all the participation criteria outlined in section A of the first interview and were recruited to participate in the study. The initial participant screening interview took forty-five minutes to complete. A ten-minute debriefing occurred at the end of the interview to ensure that negative feelings did not arise because of the questions asked during the interview. Participants did not report experiencing negative emotions as a result of participating in the first interview. However, one participant did report during the debriefing of the second interview that some mixed feelings did arise after the initial screening and debriefing. This participant indicated that these feelings were found to be motivating and increased interest in

participating in the following two narrative interviews. This participant did not report experiencing negative feelings after the second or third interviews indicating that participating in the study was empowering because it gave them a voice. In fact all participants indicated feeling empowered through their participation in this research and viewed the study to be important. They indicated that they hoped that the results would lead to changes that would make a difference for others with learning disabilities.

Data collected in the face-to-face, close-ended questionnaire was entered into the SPSS statistical analysis software program. The sample is not large enough for any type of statistical analysis using this software. However creating a data-base using SPSS allowed for the organization of the data into frequency tables. These frequency tables were used by the researcher to examine the data to determine if variation existed within the sample with regard to initial experiences such as age and the grades of diagnosis, type of learning disability, as well as specific educational approaches experienced in terms of interventions and accommodations, high school completion, and workforce participation.

Information gathered will be reported in chapter five of the findings sections First Interview: Participant Screening Questionnaire.

Second Interview: Early Educational Experiences K-S4 (n=10)

The second interview in this study involved participants sharing narratives about their early educational experiences from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-S4). These narratives were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews using interview probes (see appendix M) that required participants to elaborate on

their personal early educational experiences K-S4. The goal of the narrative data collection was to obtain spontaneous participant narratives therefore the interview probes were primarily meant to deal with conversational lags. These interviews were tape-recorded; participants were informed that they could stop the tape-recorder at any time, and that they could decline from elaborating on any topic sections or interview probe.

The question probes for the second interview consisted of seven section topics initially presented within Section B of the participant screening questionnaire and an eighth section that invited participants to share any additional information they thought was important to share. There are thirty-seven question probes within the seven specific topic sections that guided the semi-structured interview process. The Interview question probes were only used to get the narratives started or during conversational lags, as the goal was to obtain spontaneous participant narratives within each topic section to keep in line with the grounded theory approach. Narratives were tape-recorded, transcribed and the material obtained was used as the raw data for analysis and theoretical development. An additional ten-minutes was spent at the end of these interviews for participant debriefing to ensure that the recollection of past educational experiences did not produce any negative emotions. Participants reported that they enjoyed participating in the study and felt that their participation was an opportunity to have a voice around the issue.

Third Interview: Post Secondary Education and Identified Solutions (n=10)

The third interviews were semi structured and involved gathering in-depth participant narratives that described the meaning of post secondary education for participant's and explored their identified solutions to the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities often experience at different points in education. Question probes (see appendix N) were used during the narrative data collection for these interviews in the same fashion as was described above for the Second Interview: Early Educational Experiences K-S4. The probes for the final interview consisted of seven topic sections found in section B of the participant screening questionnaire and within the interview sections used for the second interview that involved gathering narratives about participant's early educational experiences K-S4, however the focus was directed toward post secondary educational experiences. The third interview consisted of thirty-seven probe questions within the seven specific topic sections and an eighth section that invited participants to share any additional information they thought was important that hadn't been covered within the interview. These interviews were tape-recorded and participants were informed that they could stop the tape recorder at any time. Participants did not report experiencing any negative emotions during the ten-minute debriefing at the end of the interview, but rather most of the participants reported feeling empowered by participating in the study and felt good about the research in general.

Participant identity was linked to a code number during the initial participant screening interview and this code was attached to information obtained

from the transcribed second and third interview data to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. All materials were stored in a locked cabinet at a secure location and raw data destroyed and properly disposed of on completion of the final report writing of this thesis.

In addition, the researcher initiated contact with the appropriate persons responsible for accommodating students with learning disabilities at the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, and Red River College to gather information about the enrollment trends of students with disabilities using their services. This information was gathered for a four-year period beginning with the regular session year of 2003-2004, and including 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 to determine if Manitoba is experiencing increased participation of students with learning disabilities attending post secondary education as is the reported trend in the literature. Other aggregate information of interest was collected with regard to the type of learning disabilities in which services are provided, gender differences of students using disability services, and which departments and faculties that students are registered. Questions were also directed at student enrollment trends such as if they transitioned to post secondary directly from high school or if entry was more commonly as a mature student, and the mean age of students (see appendix L). Responses to these questions were reliant on the tracking process of each educational setting and the liberty to share this information according to the privacy act.

Data Analysis

The focus of this thesis is to develop a substantive theory about the lived experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities that highlight the challenges and barriers experienced during their educational histories and their identified solutions to these difficulties. The raw data analyzed for developing the central concepts substantive to the theoretical framework through the process of coding was the transcribed materials obtained during the second interview that gathered information that pertained to early educational experiences K-S4 and the third interview that captured information about participants post secondary educational experiences and their identified solutions to promote educational success among all students with learning disabilities.

This involved color-coding each line of the narrative data so that participant narratives were linked to an identification number and a specific color-code. This was done so that the researcher could identify specific narrative material yet break the data down using the open coding procedure to identify the concepts and categories, subsequent properties, and consequences for analysis. Having the data color-coded and linked to the participant identity code allowed for data comparisons of participant to participant experiences to explore similarities and differences within the data. The process of concept refinement occurs by comparing data-to-data, concept-to-concept, and category-to-category for discovering the predominant themes for theoretical development. Participant narratives were also linked to a pseudonym in order to be able to use quotes from

the narratives that provide a story line for participants within the findings without revealing their personal identity.

Open coding was the first step in breaking down, examining, conceptualizing, and comparing data. Coding generated the conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena. Systematic comparisons of the emerging concepts within the data were made one against the other to develop categories and further comparisons gave way to the properties of the emerging categories. Axial coding involved asking questions about the data and putting it together in a way that provided insight into the phenomena and enabled the researcher to reassemble the data so that it provided information about the causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, and consequences along with the dimensions that give each category further specification using the paradigm model for theoretical development. Selective coding was used to identify the core category as the central phenomena around which all other categories relate. It is the core category that captures the experiential essence of being a student with a learning disability at different educational points *Unique Learning Dispositions* and *Unique Learning Styles*.

In my interpretation of the data theoretical saturation did occur, as participant narratives were not yielding any new information that gave way to additional concepts or categories. When analysis of the data was not yielding new categories, properties or consequences the process of theoretical saturation was satisfied and the data collected deemed representative of the phenomena. Strauss (1987) developed the coding paradigm, which is a high-level model, or organizing

structure for data analysis intended to guide researchers attempting to generate grounded theory. The coding paradigm guides the researcher in the data analysis process in which data is analyzed in terms of conditions, interactions among the actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. Use of this model enables the researcher to think systematically as subcategories are linked to a category in a set of relationships.

Chapter 4

**FINDINGS REGARDING POST SECONDARY PARTICIPATION TRENDS
FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES**

Current studies on the statistics of students with learning disabilities attending post secondary education suggest this group is under-represented but continuously growing. Stodden and Dowrick (2000) reported that the number of students attending universities and colleges in the United States has increased from three-percent in 1978, to nine percent in 1994, to nearly nineteen percent in 1996. The trend is thought to be similar in the Canadian context. In fact, in conversations with personnel from Student Disability Service Centres at three post secondary institutions in the Province of Manitoba it was confirmed that the numbers continue to climb every year at a steady pace.

J. Morris-Wales coordinator of Disability Services at the University of Manitoba at the time (personal communication, April 2004) indicated that twenty-percent of all students registered with Student Disability Services were receiving supports for Learning Disabilities (LD), and another forty-two percent were receiving services for LD/ADHD combined or ADHD. The total percentage of the 597 students registered for services for LD or ADHD difficulties was thirty-three percent. At the University of Winnipeg, K. McCluskey, Associate Dean of Education at the time (personal communication, April 2004) indicated that twenty-seven percent of students enrolled with Disability Services were diagnosed and receiving supports because of a LD, another forty-eight percent were registered because of ADHD. Of the 290 students registered for services

seventy-five percent were registered because of LD and ADHD diagnoses. R. Rogalsky, Director of Counselling Services, at Red River College at the time (personal communication, April 2004) indicated they do not separate students diagnosed with LD and those diagnosed with ADHD, but combined these students made up forty-two percent of the 407 students registered as a result of a disability. All three of these individuals indicated that they expected increases in the number of students requiring services for LD in the up-coming registration year and that this trend has been observed over the past decade. This data is represented in Table 1 titled Students Registered with Disability Services Academic Years 2003-04 through 2006-07 in 2003-04 Table 1-1 (see Table 1: 254).

In July 2007 the researcher again contacted the appropriate persons responsible for accommodating students with learning disabilities. Roslyn Gates was contacted at the University of Manitoba, Andrea Johnston at the University of Winnipeg, and Lauren Janzen at Red River College to gather current information about the enrollment trends of students with disabilities using their services. Information was collected for a three-year period beginning with the regular session year of 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07 to determine if Manitoba did experience the expected increase in participation of students with learning disabilities attending post secondary education. Data collection involved completion of a nine-question survey and personal communications with each individual. With regard to rates of enrollment the data was not available for all of the academic years of interest from the University of Winnipeg or Red River College, however it was available from the University of Manitoba. This data is

presented in Table 1 titled Students Registered with Disability Services Academic Years 2003-04 through 2006-07 in tables 2003-04 1-1, 2004-05 Table 1-2, 2005-06 Table 1-3, and 2006-07 Table 1-4 (see Table 1: 254). Additional information highlighting student post secondary enrollment trends in Manitoba is presented in Table 2 titled Student Trends for the Academic Years 2004-05 through 2006-07 in tables 2-1 through 2-3 (see Table 2: 256).

The University of Manitoba showed a decrease in the percentage of students registered for assistance with exclusive difficulties because of LD or ADHD compared to the percentage rates found during the 2003-04 academic year that was specific to either LD or ADHD. Rates for the 2004-05 academic year for LD or ADHD were reported to be fourteen percent for students registered specifically for LD and four percent of students were registered specifically for ADHD. In addition, an increase was noted in which forty-two percent of students who were registered for services because of comorbid LD/ADHD. Students registered at the University of Manitoba for LD and/or ADHD difficulties was sixty percent of the overall 689 students registered for services during the 2004-05 academic year. An overall increase of twenty-seven percent was reported for the 2004-05 academic year for students registered because of LD and ADHD related difficulties compared to the previous academic year at the University of Manitoba refer to Tables 1-1 and 1-2 in Table 1: 254.

The University of Manitoba showed a decrease in students registered for services with LD or ADHD during the 2005-06 academic year. The Disability Services Centre had a total of 737 students registered for services of which only

twenty-two percent were registered for accommodations because of learning disabilities or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. When this was broken down eleven percent were registered because of LD, five percent because of ADHD, and six percent because of combined LD/ADHD. It was indicated during the interview that Disability Services were experiencing an increase in students registering for accommodations with difficulties related to mental health issues. It was also noted that common difficulties experienced by this influx of student registrations related to anxiety and depression. The overall decrease in student registrations by students with LD or ADHD related difficulties for the academic year 2005-06 at the University of Manitoba from the previous year was thirty-eight percent refer to Table 1-3 in Table 1: 254.

Raw data was collected from all three institutions for the 2006-07 academic year. The University of Manitoba reported having 132 students registered because of LD and 38 students registered for LD/ADHD comorbid. These raw numbers are up from the previous year however the total number of students registered was not available therefore it was not possible to determine the percentage rate. The University of Winnipeg indicated that they had a total of 56 students with LD registered for services during the summer session. Again lack of available information at the time inhibited the ability to determine the overall percentage rate. Red River College indicated that they had 281 students registered with LD during the 2006-07 academic year but again the total number of students registered was not available at the time of the interview. The information available at the time of the interview from all three post secondary institutions

makes it difficult to determine the enrollment rate trend for the 2006-07 academic year.

Additional aggregate information was collected with regard to the type of learning disabilities in which services are provided, gender differences of students using disability services, and which departments and faculties in which students are registered that had not been previously collected with disability services personnel in April 2004. This additional information explored enrollment trends such as transitions to post secondary directly from high school or if entry was more commonly as a mature student, and the mean age of students. The tracking systems of each post secondary institution differed in terms of what type of information they had available therefore comparing trends between institutions is not possible.

The University of Manitoba was able to provide information with regard to the area of study in which students registered for the 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years. However, information about gender representation, or transitional trends or supports with regard to entering post secondary education directly from high school or enrolling as mature student status was not available. This information is highlighted in tables titled Student Trends for the Academic Years 2004-05 through 2006-07 in 2004-05 Table 2-1, 2005-06 Table 2-2, and 2006-07 Table 2-3 (see Table 2: 256). The University of Manitoba had gender representation information for 162 of the 170 students registered for the 2006-07 academic year with 71 males and 91 females registered for services. Gender for the remaining eight students listed in the database was unknown. Anecdotal

information from the University of Manitoba with regard to the transitional support used by students when enrolling indicated that parents or resource teachers attend with students from time to time. However, this information is not recorded in the database therefore it is not possible to get a snap shot with regard to the trend of transitional support being given students with learning disabilities transitioning to post secondary education. In the academic year 2006-07 more comprehensive information was available from the University of Winnipeg and Red River College refer to 2006-07 Table 2-3 in Table 2: 256 for information about student trends for that year from all three post secondary institutions. With regard to gender rates the University of Winnipeg reported gender representation as consisting of 28 males and 28 females with age range of 19-42 years of age during the summer session of that year. Red River College reported having 138 males and 143 females registered for services during 2006-07 regular session.

With regard to area of study the University of Manitoba did not have this information available for the 2006-07 academic year. However the previous years are reported in Table titled Student Trends for the Academic Years 2004-05 through 2006-07 in the following tables: 2004-05 Table 2-1 and 2005-06 Table 2-2 (see Table 2: 256). These tables show that 19% of students were registered in University I, 19% in Arts, and 13% in Science during the 2004-05 academic year. During the 2005-06 academic year 17% of students were registered in University 1, 19% in Arts, and 13% in Science at the University of Manitoba. During the 2006-07 academic year the University of Winnipeg reported that 42% of students were enrolled in arts, 5% in education, 8% in science, and 32% were undeclared

refer to 2006-07 Table 2-3 (see Table 2: 256). For the same academic year Red River College reported that students with LD are most often enrolled in community services and nursing, marketing and management or apprentice programs, the rate of enrollment were not available nor was information for the other categories. The University of Winnipeg indicated that 7% of students were registered as mature students, or fit the status as mature student but that others who enrolled that way could now be registered as a regular student. It was also indicated that 43% of the students currently enrolled had transitioned directly from high school to the University of Winnipeg.

Summary

It appears with the exception of the 2005-06 academic year that enrollment in post secondary education has increased at a fairly steady pace at the University of Manitoba for students with learning disabilities. During conversations with the student services personnel it was indicated that the enrollment rate among students with LD does remain at a steady pace at all three institutions. In addition, it was mentioned by personnel from all three post secondary institutions that students registered for support services because of mental health issues was an increasing trend. The information available at the post secondary level is not complete and may vary from year to year. There does appear however to be a tracking system in place in all three institutions with regard to enrollment rates. Variation exists in terms of what other additional information is gathered with regard to students enrolled for services. However, all three institutions do have formal criteria in place for identifying students with learning disabilities and

providing them with the resources they need to enable these students to pursue their academic goals and participate in post secondary education.

It should also be mentioned that all three institutions reported providing students that meet the criteria for services access to similar supports. In conversations with J. Morris-Wales, K. McCluskey, and D. Rogalsky (personal communication, April 2004) and more recent conversations with R. Gates, A. Johnston, and L. Jansen (personal communication July 2007) it was indicated that the types of services they provide to students were specific to their personal needs. Some of the accommodations they underscored as being available to students were increased testing times, private testing areas, increased time period to complete a degree, note-takers, scribes, readers, use of technologies such as computer software, calculators, or spell checkers, taped textbook, use of tape-recorders, and the provision of student advocacy. These accommodations are commonly reported in the literature (Mellard, Hall, and Parker 2000, Stodden and Dowrick 200) as being available to post secondary students in the American context. Thus it is evident that at the post secondary level there is a formal action plan in place to help students succeed academically in the province of Manitoba. Canada and Manitoba Student Financial Aid provide specific funding to students with learning disabilities to enable them to gain access to private tutoring, or specialized technology. This funding is provided through the Canada Access Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities and the Canada Study Grant for the Accommodation of Students with Permanent Disabilities.

In addition, it is important to note that there is more comprehensive information available about students with learning disabilities at the post secondary level than was found to be available with regard to students in the K-S4 educational institutions within the province. During preliminary inquiries, it was virtually impossible to gain any information about the percentage of students enrolled in the public school system with learning disabilities or the number of students who had been assessed for learning disabilities in a given year. Attempts that were made to gather this information from Government of Manitoba Departments held responsible for providing funding and educational guidelines within the province were fruitless. Inquiries were directed to Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, and the offices of the Minister of Education, Healthy Child Manitoba and the Child Guidance Clinic. However specific information about students with learning disabilities attending public school within Manitoba or the number of students being assessed for learning disabilities each year was unobtainable. This information is apparently not formally tracked. This is problematic since these are the key government departments who would need this information to design a system of support for students with learning disabilities. The lack of a formal tracking system in place within the public education system and supporting government departments hinders the potential to development systematic approaches for providing educators with the knowledge they need to work effectively with students who have learning disabilities. Also, the capacity for developing formal action plans that provide students with the appropriate interventions and preventative measures needed for academic success and

personal well being becomes limited. It also appears that funding is more readily available at the post secondary level to enable students with learning disabilities to succeed through government grants than is available for students with learning disabilities during the K-S4 educational years. Family socioeconomic status potentially becomes central in gaining access to technological support or specialized assistance outside of the public education for students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 5

**FINDINGS OF FIRST INTERVIEW: PARTICIPANT SCREENING
QUESTIONNAIRE**

The first interview screened for participant criteria eligibility and looked at the variation within the sample. All ten participants met the criteria outlined in section A of the questionnaire related to post secondary student status and were registered with the Disabilities Services Department at their post secondary institution. All had English as a first language and were eighteen years of age or over, diagnosed learning disability by a professional qualified to diagnose, and educated within the Manitoba school system during the educational K-S4. It was observed during the interview screening that the first six participants attending the interview were left-handed. Although this was not a question within the questionnaire this observation seemed a little unusual because left-handedness in the sample was occurring more frequently than would be expected given the frequency of left-handedness expected within the general population. Overall, six of the ten participants were left-handed.

Section B of the questionnaire did find that participants varied in the time of formal learning disability diagnosis, procedures taken for academic accommodation within the school system, and family response, and access to private resources. However specific academic difficulties associated with their learning disability varied less as nine of the ten participants reported difficulties in the areas of reading, spelling, and writing although there was variation in terms of diagnosed comorbidity. Participants consisted of three males and seven females,

ages ranged from twenty to forty-seven years of age with the mean age being 25.4 years. Participants consisted of nine undergraduate students and one graduate student; five reported being full-time students, three part-time students, and two participants were graduating. One student from the faculty of fine arts, and the other had just completed their Ph D. from the Faculty of Medicine with a focus in biochemistry and genetics. Of the three institutions participants attended, six attended the University of Manitoba, three the University of Winnipeg, and one attended Red River College. Areas of study were reported as follows; three participants studied in arts, one in fine arts, one in engineering, one in education, one in early childhood education, one in University 1 with nursing as their long-term goal, one in theatre, and one in the faculty of medicine.

Awareness of Learning Disability

In terms of type of disability; two participants had been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome comorbid with learning disabilities, two participants reported comorbid ADHD predominately inattentive type with a learning disability, one with an information processing disability, and the remaining five participants reported their diagnoses as learning disabilities with specific difficulties with reading, spelling, and writing. Two participants reported an additional medical condition of epilepsy; one participant with a comorbid diagnosis of Aspergers Syndrome and one participant with a learning disability that they referred to as dyslexia. In total, two males and three females reported a reading learning disability referred to as dyslexia while the four other participants

reporting difficulties with reading, spelling, and writing did not make use of the term dyslexia.

Participants reported being aware of their learning disability during a range of ages one as early as age five, four indicated before age six, five between ages eight to thirteen. In terms of grades that this awareness came about eight of the ten participants indicated they became aware in the years K-4, and two during middle year's grades 5-8. In essence all participants were aware that they learnt differently from their peers before a formal assessment or diagnosis had occurred.

Assessment, Diagnosis and Academic Action Plan

Participants underwent formal assessments in which five participants indicated that this occurred during the K-4 grades, four during middle year's grades 5-8 and one was never informally or formally assessed until post secondary. Formal assessment did not necessarily result in a formal diagnosis of a learning disability as two of the participants assessed during the K-S4 educational years suggested they did not receive a formal diagnosis until they were formally assessed during post secondary education.

Only five participants reported that a formal diagnosis lead to an academic action plan, of these, two experienced the behavior issues associated with Aspergers Syndrome and two attended a specialized school Laureate Academy specifically directed at students with learning disabilities or ADHD, and one participant attended the French program. Additionally, one participant did attend a private residential school beginning in grade nine after they had been streamed out of the high school system into a technical program. Otherwise participants

reported academic assistance was restricted to occasional resource help that all participants reported to be insufficient to help them with the degree of educational difficulty they experienced. Resource help began during the early elementary years K-4 for five participants, three participants received resource help during the middle year's grades 5-8, and one reported they did not receive any assistance until grade ten, which occurred at a private residential school. One participant hid their learning disability and was not formally aware until post secondary therefore help was never offered during the K-S4 educational years.

Academic Implications

Some variation existed in terms of specific academic areas of difficulty participants reported experiencing. Participants reported experiencing difficulties in the following areas: math difficulties are reported by eight participants; reading, spelling, or note taking difficulties are reported by seven participants; writing or attention difficulties are reported by six participants. Four participants reported memory difficulties; and three participants report information-processing difficulties during their educational experiences K-S4. Within the overall sample five participants reported having behavioural issues and/or severe social difficulties related to being bullied during the K-S4 grades and all participants reported feeling isolated from peers throughout the K-S4 educational years.

Specific other areas of difficulty were reported by five participants as being related to getting the main point of material, time management and organization, having to cover materials many times to understand the information, and an inability to handwrite or read handwriting. These challenges were reported as

continuing difficulties that existed during the K-S4 years and remained issues during their post secondary educational experiences. All participants reported experiencing difficulties in the same academic and cognitive areas during their post secondary education as they had experienced during earlier educational experiences with the exception of math as only four participants reported continuing to have difficulty with math. However it was not determined if the participants who no longer reported having difficulty in math were required to take any math courses at the post secondary level.

Participants were asked if they had specific areas of strengths. It was nice to hear that all participants reported recognizing areas of strength. Seven participants indicated these areas of strengths as being in specific subject areas such as math, science, social studies, history, or creative writing. Five participants mentioned visual spatial strengths; four indicated kinesthetic strengths; and one participant indicated she or he was artistically inclined. Other specific strengths reported by four participants were in the areas of expressive and receptive oral language, literature, abstract thinking, and problem solving.

Interpersonal Relationships with Family, Teachers, and Peers

Participants were asked if their interpersonal relationships were affected as a direct consequence of their learning disability. Nine of the ten participants reported their relationships with teachers, and peers to have been negatively affected. Seven participants indicated that personal relationships with family members had been affected. Four participants reported they had teachers or guidance counselors during their senior school years that directed them toward

post secondary education. All participants reported receiving continuous positive support and direction from their family to continue in their education with the most common source of this support coming from their mothers. Participants also reported still using a benefactor to help them manage within post secondary education reporting having either a parent or spouse as their primary support. Awareness of other students with learning disabilities during the K-S4 educational years was not common among participants and if they were aware of other students it was not clear to them what type of learning disability the other students experienced or their educational outcomes. Participants tended to be more aware of other students with learning disabilities at the post secondary level.

Associated Features (negative consequences)

All participants reported experiencing problems with the associated features of learning disabilities outlined in the DSM-IV (2000) and described in the Learning Disability Association of Canada National Definition (2002) describing learning disabilities and potential negative consequences. These associated features occur in the social, emotional, and psychological domains. A total of eight participants reported experiencing social difficulties, which related to making friends, maintaining friends, being teased, and bullied. These experiences were reported to be most intense during the K-8 grades although for some participants these experiences continued into the high school setting.

All participants reported experiencing difficulties in the emotional and psychological domains. Ten participants reported feeling stupid, while eight of the ten reported experiencing feelings of helplessness, or being overwhelmed, and

seven participants reported feelings of hopelessness. Other consequences reported by all ten participants were experiences of distress. Low self-esteem and low self-confidence was indicated by eight participants; six participants commented on having experienced anxiety and thoughts of school dropout; depression was a reported experience of five participants; and negative coping, such as substance abuse, was indicated by five participants. Thoughts of suicide were reported by six of the ten participants; this is alarming because they reported having these thoughts at young ages corresponding with elementary and middle year's education. These negative associated features were more prevalent during their early educational experiences as four of the participants indicated that their educational experiences were better once in high school.

Advocacy, Learning Style, Educational Interventions, and Transitions

Advocacy, learning style, educational interventions, and transitional supports are important issues reported in the literature that have been found to lead to success for students with learning disabilities. Participants were asked specific questions that relate to these areas and as stated above, all reported receiving some sort of positive support usually from their mother who was indicated by most participants as being their primary advocate during the K-S4 educational years. When asked specifically about having an advocate within the school system seven participants reported that they were familiar with someone advocating on their behalf for them. Participants also indicated that interventions provided by resource was mostly insufficient to help them with their degree of academic difficulty and eight of ten participants did indicate receiving some sort

of specialized strategies or accommodations usually occurring in middle years or high school.

Of the specific accommodations reported in the literature to be effective for helping students with learning disabilities succeed academically, seven participants reported receiving resource teacher help, six had access to a private test area and small group participation, five indicated that they had extra test time and access to private tutoring, four reported having study skills training and a tutor, and three had use of technical support such as a computer, a note taker, and one-on-one tutoring. Also, two participants indicated they received direct instruction around time management and organization, and a scribe to help with written work, while one received a reader, and one participant reported having access to the use of taped books. With the exception of resource teacher help, these accommodations were not reported to have been available to participants until middle year's grades 5-8 or later, occurring inconsistently.

Three participants reported having Individual Education Plans (IEP) in place, two during middle year's grades 5-8 with one participant reporting that this plan was put in place during the elementary grades K-4. Individual Transition Plans (ITP) were also reported to have been developed for these three participants to help with educational transitions from middle years grades 5-8 to high school and then to post secondary education. Of these participants two reported having a learning disability comorbid with Aspergers diagnoses therefore there were behavioural components that enabled these students to meet the criteria for the higher funding levels available within the Manitoba education system. Manitoba

Education, Citizenship and Youth mandates that school personnel have both an IEP and an ITP put into place for students meeting the criteria and receiving level II or III funding. The other participant who reported having an individual education plan in place attended the French educational program within Manitoba and reported having an IEP and ITP in place during the elementary school years grades K-4.

Educational History and Personal Educational Views

Participants were asked if they completed high school credits in regular high school, transitioned to work before entering post secondary education and if they thought of themselves as educationally successful. In terms of educational history eight participants reported that they completed high school credits in regular high school and two completed credits in an adult education program, seven participants reported working before they transitioned to post secondary education however some of these employment positions consisted of part-time employment while completing high school. Of the ten participants in the sample nine reported that they were academically successful and the individual who did not view them self as academically successful was currently experiencing difficulties at the post secondary level.

Participation and Academic Management in Post Secondary Education

Participants were asked questions about participation and academic management in post secondary education. Questions in this section examined student transitions to post secondary education, specific areas of study, and the types of accommodations available and used by students for educational success.

Of the total sample five participants reported transitioning directly to university or college from high school while five reported their initial enrolment was as a mature student. Only three participants indicated that their current field of study was not their first choice. All participants reported experiencing academic difficulty at the post secondary level that is directly related to their learning disability. Their reported difficulties are consistent with the difficulties experienced during previous educational experiences. Nine of the ten participants indicated that these difficulties occur within their major or minor fields of study.

Participants reported that they have specific management strategies in use to help them overcome weaknesses and draw on their strengths for educational success. Management strategies reported were study strategies by eight participants, time management strategies by seven participants, and use of technological supports by five participants. When asked if they made use of the services and supports available through their post secondary institutions Student Disability Service Centres in which nine of the ten participants noted that they actively accessed services available. One participant indicated that they did not want to disclose their disability for services as they found this stigmatizing. All of the participants accessing accommodations through their educational institution received extra test time, eight used a private testing area, five participants used note takers, four reported having a private tutor, two reported using a scribe, taped books, study group participation and one participant indicated they recorded lectures. Five participants reported using other personal supports such as professor clarification, editor for papers, study direction, exercise as a self-

management strategy, and a personal advocate along with academic supports such as a parent or spouse.

Challenges, Barriers, and Identified Solutions

Participants were asked about the challenges and barriers they have experienced throughout their educational experiences. All participants indicated they had experienced various challenges and barriers. Of these eight participants reported experiencing challenges within teacher and peer relations; six participants reported challenges within the home related to specific tasks; five indicated that challenges existed within family relations; and one in the area of sports. Five participants commented that they experienced challenges in other contexts such as work or when trying to function within the wider social structure because of general difficulties of daily living. Challenges were explained by the researcher as being areas of difficulty perceived to be a direct consequence of their learning disability that they had to work very hard at to overcome.

When asked about barriers, eight participants indicated they experience specific barriers as a direct result of their learning disability. Of these six reported barriers in the school context, two within teacher relationships, and one participant reported experiencing barriers in the home, family relationships, and with peers. Six participants indicated that they experience barriers in other contexts. Examples given of barriers were with everyday living difficulties, in particular areas of studies such as political science or math, with professors, administration within employment, employment itself, stress, anxiety, and mood, along with the task of handwriting.

Eight participants reported experiencing feelings of stigmatization from time to time that they perceived as being a direct result of their learning disability within their post secondary setting. Six participants suggested they experienced specific barriers within post secondary, while three suggested that they were directed away from an area of study after disclosing their learning disability. The researcher described barriers, as being areas of difficulty perceived to be a direct result of their learning disability and no matter how hard they tried, these difficulties remained issues that they had not been able to overcome. Participants were asked about differences in the available accommodations within the post secondary setting that were not available to them in previous educational settings. Five participants reported that the accommodations currently available to them at post secondary level had not been available to them during their earlier educational experiences.

Summary

In summary, the findings reported in this section were derived from the face-to-face, close-ended interview questionnaire. Specific information was gathered in the questionnaire that report on when specific experiences occurred for participants with respect to age, and grade of awareness, assessment, diagnosis, types of academic difficulties, interventions, interpersonal relationships, family actions, along with various experiences of stigmatization, and negative consequences outlined in the DSM-IV TR (2000) as associated features of learning disabilities.

Participants reported consistency in their experiences with specific academic or cognitive difficulties across educational settings consistently with the exception of math. Some participants reported having access to similar intervention or accommodations across educational settings while others only received formal intervention and accommodations once in the post secondary educational setting unless they had access to private education or tutoring. Interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers were more positive in later education as were interpersonal family relations. Experiences with stigmatization, the negative consequences outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) as associated features of learning disabilities were reported as different experiences for participants during the K-S4 experiences when compared to their post secondary educational experiences.

However the meaning of these experiences as well as the circumstances, or contexts in which they occurred can not be determined from the data gathered in the First Interview: Participant Screening Questionnaire. Therefore the topic sections that were covered within the screening questionnaire were presented to participants in two other interviews, Second Interview: Early Educational Experiences K-S4 Narratives and the Third Interview: Post Secondary Education and Identified Solutions Narratives in order to determine what the meaning of these experiences were for participants. The data derived from these narratives will be further analyzed to develop a theoretical model to explain what it means to have a learning disability at different educational points for students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 6

FINDINGS OF SECOND INTERVIEW: EARLY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES K-S4 NARRATIVES

The second interview in this study involved participants sharing narratives about their early educational experiences from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-S4). The purpose of this interview was to explore the challenges and barriers participants often experience in education at different points in their lives as a consequence of having a learning disability. This interview was tape-recorded and participants were informed that they could ask to stop the tape recorder at anytime or decline responding to any question probes that they were not comfortable with or preferred not to respond to. The second interview consisted of seven sections from section B of the face-to-face, closed ended screening questionnaire that participants responded to during their first interview. Sections in this interview consist of topic sections that probe for information about early awareness of learning disability, assessment, diagnosis and impact, meaning of learning disability during the K-S4 educational years, meaning to personal interactions, advocacy, educational interventions and transitional supports, awareness of others with learning disabilities, challenges and barriers, and a final section that asks for any additional information that participants view as important to share.

The narratives participants shared uncovered story lines that reflected the meanings attached to early education in terms of personal thoughts about their learning when compared to peers, feelings of stigmatization, social isolation, and the processes of assessment, diagnosis, and intervention. Narratives emerged with

similar meanings despite the variation that was found to exist within the sample derived from section B of the participant screening questionnaire. Section B of the participant questionnaire explored initial experiences of age and grades of assessments and diagnosis, types of learning disability, as well as specific educational approaches experienced in terms of interventions and accommodations, high school completion, and workforce participation.

In addition, the similar meaning that participants attached to their personal thoughts about their academic performance when compared to peers, feelings of stigmatization, and social isolation occurred despite the differences experienced with specific actions taken to help them. Specifically, differences relate to access to private tutoring or specialized educational programs, differences with specific programming within the public school system for students that received individualized education plans or transition plans, or exposure to variation in instructional or accommodation interventions. This could be because regardless of the different actions that were taken at different points to help participants succeed academically their initial early educational experiences were marked by commonalities. These commonalities encompass academic achievement, labeling, feelings of stigmatization and personal experiences with the negative consequences outlined as the associated features of learning disabilities described in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000).

Awareness of Learning Disability

Age or Grade of Awareness

Participants provided narrative stories about when they first became aware they had a learning disability. The interview probes were directed at age, grade, learning problems, specific experiences, environments, and personal understanding. Participants suggested recognizing that they learnt differently than their peers during kindergarten or grade one. However this seemed to be an intuitive awareness as only two participants provided concrete examples. Whereas, all the participants articulated concrete examples of the experience during grades three or four in which reading difficulty seemed to be the most obvious area of difficulty that participants recalled. All participants had a cognitive awareness and concrete examples from grades three or four upward of their experiences.

All but two participants indicated that kindergarten or grade one was their earliest awareness. This is slightly different from what they reported on the closed ended questionnaire. However, this awareness that participants are referring to in the narratives is the intuitive awareness based on their academic functioning when compared with peers. Their experiences are described in the following selective narratives. Nancy said she was aware that she learnt differently from her peers, "Before age six", which is the most common age participants mentioned. Two participants added a concrete experience to their early awareness related to their academic functioning. David recalled not only the academic experience but also the teacher that he had at the time:

Hum, the first experience that I can remember would be kindergarten I remember an event of having to stay to make and look at numbers during recess, and then when I noticed or someone noticed that I wasn't learning the same as everyone else I was in grade one and I had a teacher who kind of knew and I interpreted it that way.

Erica expressed not only a concrete example but also her feelings around the experience, "In kindergarten, I was terrified that I would be chosen to recite the alphabet because I did not know it". Kate recognized she had difficulties early and this was affirmed when comparing herself to her younger sister in about grade three.

Kindergarten was earliest recognition that I learnt differently than peers, the big thing I remember later on is my sister who is three years younger than me and when she was in grade one I was half way through elementary school, but she was able to read and write and do all these things that I couldn't do.

Concrete Academic Struggles Leading to Personal Awareness

Participants tended to provide concrete examples of their experiences as they moved up in grades that described how they knew they learnt differently from their peers. Participants' concrete descriptions most often related to language arts as the academic area of difficulty that they recalled. Norm recalled as a common worst memory for individuals with reading disorders, "I think the first time I recognized that I had trouble was in grade two or three when we were reading in front of the class". Yvonne's concrete recollection relates to the educational intervention approach taken to help her manage her academic difficulties.

It's hard to tell the difference, when we were in elementary there was always a group of kids, like four or five of us that always had to go to resource to receive help. I kind of knew I needed more help

by the third grade I would say is when I noticed that everyone else wasn't coming to resource anymore.

David who had his early education in the Caribbean had this to say about his developing awareness that he learnt differently than his peers and what it meant for him.

I had difficulty reading, because I was in St. Lucia, which is the Caribbean, and there it was like corporal punishment in the schools so I would get hit for not being able to read so you kind of interpreted the fact that you were getting hit a lot because you couldn't read. I was punished because I couldn't read.

Participants spoke of environmental, cognitive, and social factors that highlighted their difficulties for them. Mary linked environmental factors to a specific difficulty, "If the environment was noisy, I had difficulty making connections to new scenarios, I got along better with teachers than students". Ashley reported experiences with punishment and described her cognitive experience in a concrete example of her becoming aware that she learnt differently than her peers, "Couldn't pay attention, fidgety, focus was everywhere else, when had to focus couldn't understand information or what to do. Grade four is when I really noticed this". Elizabeth who was academically successful in language arts and labeled as a bright student by teachers recalled her first recollection of becoming aware that she learnt differently from peers, she was also able to elaborate on her fears about the label and stigmatization associated with learning difficulties for students that she perceived.

First time I ran into any trouble was in grade four. What happened in grade four was we were memorizing the times tables and we were supposed to memorize them and regurgitate them. I never memorized the times tables, I faked my way through, and that's when I remember thinking that I was stupid that there was

something wrong going on because everyone else was doing it except the dummies that went to resource and I couldn't do it. There was a big stigma about the dummies that went to resource so the last thing I wanted to do was go to resource. I was terrified of resource and of being classified for resource.

Erica articulated the difference between what she was able to learn orally and what she was able to produce as output to show that she knew the material.

I always knew what was going on in class and I would participate but when it came to the tests I would get two out of twenty, and that was for writing my name. It took me until grade three to be able to write my last name.

Coping with Early Awareness

Participants were probed to elaborate about how they dealt with their early experiences. Participants indicated that they really did not know how they dealt with early experiences because they didn't really understand these experiences. Several participants indicated that they kept quiet about it, while others described a memory associated with the experience and a few indicated that they responded with anger. Yvonne shared how she dealt with her awareness, "I was in a bit of denial". Kate dealt with the experience this way, "I kept quiet about it, I didn't really understand it, I didn't understand why my sister could do all this (read, write, spell) and I couldn't". Norm shared his social experience, "I don't really remember; I was always a quiet person so I was always a little bit removed from everybody. I think I just felt that I was a little bit different". Ashley shared the emotional state she experienced as well her feelings of helplessness, which was very much linked to how others responded to her.

Anger response and feelings of isolation, and I don't remember how I responded but I remember I used to get punished a lot. The teacher would send me to the office or to the back of the class.

There was never anything I could do because I didn't know why. I didn't understand why I was punished so much.

Participant responses with respect to their early awareness and how they became aware that they learnt differently from peers supports Barga's (1996) conclusion that children define themselves in terms of normalcy at young ages based on how they measure up to peers and that school success is an early benchmark of how students view normalcy.

Assessment, Diagnosis, Academic Action Plan

Participants shared information that related to their experiences with assessments, diagnosis, and impact of learning disabilities describing what these experiences meant for them. Most of the participants were assessed between grades two and five for the first time, and had a number of assessments throughout their educational experience. They suggested that not much of an intervention action plan occurred after the assessment with the exception of those participants who attended private school designed specifically for students with learning disabilities. Students who were assessed while attending post secondary education share a different description of their experience with being assessed, formally diagnosed, and having access to the accommodations they need for educational success.

Participants diagnosed as having a learning disability comorbid with Aspergers or for one specific participant who attended a French program shared recollections of experiences within the context of public education that differed from the other participants. These participants reported having access to more formally provided interventions and accommodations within the public school

system compared to the other seven participants. These participants considered the interventions and accommodations they received because they had Individual Education Plans (IEP) and Individual Transition Plans (ITP) during the K-S4 educational years as helpful. Participants describe the process of being assessed, diagnosed, and the intervention procedures they experienced to hold these meanings for them that are highlighted in the following narrative stories.

Yvonne reported having confusion around the assessment process.

I didn't quite know that I was being assessed, but I thought it was fun because I got to take an hour off class and get to go and do some fun stuff. The first one that I remember is the school counselor coming to talk to me, I thought I was in trouble at first, she wanted to talk to me about my friends and stuff, and then she sent me for an assessment.

Ashley describes both the negative and positive consequences of a formal diagnosis.

I've been assessed three or four times throughout my life so far. I was first diagnosed in grade four in a hospital. As a little kid being assessed bothered me because I felt that I was not normal or the same as the other kids. When I was told I would have learning disabilities for the rest of my life and I would have to deal with it and learn how to learn differently it bothered me but I thought at least I know why I act the way I act.

Erica elaborated on the process as well as negative and positive consequences of a formal label.

Made me feel different from peers but helped give me some understanding. It took from grade three to about four or five going from various lady-to-lady reading and writing for different people to figure out what was wrong. I hated it, I thought that no one knew what was wrong with me and I was the only one in the world with this.

David related to the positive consequences of the label as his family enrolled him into a private school to ensure that he received appropriate interventions.

I went to a private school; it raised me from something like a grade three reading level (in grade seven) to when I left Laureate to be at the exact level I was supposed to be at. I can read handwriting but slowly, I print although I can hand write but I print most of the time.

Kate recalled her experiences with assessments and what occurred for her with respect to what happened afterward in the following way.

Grade six was first assessment. When I was in grade six, the school psychologist assessed me but nothing came out of it. Then in grade seven I got some private help. The resource in the school told us about a Jewish lady that tutored kids privately. It was in 2003, that I was assessed and diagnosed at Red River College by the psychologist. At the beginning, I was nervous. It was a relief to have this assessment done, and to know that I was not an idiot and finally get the help that I needed. First formal diagnosis was 2003 when assessed at RRC.

Tom provides an example of the assessment and diagnosis process at the post secondary level.

I had some assessment done in the early years but it never resulted in anything. My mother suggested that my problems might be ADHD and that is why I went to see Dr. Don Stewart in 2001 when I was having academic difficulties at university. First formally assessed and diagnosed 2001 by Dr. Donald Stewart at U of M. Formal action were academic accommodations, private testing space, and extra exam time.

Elizabeth whose academic difficulties were less intense and more limited was assessed for the first time during post secondary education.

I was in my second year of undergraduate and I was struggling with an intermediate bio chemistry course, it is an absolute nightmare for someone like me because it involves memorizing and regurgitating a three inch text book, being able to reproduce all of the chemical structures with all of the hydroxyl groups on the correct side and all the enzymes spelled correctly. I ended up

getting 30% more exam time and with that I was able to pull off a C in intermediate biochemistry and my grades overall went from C or C+ to B+ or A's. If that professor hadn't of intervened when he did I would have been out the door and that would have been at the end of it.

Meaning for Participant Interpersonal and Educational Experiences

Participants commented on the meaning of learning disabilities for their educational experiences during the K-S4 grades. In regard to the overall meaning during the K-S4 educational years all participants mentioned various aspects of their educational situation and interpersonal relationships that were highly negative in nature. The meaning participants attributed to having a learning disability in the context of education goes beyond the academic struggles and reflects the social, emotional, and psychological consequences that are outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Participants attributed various aspects of the meaning of having a learning disability to specific approaches and situations that they found either helpful or unhelpful within the context of education. These meanings are reflected in the following selective narratives.

Meaning of Helpful Interpersonal Relationships and Educational Experiences

Participants commented on what they perceived as being most helpful experiences. Their views were reiterated with regard to the importance of having someone to advocate for them, usually their mother. A few participants mentioned that good teachers were most helpful and experiences with good teachers meant they could succeed academically. While others talked about the positive aspects of appropriate instruction, interventions, support, and the specific management

strategies they learnt to employ as helpful. The following selective quotes highlight what participants perceived to be most helpful.

Erica indicated that the most positive thing for her was her mother's advocacy skills which also reflects the frustration experienced by parents trying to help their child get what they need within the public school system, "A positive thing was my mom always home for lunch to scream and rage, declare vengeance and send me back to school. My mom's advocacy made me realize that I should have the right to learn". Ashley's remarks are reflective of common participant views with respect to what their family's commitment meant to them.

Parents were most helpful, they didn't give up, they kept pushing me, they would help me throughout the summer, and my mom would make out assignment sheets, handwriting booklets, to help me. I look at it now, it was help but back then, it was torture.

Erica's remarks also captured common meaning among participants with regard to the family views they perceived, "Mom, she was convinced I was smart, I could do it, she believed in me and realized the system wasn't working, and she was doing something about it". Erica viewed her mom's advocacy in helping her get the help that she needed and remarked on what having an IEP meant to her, which she perceived as enabling her to gain access to effective help within the public school system.

My TA in grade nine through twelve, after the first couple of weeks she knew what to do, she never assumed I was stupid, as she got to know me she realized how smart I was. We got down to a system where she knew what I could recognize and what she needed to read.

Norm recalled the positive attributes of one of his teachers as meaning a lot to him, "Huh, I think the most helpful was my teacher being encouraging. Having

to go for help was embarrassing; the teacher would make it out like I was doing something special so I would feel better". Elizabeth recalled specific help received from understanding teachers as having been most helpful, "There were two teachers that stand out in my mind, one was my grade five teacher and the other was my grade eight teacher". Elizabeth indicates that it was these teacher's techniques as being positive and meaningful for her academic success.

I had a few good teachers that clicked in and gave me space and time to do things at my own pace and in my own way and in those courses I did very well. I was frequently top of the class in that type of course. There were other places where heavy emphasis on rote memorization was central and I did very poorly.

Norm reflected on what the interventions received privately meant for him and provided comparisons of the differences in experiences between the private school and his public school for both academics and peer relations.

The most helpful was my private tutor and the Laureate Academy, which was the private, specialized school. I started Laureate in grade four and I finished in grade nine then I went to Westgate for grade ten, it was similar to Laureate as any school might be because they had small classes twenty or twenty-five students, and it was not semester and that was good because it had the slow and steady teaching of subjects through the whole year, that was the main reason why I went there. Laureate was not semester either. It was easier being in a common environment with peers at Laureate, we were never told that we had a disability there but we were told that we learnt a little differently than others. The way of teaching was more effective than the public system and it was a better experience than being in the public system. Like a lot of the teasing and that sort of thing were not nearly as bad and that sort of stuff and I caught up in my grades.

In total eight of the ten participants indicated they experienced social difficulties often described as unbearable. In contrast, two to the ten reported that relationships with peers were not affected by their learning disability. These

participants believed that peer relationships were not affected because they were able to draw on other strengths outside of the context of school such as sports. They felt that being able to draw on strengths outside of school helped with self-confidence and self-esteem.

David did not really experience negative consequences with regard to his learning disability outside of the school context indicating that interpersonal relationships were not affected, "My relationship with peers was good I don't really think that it affected me in that way". Yvonne also reported being able to draw on personal strengths outside of the school setting, therefore she didn't view her interpersonal relationships as being affected: "I don't think it impacted on my social interactions at all. Yvonne who decided to manage her learning disability within education by hiding it because of the early experiences she had with the label, social isolation, and stigmatization recalled the following management technique as being the most helpful because it changed the views of educators with regard to her abilities and their expectations. The following narrative reflects what having a learning disability meant for her based on her perceptions of teacher expectations.

Most helpful was being seen as just another student because going to resource wasn't a good feeling it was negative. There was a huge difference when I was in my first school everyone thought I was a dumb little girl but when I went to the other school they expected more of me and I raised the bar. People would come to me and ask questions because they thought I was smart. I am above in intelligence in certain areas (they didn't know at my second school that I had a LD) it gave me self-confidence when people saw me, as being just like everyone else. Not having teacher expectation that I couldn't do the work made a difference in my motivation and self-confidence, I didn't feel like I was dumb.

Meaning of the Impact on Family, Unhelpful Interpersonal Relationships, and Educational Experiences

Participants talked about some perceptions they had of the negative impact learning disabilities can have on the family as a whole. They also indicated that their interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers were impacted negatively. Participants considered these interpersonal difficulties as being least helpful for their overall personal and educational experiences. The main themes that emerged within the narrative story lines encompassed aspects of lowered teachers expectations, going to resource, and in general teacher's lack of knowledge or inability to help them. These experiences were met with negative feelings and self-views that are descriptive of the negative associate features outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Participant perceptions of the impact on family and what they viewed to be the least helpful are highlighted below in the selective narratives.

Kate elaborated on the negative meaning learning disabilities can have for the family structure. Highlighting the feelings of guilt or self-blame she perceived her parents to have, "My mom to this day is very upset and things that have happened to me because of my LD. She has always felt that it was her fault that I have an LD. I know my dad thinks the same way because he is dyslexic too". David further elaborates on what his learning disability meant for his family and the way he felt about how he perceived his family as being affected.

As a child I had no understanding of the positive aspect, I just saw the negative side. The fact that my family had been forced to move to accommodate me, my brother was forced to leave school, we were forced to be up rooted, yet again, and this was basically my

fault.

Erica further expands on what it means for the family unit, her personal privacy, and her interpersonal relationships with peers.

It limits my privacy and it expands on my mom's duties...she needs to go through all our income tax...it is a way of life that my parents have adopted, my mom especially, and my friends as well. Getting a letter from a friend I need my mom to read it, a boy writes me an email the boy is asking me out I don't want my mom to know but I can't read it and I don't know what it say's so I have to get my mom to read it...You lose a whole lot of privacy there. The not showing up at class because the TA would be there waiting for me, I never had the opportunity to fool around in class or skip French to do math homework. Doing these things are also social things...so I couldn't interact the same way as my peers...but I would hear what everyone else was doing.

“Teachers were least helpful” was a common participant response stated by all participants at some point during the interview. This comment related to participants perceptions of negative teacher attitudes toward them. Participants perceived teachers to have a lack of knowledge about learning disabilities, and lacking in patience and understanding of them as students. They perceived most teachers they encountered as unable to help them learn, suggesting in most instances that teachers provided them with inappropriate teaching methods and materials. They perceived teachers as lowering academic expectations for participants and unable to intervene with the social difficulties participants experienced.

Elizabeth was able to zero in on some positive attributes of teachers that helped her. She was also able to zero in on teachers she perceived to have negative attributes as holding lasting meaning for her as well. She commented on the lack of patience she experienced, “When teachers would yell and get angry

because I couldn't do the rote memory and regurgitation". For Erica the lack of understanding of what her problem was and the lack of knowledge and ability educators had meant a maximum amount of frustration for her.

The hardest thing was the fact that nobody knew what the problem was and when they did know they didn't know what to do about it. The fact that the teachers didn't want to do things in a different way or that they didn't believe I had a learning disability. The fact that I was told that this is what is going to happen but then what happened was a vague interpretation from what I was told I would have for accommodations.

Ashley recalled others responses as being least helpful and described what these frustrations meant to her along with the self-managing strategy she employed.

Questions on homework lead to frustration from teachers and family. If I had any questions, I would ask parents or teachers and because I would keep asking the same questions, so many times they would get frustrated. I got afraid they would get mad at me for asking the same questions that finally I stopped asking questions.

Elizabeth describes another negative self-management approach in which not only did she hide her LD within the school structure but also within her family structure. She could not talk about it within the family because of the impact her brother's diagnosed learning disability had on the family. She did not want to give up the status she had accomplished with her well-developed literacy strengths as a bright student within the family or educational setting, "I was not able to talk about it within my family structure".

Yvonne reflected on the meaning she attached to the help she received in elementary as most unhelpful, "I always think that my resource teacher in elementary that was least helpful. It was kind of like we were a pain to be there,

like it was taking time out of his day, like he didn't need to work with us, and all that". Ashley's recollections are in line with Yvonne's for what having a learning disability meant for her and her perceptions of teachers views of her and the help she received.

In elementary I really didn't really get any help. Teachers thought something was wrong with me and I was immature for my age. Teachers weren't very helpful. I really didn't get any help until high school. Teachers were not helpful.

The meaning for Erica was negative with peer and teachers, "The social aspects, my peers didn't really like me; they didn't want to be in-group with me and the fact that the teachers didn't really know how to deal". Erica goes on to describe the social isolation she experienced.

I didn't have friends until the end of grade six grades seven. I used to spend the recess walking with the teacher who was supervising. Being socially isolated was much less of a problem in high school than in elementary. I think this was because when they knew me I was the contagious epileptic who couldn't read...so if you played with her you might become stupid as they used to put it.

Tom indicated that his difficulties meant negative consequences for his personal relationships across domains, "ADHD impacted directly on my personal interactions with peers and teachers. My family relations were very strained during grade seven through grade nine". Norm suggested that the meaning to family relationships were not affected but felt that his inability to measure up to peers had meaning for him, "My family was good about it, with peers you perform a year or so below your grade level so you are looked at as though your dumb, so that makes you feel inferior and puts you down on the social chain".

Ashley commented on another area that she found least helpful that meant social

isolation because of teacher inabilities to intervene, "My peers didn't understand they just didn't want to put up with me. Teachers weren't that helpful".

Yvonne sums the meaning of her educational experience up to unhelpful experiences of lowered academic expectations and inadequate interventions that she perceived to attribute to negative personal feelings.

I didn't feel adequate I felt that I was somehow below everyone else. I think the teachers played a huge part in the feelings of inadequacy. This was evident in what their expectations were. I thought that when I was being removed from the class that I was missing out on fun thing they got to do as well.

David recalled the differences in teacher expectations between private and public school and what these differences in expectations meant for him.

At Laureate it was incredibly small class sizes, incredibly directed, here there was a 5-1 ratio for students to teacher, there was an incredible feeling of the teacher knowing what was going on with your work. They understood me and their expectations didn't lower, like it wasn't like they assumed it was lower, they just wanted you to get to that level, like once I got to junior high they didn't care if I finished work or not or if it was up to par or not where as at Laureate you would come home and have your homework because you knew that was the teachers expectation and that they would know if you finished your homework or not where in junior high and high school nobody cared.

Once I left Laureate it started going down hill I went to Laureate for grades seven and eight then went back to public school for grade nine. Laureate got me reading up to par in two years it was incredibly impressive. I think it comes from being incredibly focused and having that individual attention.

Norm who like David attended private school attached the following to what he perceived to have been the least helpful highlighting what his experiences with teachers in public school meant for him, "The least helpful were the public school teachers". This section is summed up with Kate's description of her academic

experience as she describes in explicit detail what it meant to have a learning disability for her during her K-S4 educational years. Her narrative captures the social, emotional, and psychological consequences of learning disabilities.

It was all horrible, it was bad, before anything happened, I remember teachers making me cry, calling me an idiot, embarrassing me in front of the class, I had absolutely no friends, the teachers just thought I was slow so they would stick me in the resource room with kids that had Cerebral Palsy, Downs Syndrome. I always thought that I was the idiot in the whole school. I thought that I was the only one (with these problems) like I was different than everybody else, like I was purple or something. I never really had good schooling experience. If I had a good teacher, I always felt like they felt sorry for me. Its okay you don't have to do this paper, you can just sit in the corner and color. I didn't have anybody try and figure out that maybe she's not slow maybe there's something else.

Associated Features (negative consequences)

The associated features are outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000), which is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual used for diagnosing learning disabilities by qualified individuals. These associated features are viewed to be the negative consequences individuals with learning disabilities often experience if appropriate intervention and supports are not provided. Participants indicated that they experienced negative consequences in the social, emotional, and psychological domains as a direct result of their learning difficulties. The following stories capture what having a learning disability meant for them in areas beyond academics that encompassed their personal social, emotional, and psychological well being.

Tom pointed out that for him academic difficulty meant social difficulty and a difficult time with transitions were most difficult, "Major consequences were

social and made transitions difficult. Socially I was isolated; this made me have feelings of contempt for my peers”. Ashley shares similar meaning of her experiences reflective of the negative consequences of learning disabilities outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) as associated features. She also describes her perceptions of teacher responses to her difficulties as having painful meaning for her, “Social frustration, anxiety, and depression. Teachers didn’t help with social problems and they tended to punish”. Erica highlighted the meaning her educational experiences had descriptive of negative consequences of the associated features along with physiological experiences.

In elementary I had major anxiety and depression. I would come home every lunch hour crying. I would be sick every Sunday night. I was sick because I was afraid that when I got to school something would go wrong...like there would be a substitute teacher that didn’t know about me...and then I would have to prove myself all over again, know I can’t copy that or do this test. ...Oh well, why you are smart why do I need to help you.

Elizabeth highlighted the negative way in which she managed her academic struggles and educational experiences.

The main consequence of my LD is that I lied and covered up and on a few occasions cheated to get through these rote memorization things. I am ashamed of that but it was the only way that I could do it. I knew I was smarter than a lot of my peers and that’s why I cheated because I thought there was something wrong with the system that was holding me back on something and that wasn’t fair.

Positive and Negative Consequences of the Label

Participants articulated both positive and negative consequences associated with the label of having a learning disability. The negative consequences participants verbalized held meanings reflective of the associated features of

learning disabilities in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The positive consequences were viewed to mean gaining access to support and academic interventions for academic success. The next few statements reflect what participants found to be negative or positive consequences of the label.

David described the meaning of the label as negative within the context of school and meaningless outside of the school environment because he was then able to draw on his strengths.

I didn't have these outside of class, academically I felt incredibly weak I didn't have self-esteem around that and I didn't feel like I was really going to succeed anyways academically I didn't have self-confidence. I had other areas where I was strong like sports and other things I succeeded in that area so my self-confidence was good in these areas.

Yvonne infers that the label had a negative meaning for her because of the typical intervention approach that was taken to help her academically also hurt her academically.

Being taken out of class at certain times during the day for remediation. It didn't matter what subject it was they would take me out and say, "come and do this". This hurt me in other stuff they were learning, remediation was pushing me further behind, so I wasn't able to keep up with everyone else.

Ashley describes the meaning of the label to have had consequences not only for her learning but also with her attachment to school. She describes the managing strategies she used to avoid the school experience. Finding the external forces she experienced within the school context overwhelming for her emotionally and psychologically.

There were days were I would fake being sick I hated school, I hated everything about school. I didn't like being at school because they never treated me like I was a person. As I got older they

figured something was wrong with me then they made fun of me more. I felt bad about myself. In the early years, there was a lot of anger but as I got older, I got depressed because I started thinking how am I going to survive when I get out of school.

Erica viewed the label as having global negative experiences, "It was very negative, and it is hard to think of anything positive, I can't think of anything super positive happening". Norm describes the permanency that the label means for him, "It has made me anxious; it has made me feel down. Even in university it is always something in the back of my mind. It never really goes away. I don't think it ever will". David provided an example of the positive meaning the label can have for individuals because of the personal understanding and self-knowledge that can be gained from the label. Positive meaning of the label did not occur for him until later on as was the case for most participants.

I didn't see it in the early years but now I see it as a positive thing. I guess it is a positive label in a way because it removed this idea that I was just stupid so I no longer felt well I'm just stupid and I don't get it right you actually had a reason behind it (learning difficulties).

Perceptions of Stigmatization

Participants commented on specific situational or interpersonal experiences that were perceived as stigmatizing. Specifically they viewed instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations highlighting problems with the age and grade inappropriate materials as particularly stigmatizing. They viewed these stigmatizing experiences to hold negative consequences for them reflective of those outlined as associated features of learning disabilities. These narratives bring to the surface the link between academic struggle, inappropriate intervention approaches, unhelpful interpersonal relationships, the learning

disability label, and experienced perceptions of stigmatization with the negative consequences of learning disabilities described in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The following statements capture participant consensus around experiences they found stigmatizing.

Tom's reference to the social isolation was an experience all participants remarked on during the interview, "Socially I didn't fit in and I didn't know what I had to do to fit in". Nancy's comment highlighted the personal feelings that stigmatization generated for participants and their inability to deal with the situation. "I didn't feel good about myself; I didn't know how to deal with the situation". Yvonne recalled the experience of being stigmatized because of the academic materials she worked in that are age inappropriate but at her reading level.

Other kids would be reading chapter books and we would have Robert Munch at twelve years old reading books that are for five/six year olds, it was stigmatizing reading at my reading level when I was so much older.

Kate describes her experience with age inappropriate reading experiences with her narrative story, "When they wanted me to read in high school they would give me kindergarten books to read or math and those things weren't helpful they just made me feel worse than I already was feeling". David reflects on the lack of help he received after leaving Laureate as well as his place within the larger school structure which may or may not be linked to that lack of disclosure around his learning disability; although the fact that his school records would have revealed the fact that he did experience learning disabilities based on the fact that he had attended Laureate Academy.

Hum. I don't know when I left I kind of rebelled because I didn't get the help like for instance when I was in high school I didn't get the help because none of my teachers knew, at that point I became anonymous with my learning disability because nobody knew what was going on so I never accessed any help. Yea, I think maybe more myself, I think that maybe I stigmatized myself because I never told anybody about it so it was more of or people in hindsight would look back and say oh maybe he has a little dyslexia.

Elizabeth experienced both teacher and peer stigmatization based on her academic weaknesses regardless of the fact that she did not have the label associated with her or any experiences of receiving resource help during her K-S4 education. The system did not pick up on her learning disability and her self-management strategy focused on hiding her learning disability because of her fears of stigmatization. These fears were based on how she perceived other students with learning disabilities being treated for whom the label was attached.

I did feel there was something weird and different about me because I could do so much better than my peers on so many things but then there were others that I just couldn't do these things were so obvious to my peers. I couldn't figure some stuff out.

Advocacy, Learning Style, Educational Interventions, and Transitions

Participants made references to experiences with advocacy, educational interventions, and transitional supports. The story lines that emerged from the participant narratives captured aspects of academic struggle, interpersonal relationship, elements of what kind of interventions were helpful or unhelpful, types of supports participants received, and what these experiences meant to them. The meaning of these experiences has influenced how participants have managed themselves at different educational points, motivating experiences, and their ability to self-advocate during later education. Participant comments about

what it meant for them to have an advocate suggest views that they would not have succeeded within education without a family member or educator taking the advocacy role. The following selective narratives describe participant experiences with advocates within the family, the educational system, and others received privately. Kate credits the intervention she finally received to her private tutor who also became a support to her mom for advocating within the educational system. She describes in the following narrative what her tutor meant to her academically.

The person that advocated for me was my mom. After grade eight, the private tutor that I went to attend meetings with my mom and the teachers at the school.... (Private tutor) worked with me from grade eight to grade twelve. She worked on everything with me reading, writing, spelling, and math. I know if it weren't for her I wouldn't have learnt any of that stuff.

Yvonne referred to her mom as her primary advocate and described the self-management skills she developed to help her cope; "I didn't receive any help after grade nine. My mom helped me sometimes, but most of the time I just did it on my own. I learnt to use strategies on my own". Erica described what it meant to have her mother advocate for her, which is a shared point of view among participant narratives.

It means a great much, it means I had someone I could rely on, it means I had someone to come home to and they would make things better. I didn't really need to self-advocate in high school because it was done. I did have to self-advocate in grade eight but then I would go home crying and my mom would finish advocating.

Ashley credits a teacher who influenced her future educational goals through their patience to help her succeed. Below is a description of what this teacher meant to her.

In high school, my woodworking teacher really helped me out. He was one of the first guy's (person) that really helped me out, and pushed me toward good stuff that I really enjoyed doing, like my wood working, and he huh, got me interested in wood working and taking the program at College in Kitchener Ontario.

Elizabeth finally had the experience of an educator noticing that there were discrepancies in her abilities; guiding her to the help she needed to succeed within post secondary education, she viewed this professor as her one advocate.

Elizabeth describes what this professors' advocacy meant to her, "The professor in post secondary was my one advocate that made a huge positive impact on my educational success".

Participants considered the development of self-advocacy skills as an essential component for academic success. Ashley spoke about the meaning to be able to self-advocate as an important skill set for academic success. Her view was presented in a number of the participant narratives, "Taking charge, taking steps to make sure your voice is heard because you're doing it for yourself that shows that you're not afraid to admit that you have LD and maybe they are more likely to help you out". David commented on the limitations of being able to self-advocate in early education and the importance of being able to do so within post secondary, "I was not able to advocate for myself during my K-S4 years, I am able to advocate for myself in university and that is when I decided that if I was going to succeed I needed to self-advocate". Other participant narratives contained comments that described limitations in their abilities to self-advocate during the K-S4 educational years.

Educational Interventions and Accommodations

Participant narratives provided story lines that reflected common experiences with educational interventions and accommodations or about the lack of appropriate interventions and accommodations. These narratives provided in-depth information about the negative or positive consequences associated with various experiences with instructional methods, intervention, or accommodations, perceived as either helpful or unhelpful to overall experiences. Participant narrative quotes provide a snap shot of what these experiences meant for their educational experience.

Mary commented that her later educational years were better than her early experiences. This theme, that “High school interventions were better than in elementary school”, was common throughout the student narratives. Ashley did not perceive herself as having access to the help she needed until later education, “It wasn’t till high school, I was put in a program for slower students, and I would write my test there where it was quiet and a place to go when I was having a bad day for some time away”. Kate, who did not perceive herself as having access to any appropriate instructional methods, interventions, or accommodations, until she received private tutoring, had this to say about what the lack of these resources meant for her.

I didn’t have any special programs other than resource. Going with the kids in the resource room with the kids in wheel chairs and with downs syndrome. I didn’t get any accommodations.

Kate goes on to further describe what she perceived to be the only help she received from the educational system, the “Resource teacher but it wasn’t really intervention or accommodations”.

Erica commented on what it meant for her to have formalized educational interventions provided for her once she had individualized education and transition plans put into place for her.

They meant I could learn and not need to stress, in grade ten I stopped being sick every Sunday night, my acne cleared up, it took two years for my body to work this out, the anxiety went away around grade ten, and the depression around grade eight and nine. The IEP meant that I got the help I needed. Once it was in place I knew I had something I could rely on it meant I had rights. In grade six going to grade seven we meet with the teachers two weeks before school and we had a meeting on how we would approach the issue.

Mary who also had access to individualized education and transition plans in place for her suggested that they meant you get the help you need, “I think that having an IEP plan was helpful to me”. For David, attending private specialized education meant that he received the help he needed to overcome academic challenges, “Specialized education meant that I learnt to read at the level expected given my age and grade”. Norm who also attended private school for specialized education described what it meant to have the interventions and instruction to face academic challenges compared to the ineffectiveness of the interventions he perceived himself as receiving within the public school system, “The public support was minimal, generally an hour a week. Like it would, maybe they could shed light on the troubles that I was having but there was nothing that could be learned from what they were doing”.

Awareness of Other Students with Learning Disabilities

Participants were probed about their awareness of other students with learning disabilities during their K-S4 educational years. If participants did know other students with learning disabilities they were further probed to share information about the educational outcomes of these students in terms of high school completion, school drop out, post secondary or work transitions. Most participants were not familiar with other students with learning disabilities during their K-S4 educational years. A couple of participants commented that they were familiar with other students whom they had worked with in small groups. However they were unable to articulate the nature of these student's difficulties or elaborate on their outcomes. One participant who managed their learning disability by hiding it mentioned she had a sibling diagnosed with dyslexia. Participant narratives are suggestive that not knowing other students with learning disabilities contributed to their feelings of isolation.

The following comment provided by Mary was commonly pointed to within the narratives, "Sometimes I felt like I was the only one with LD". Several narratives also reflected this additional comment Mary provided, "I became aware of a boy with downs syndrome, but did not meet many people with LD like mine". Yvonne remarked on the experience of being paired with students whose issues were related to behavior rather than learning, "I didn't know anyone else. In my primary years there was another guy that used to go for help with me but he had other issues as well like behavior problems and all that, and he wasn't a very nice person". Erica was aware of someone who she thought had learning

difficulties similar to what she experienced, but was not able to comment on the student's outcome.

There was a kid in grade three that his mom would make sure that he was in my class right to grade six because he would benefit from my TA. I don't know what he had because I don't think he was ever assessed. I think it was something like dyslexia because his problems were a lot like mine. But I don't remember him being at school after grade nine or ten; whether he dropped out or transferred I don't know.

David indicated that his awareness of other students with learning disabilities was limited to his private school experience.

I was aware of others at Laureate but not in the public system except for when I was in special classes in elementary but when I was in public school in grade nine I wasn't aware of anybody else who had them but I am sure there must have been but I had no clue to who they were.

Elizabeth shared information about her brother's experience with learning disability and his outcomes.

My brother was diagnosed in kindergarten and that was hard. Then there were two other boys that were diagnosed that went off to resource all of the time. My brother was streamed to trade school. Then he joined the military. The military actually turned out to be the best thing for him. Eventually he ended up in the Special Forces. He did finish high school in adult education once leaving the forces and went into carpentry.

Challenges and Barriers

Participants elaborated on their most significant challenges and barriers and the motivating factors that helped them continue to persevere to overcome the challenges and barriers experienced. Challenges tended to relate to the academic difficulties they experience, interpersonal relationships with family, teachers, and peers, along with aspects of struggles of daily living as a direct result of their

learning disability. These experiences were perceived to have negative consequences of learning disabilities outlined as associated features in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The specific barriers relate to areas of academics that remain a problem for participants, and their abilities with tasks of daily living, which they perceive as areas that they have not been able to overcome. Participant narratives highlighted the social expectations of the larger community as being challenging or creating barriers. Motivating factors were their family; effective intervention approaches, positive interpersonal relationships, and their personal attributes of self-determination that helped participants continue to move forward in education. The following narratives describe the meaning of challenges and barriers along with what they found to be motivating influences.

Kate mentioned how measuring up to others was a meaningful challenge for her, "Not being on the same level as everybody else I didn't have any friends. It didn't seem like my challenge would end when it came to school". Yvonne echoed the problem of being able to measure up to others as being a meaningful challenge added into her academic experiences, "The hardest part would have been just that I couldn't keep up with everyone. All the problems, just like writing papers and everything else I would have problems with". Ashley commented on academics and social difficulties as meaningful challenges, "Some of my subjects like math, reading, getting along with peers, and dealing with bullies". Tom commented on the social aspect of his experience, "I felt like I was always trying to fit in. I didn't feel I belonged and I didn't know what I had to do". Norm

mentioned his biggest challenge as being directly linked to academics and the learning process, "The academics, reading, writing, that sort of thing. Learning is a slow process". Nancy reflected on the lack of understanding she experienced as challenging, "Not being understood".

David highlighted the difficulty remaining motivated to continue putting the effort out to learn as being a major challenge.

I think the hardest thing was just motivation it was incredibly hard to feel that the work you needed to put in was worth it that it mattered at all that it was going to do anything and subtle things kind of went on that I don't know if were intentional but there was this assumption by people that once they knew that you weren't going to go on academically like you were kind of pushed into this idea of oh why don't you go into the trades why don't you do other things why bother taking S courses you know just take the G the expectation drops therefore your expectation drops and therefore your motivation doesn't kick in at all like why am I caring.

Elizabeth mentioned structural issues as barriers and how she managed her awareness of her learning disability during the K-S4 educational years as challenging.

It was being held back, things, barriers created over stupidity like rote tasks. I had to hide my LD because of the stigma associated to it. I felt that there were things that would have been closed off to me if anyone knew I was having this problem. I viewed the LD as presenting a barrier if anyone knew.

Kate commented on the barriers she still experiences.

There are still silly ones that I still have now, I can not hand write and it is something that I will never be able to do, I can not do math and things like that are things that it just doesn't matter how much I practice I am not going to get to overcome those things. I honestly haven't tried practicing hand writing for a long time.

Erica mentioned both the academic barriers and the social consequences of these barriers. "The reading, the writing, the posters, the talking on MSN and

passing notes in class which I never did, the talking behind the teachers back which I never did because I had a TA sitting beside me”.

Motivating Factors Participants Attribute to Educational Success

Participants held a shared meaning to their struggles as it provoked personal attributes of self-determination. Sometimes this self-determination became a motivating factor to show others that they can do it (learn). This is more or less a shared motivator among participants. Next were the influence of those that helped them in the learning process, and the importance of obtaining long-term goals and careers as commonly shared motivating factors.

Kate shared the following narrative.

It has always been that I just wanted to become a resource teacher so I can make sure that nobody else goes through what I went through. I don't care if I have to be eighty when I graduate from university, that's my only goal, and that has been my goal since I met the tutor that helped me. She (private tutor) motivated and directed me into what it is that I want to do.

Yvonne's self-determination was her primary motivator, “I said to myself that I could do this because everyone else can. I wanted to prove to everyone that I am as good as they are”. Erica shared this view about what self-determination meant to her, “My determination to not get whipped and to show them that I can”. Ashley found family support to be her motivator; “Parents helped with homework and helped to make things easier”. Mary found the help she received within the education system to be motivating, “Motivating factors was talking to teachers, and other adult supports to help with strategies to overcome difficulty”. David indicated that he didn't have any motivator until later which is interesting because he had access to appropriate intervention in private school but at the same time he

did not find his later experience in public education during high school as directing him toward post secondary education, "I didn't have any motivating factors until later on".

Additional Participant Views

The final section of this interview encouraged participants to share any additional information they felt was important and wanted to emphasize. The comments surrounded the importance of better understanding of students with learning disabilities, increased education for teachers, and better understanding, intervention and prevention of the associated features such as poor self-esteem, low self-confidence, and negative self-views, and access to specialized programming. Overall participant thoughts around these phenomena are highlighted in the following statements below.

Nancy shared the following concern, "Not everyone diagnosed with a learning disability is the same. People need to be open to the differences, don't judge a book by its cover". Ashley highlighted the importance of patience and the gift of time, "I think it is important for people to be able to be patient and take time. I didn't have a lot of people being able to take time and be patient with me, to explain things over and over until I got what I needed to know". Yvonne remarked on her views about the importance of preventing the associated features.

I think the whole problem with the early years is help kids with learning disabilities is keeping self-confidence. If they don't have that there is not much that they can do. They don't feel like they can accomplish more. It is important for people to recognize the other things that happen to kids with learning disabilities like the self-confidence and self-esteem issues, feelings of stigmatization; these areas need to have intervention.

Erica made reference to the importance of knowledge for teachers to enable them to better help students with learning disabilities, "Teachers to be aware of stuff...teachers to keep updated on different schools of thought, technology, and research, if these teachers knew what they are dealing with I probably wouldn't have had half the problems I did". Norm commented on the importance of having access to teachers who are properly trained to deal with learning disabilities along with the need to be able to provide students with more personalized attention in smaller classes, "Access to funding for private school where the teachers are trained to deal with learning disabilities and the classes are smaller".

Tom commented on the importance of the structure for helping students with learning disabilities and highlighted the impact that learning disabilities can have for interpersonal relationships.

There was a major relationship improvement with my family when I went to private school. My family relations were very strained during grade seven, eight, and nine. Private school gave us the chance to disengage a little bit. It gave my parents some relief because they saw that I was actually going to be able to go somewhere. Because they saw some progress and some of the tension was released.

Summary

Participant narratives suggest that early educational experiences held an array of negative meanings and consequences within the context of education. Academic difficulties were described as having an impact across a variety of academic domains and access to the help students needed were described as limited within public education. Interpersonal relationships particularly with educators and peers were viewed as being strained and for some participants

unbearable. Participant experiences with the negative consequences associated with the label, experiences of stigmatization, and the challenges and barriers experienced were thought to create global difficulties within emotional, social, and psychological domains during the K-S4 educational experiences. Positive experiences were described as being able to rely on an advocate to provide a voice for them within the context of education and gaining access to the methods of instruction, interventions, and accommodations needed to promote academic success. These positive experiences provided participants with the increased personal knowledge needed to facilitate learning and created opportunities for positive educational experiences.

The participant narratives obtained in this interview are rich with experiential information that will be further developed into a theoretical model using the grounded theory in chapter eight, Theoretical Development. The Third Interview: Post Secondary Education and Identified Solutions Narratives will provide further insight with respect to the concepts that emerged during the Second Interview: Early Educational Experiences K-S4 Narratives. In turn, this will help explain how the predominant concepts that emerged in the data of each respective interview fit together for theoretical development that captures what it means to have a learning disability a different educational points for students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 7

FINDINGS OF THIRD INTERVIEW: POST SECONDARY EDUCATION AND IDENTIFIED SOLUTIONS NARRATIVES

The third interview involved gathering in-depth participant narratives described participants' post secondary education experiences and explored their identified solutions to the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities often experience. Overall participants reported post secondary education as being a positive experience particularly when compared with how they described their earlier educational experiences. Narrative stories provided insight with regard to the similar experiences participants attributed to their educational successes and motivational attributes to participate in post secondary education. These similarities existed despite differences experienced in terms of how participants gained access to the appropriate educational strategies or experiences with success that enabled them to develop increased personal awareness of their learning profiles and awareness of the specific effective strategies to help them overcome their weaknesses. These differences are evident in the narrative story lines that describe variation in exposure to educational interventions and accommodations, access to private resources, public education support, high school completion, and workforce participation previous to their enrolment in post secondary education. Participants attached similar meanings to their post secondary educational experiences with regard to their academic success, use of strategies and accommodations, low or absent experiences with feelings of stigmatization, and more positive interpersonal relationships.

Transitions to Post Secondary Education

Participants commented on their transitional experiences to post secondary education, how they came to the decision to attend post secondary education, and highlighted some of the factors that motivated them to participate in university or college. Five of the ten participants transitioned directly to post secondary education from high school, one participant only attended for a few months before dropping out; she later enrolled in university as a mature student after successful employment and college experiences in which she completed a diploma. Employment experiences were reported to be important milestones for success by five other participants who indicated they worked for a period of time, and/or attended other educational programs before enrolling in post secondary as mature students.

The first two narratives that describe managing transitions and academic course loads with accommodations in post secondary education are polar opposites; nine of the ten participants share Norm's approach for managing their learning disability in post secondary education. Yvonne transitioned directly to university from high school. She has registered with Disability Services Centre however she didn't receive accommodations because she found self-identifying her learning disability for accommodations stigmatizing. Yvonne is the only participant in the sample that did not use the accommodations available to her while participating in post secondary education. She notes "I went straight from high school to university and that has worked out well. I am in second year now but taking first year courses".

Norm also transitioned directly to post secondary education from high school. However, he enrolled with the Disability Services Centre as soon as he entered university to secure the accommodations that he needed for educational success. Securing accommodations when enrolling is the strategy used by all other participants who entered post secondary education knowing about their learning disability. "I went straight to post secondary from high school...there were a few things at the U of W, study habits and a few workshops that I went to". Students whose learning disability was confirmed during post secondary educational all secured accommodations after their initial diagnosis.

Kate talks about the assistance she received transitioning from college to attend university for the second time, which involved transitional support from her Red River College counselor and what this meant to her.

Through the counselor at RRC, we talked about what I had at RRC, and how we would like the same at U of Winnipeg. My counselor from RRC took me to meet the DS person at University of Winnipeg so that I would have the supports I needed. She also took me to Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba so that I had more support and could learn more strategies.

David and Elizabeth attended adult education to complete their high school diploma before entering post secondary as mature students; all other participants completed their high school diploma in regular high school.

David elaborated on his experience after high school, adult education, and work before entering post secondary education as a mature student.

I worked before coming to university, I traveled for a year after high school then went back to school because I needed two credits that I had failed (adult education), then I worked for a bit then I went to flight school then worked in that for two years.

Elizabeth who was not diagnosed until her second year of post secondary provided the following narrative about her high school experience, adult education, and her transition to post secondary as a mature student.

I went to an adult education place and told them that I wanted to be a doctor so they said here is where you are and here is what you need to do to get into medicine. By the time I got into U of M I knew I didn't want to be a doctor anymore but I knew biology was what I was interested in. I did grade eleven and twelve by correspondence. Physics, advanced math, history, and biology were what I needed to do through correspondences. I started taking university courses through the University of Waterloo through correspondence. Then I realized I needed to get into university so I started University of Manitoba when my daughter was two. She got into the university daycare.

Tom highlighted his experience in the armed forces as influential in his decision to enroll in post secondary education. Tom entered university as a mature student. He was able to obtain the marks needed to enter into the field of engineering. However he indicated that the structure of his faculty is not a good match for using the typical accommodations. He also indicated that the method of instruction within his faculty does not work well for his learning style.

I entered the armed forces before attending post secondary education...some of the experiences within the armed forces was influential for me attending post secondary, and the area that I have focused on in engineering. I entered university as a mature student. I took prerequisites for engineering during university one then applied to engineering based on those marks and was accepted. I did very well in University One.

Ashley gained employment in a field that she thought might be an area of interest in pursuing as a career, "Before I went to RRC, I worked at a daycare and it has been helping me get through College because sometimes I base past experiences from the daycare and it helps me understand the course work". Erica

who traveled after high school describes working for a period of time before enrolling as a mature student, "I worked at the museum, and at a pizza place, I memorized the menu, the chef could read my writing but his wife couldn't". Nancy indicated she worked and took a few evening courses before making the decision to participate in university, "While working I attended evening courses at RRC for three years".

Influential Motivating Factors for Post Secondary Participation

Participants indicated that experiences in high school, their work experience, or their aspirations for a career were influential in their decision to attend post secondary education. Participants made reference to a number of motivating factors and reasons why they made the decision to attend post secondary education that related to personal views around education and careers. Participants elaborated on their personal educational views, talked about what motivated them to attend post secondary education, and what participation in post secondary education means to them.

Ashley who is working on her second college diploma realized that the first diploma was not a long-term career for her; however the first diploma was the beginning of educational success in which her high school wood working teacher played an influential role in motivating her to try post secondary education. Ashley was motivated by what she discovered to be strengths for her during early adulthood along with her self discovery that what she was trained to do was not a good fit for her with respect to the job market, "I found wood working wasn't for

me, I found that I am really good with kids, its something I enjoy so I wanted to pursue a career in child care”.

Elizabeth recalled what motivated her to attend university in the following statement in which she describes her decision and what she had to do before she would be able to go into her interest field of science.

It was key between being what I want to be and following some other path that didn't fit. Post secondary was absolutely critical to becoming what I wanted to be and I had to do it. I decided to go back to school and in order to do so I had to go back and finish high school because I had left high school in grade ten. Dropped out of high school or avoided taking the harder courses because I was struggling and not able to do anything about it. Well I didn't really drop out I opted out of all the hard courses and I took the filler courses or option courses. I had worked in a whole bunch of jobs as a waitress and what not, but I needed my grade twelve to go into science, so that's why I went back to finish high school.

Erica looked at her interests and her love for learning, “What motivated me to go to university was my love for learning. I was interested in math and theatre”. Norm like other participants did not think that a high school diploma was enough, “I thought that having a high school diploma was not good enough, I would have thought I was a failure if my education had of just ended there”.

Kate had long-term goals that motivated her and her experiences with educational success in college provided her with the self-confidence to try and pursue her goals.

The college experience was motivating to go back to university and follow my dream of being a resource teacher. I knew the course that I took in RRC to be a TA was not going to make me happy for the rest of my life. Educational success to me would be getting great marks in school like A's. Definitely to accomplish goals I want really good marks.

David credits his motivation to his self-determination, ability to self-advocate, and awareness of the strategies that work for him as being linked to his current educational success.

Now I do, really wanting to succeed in it, and realizing at this point in my life knowing that I have an LD and knowing what I need to do and that you know...learning what I needed to do that works for me and applying them (strategies) and trying new things to see how they work...I'll talk to students and ask how they study and see if those strategies work for me, and if I need help understanding that's okay, for example for an essay exam if I need extra time then I need extra time and excepting that and not feeling bad about having an LD like I did in high school. At this point in my life I realize that it is not who I am. If someone asks me why I wasn't in an exam I will tell them that I have a LD and I get extra exam time in a private space and it doesn't bother me.

Yvonne who hid her learning disability in high school internalized the expectations that she perceived coming from educators in high school that post secondary was an expectation for her, she indicated that post secondary education was important because she wanted a career; other participants echoed that they entered post secondary education for career purposes.

Well like I always kind of planned on going...well I didn't always plan on going to university although in my early years I didn't think it was quite possible. When I reached high school it was sort of thought of that if you are smarter you go to university, it was kind of expected of me. I didn't really want to do any manual type of job so university was the right fit.

Meaning of Educational Success for Participants

Participants pointed to both high school graduation and participation in post secondary education as measures of educational success. This is what participants had to say about educational success and what this meant to them specifically.

Nancy viewed graduating high school as being a measure of academic success

“Graduating high school”; other participants also referred to positive high school experiences as a benchmark for educational success. Kate talks about the various steps she took before re-entering university for a second time to try to reach her long-term goal. Several participants mentioned that their successes needed to come from outside of the high school experience before they pursued post secondary education.

I didn't have anyone to help with that, or anybody from high school talking about when you go to post secondary it will be this and this sort of thing. This may have been part of the problem why I dropped out of university the first time. I went to university right out of high school. I was there for a year and a few months. I am not to sure if I succeeded so well in College because I had that break after I dropped out of university for a year or if College is a different atmosphere which I think was another reason. I know when I came out of Red River with the good marks. The transition from RRC to University was helpful because I had gained the confidence I needed to go back to university for the second time. I got a lot of help in College the stuff I had was extra time to write exams. It was a different atmosphere, the teachers would give me the notes before hand on the computer and blow it up in huge print and give me all the notes. Stuff like that. I got a lot of help, the college was able to accommodate me, you know the extra struggles I would have and that was part of the reason I did so well. My GPA from College was 4.5.

David describes how he found success in another field after dropping out of high school before he entered university. Experiences with success either in employment or other areas of education were common for participants before enrolling in university.

Before I came here I got my pilots license and I got my flight instructors license so I can teach people how to fly, so when I was doing that I was doing well so you know...university is great. I went to flight school. Flight instructors make no money and it was basically a transition job, I realized even after that transition that I didn't want that lifestyle; I didn't want to spend twenty days away.

Ashley has found herself in a field that both interested her and where she receives the supports she needs to succeed in order to follow her career aspirations.

Yes, I see myself as educationally successful. I am in my second diploma in College I finished my wood working and now I am in Early Childhood Education at RRC and so far I'm passing everything and doing pretty well, even when the pass mark is 65%, I'm doing alright.

Erica refers to the support she has received in post secondary education as contributing to her educational success.

The teachers at university have contributed to my educational success. My calculus teacher has given me technology to use; my French teacher realized there was a language issue between the scribe and me so he let me do my exam on my own. He recorded the text to a tape and let me do the analysis of the text and I handed him a CD, hum, so it is relieving to have people open and willing to help. I am able to advocate very well in university.

Tom who has experienced academic difficulty in his major area of study is the one participant that did not feel educationally successful.

I don't feel educationally successful because right now I only have half the courses completed that I should have for the time spent at university. I haven't been as successful as I wished because of my learning disability the amount of credit hours that is considered a full course load is less, so I only have to take four courses each term as opposed to the five expected. This is not helpful this term because the expectation of the multi is imposing a time frame that is not in sink with the recommended course load based on the recommendations of accommodations determined from the assessment.

The military is policy driven, and getting extra time is not easy to do, it is questionable that I slipped through because they only have a slot to answer questions so they don't know about having an LD, so now I need to repeat any missed time on my own time.

Participation and Academic Management in Post Secondary Education

Participants talked about their major and minor areas of study, how they manage themselves in post secondary education academically and what participation in post secondary education means to them. Participants did not report feeling that they have ever been openly directed away from a field of study within their narratives because of their learning disability. Although there were three participant responses to a question on the First Interview: Participant Screening Questionnaire that seemed to suggest they had been directed away from a field of study. In the narrative data these three participants mentioned making conscious decisions about fields of interest that they decided to back away from because of their learning disability. This was because the particular fields of interest would have been taxing because of participant learning profiles of strengths and weaknesses and the potential course demands within those fields.

One of the participants made a conscious choice to follow another field of study because her first choice to enter social work was not available to her at the smaller university she wanted to attend. Therefore she was forced to balance her career choice against her choice of educational institution that she wanted to attend because of the smaller class sizes available at the smaller institution. David indicated that he has other areas of interest but he is studying in the area that he wants to pursue, "Hum not really, I mean there are lots of fields that I find interesting but I haven't considered other fields". Norm indicated that there are other courses he would like to take but he is in his chosen area of study, "Just different courses, I was thinking of taking math but economics is my first choice".

Erica had other areas of study she considered but decided what she would need to be able to do academically in those fields would draw too heavily on her weaknesses. Therefore they were not options that would have been a good match, “When I was in grade ten I thought I would be an engineer or a physiotherapist...I was deterred from engineering because of the writing load and now I am more interested in doing theatre sets”.

Academic Management, Accommodations, and Educator Support

Accommodations participants indicated were available to them are descriptive of what is pointed out in the literature as common accommodations available in post secondary education. The described accommodations are the same as those participants reported in Barga’s (1996) study highlighting how participants manage their academic difficulties within post secondary education. Participants commented on the accommodations that are available to them and what these accommodations mean to them. Most participants indicated that the accommodations are positive experiences; however one participant indicated that the typical accommodations were not overly effective because of the structure of the exams and the instructional methods of the department in which he was studying. This is what participants had to say about the use of accommodations.

Yvonne, who does not access the supports that could be available to her, talks about how she manages her academic course load in this narrative, “I consider myself like everybody else. I write down my course load dates for assignments and tests and follow it. Use time management strategies”.

Ashley elaborated on what accommodations available to her mean and the support that she receives from instructors.

RRC I have test accommodations like extra time, private test area, use of electronic dictionary. I can listen to music while writing tests because it helps me focus. The teachers give me power point notes, if I need clarification on projects I can get the teachers to look over assignments before I hand them in.

David mentioned the accommodations available to him and what the professor support means to him.

At this point the supports the ones that I find most helpful are the voluntary note takers, I mean at this point you have a few classes that have power point and I am able to get the power point lectures from the teacher which is immensely helpful but if that doesn't happen its really nice to have the voluntary note takers, the extra time especially for essay style or short essay tests, I can use a spell checker for these, but also the teachers are really understanding because at this point I don't lose any marks for grammar or spelling on long answer tests, also having writing assistance workshops.

Kate had this to say about the supports available to her during her second experience attending university and what these supports mean to her.

The supports are very helpful the second time round at university. I could maybe name a few things that could be done differently in the supports, although I am very grateful for the supports because I know without support I would not be able to go to University. University is set up for people like my sister, people who don't have disabilities. I am glad they have done something to accommodate students with LD, you know other people that don't think like the majority of people in university.

Norm commented on his intention to continue into graduate studies as an indication of what he now views his educational abilities to be and what participation in post secondary education means to him, "I plan on going to graduate studies in economics".

Tom decreased his course load because of his learning disability, which he did find helpful for managing his learning disability in post secondary education. However this may not have been beneficial for him because the expectations of both his department and his employment in the armed forces require that course completion be within a specific time frame. Tom mentioned that the typical accommodations are not helpful because of the exam structure and instructional approach within engineering.

Academic accommodation of decreased course load has been very helpful. But you don't complete the program in the time allotted by the faculty of engineering and I don't know if the faculty is aware that they need to give me more time. There is no educational support system with the military and the pressure is not relieved from them. I have been hesitant to go to my professors with the information about my assessment, in part because I didn't see the accommodations as affecting my outcome. They (the accommodations) wouldn't have helped.

Erica managed her academic difficulties by making sure that she had courses that she found intellectually stimulating to motivate her while trying to complete courses that were difficult for her because of her specific weaknesses associated with her learning disability. She also describes the confusion she often experienced with professors because of the inconsistencies in her academic abilities that occurs because of her learning disability.

I tried to always have one course that I would find very difficult like the calculus and other courses of high interest that would keep me motivated. This was one of my coping mechanisms.

I could go somewhere and say that I had a learning disability and I need the extra accommodation but professors that are mainstream learners have a difficult time understanding me because I can do very well, yet I need accommodations.

Participants talked about how they secure academic accommodations and what this means for them. Yvonne is registered with the Disability Services Centre but chooses not to use the accommodations available to her because she found the experience of disclosing her learning disability to secure accommodations to be stigmatizing, "I am registered at DS but I don't receive any accommodations I do everything like everyone else". Yvonne is the only participant in the sample to report experiencing feelings of stigmatization when self-identifying for accommodations at a Disabilities Services Centre.

Ashley described how she went about securing accommodations at the college she attends. All but one student recommends contacting the disabilities services to set up accommodations immediately the way Ashley describes.

The first day I found out I was accepted to RRC I took a copy of my assessment report to a counselor at Student Services and they started getting the accommodations organized. The counselor emailed my teachers to let them know what my needs would be.

David goes into depth about the process of getting accommodation and his willingness to approach securing accommodations in a proactive way.

I am the one that has to do it, if you aren't getting the voluntary note taker you need to talk to the instructor and let them know that it is not happening or let DS know that they need to send another letter, the same for exams you have to be very proactive you have to let them know that this is what you want and this is what your going to get and this is what means success for you. Accommodations are available to you but you need to make sure that you get them I can't imagine that if you just sat back being able to get them or succeed with them.

Elizabeth who gained access to an assessment and accommodations to help her during her second year as an undergraduate had this to say about the support of a professor who helped her obtain an assessment and the accommodations she

needed to succeed. She also describes a managing technique that she used to gain access to help through the Access program.

It was the one professor that first helped me get an assessment and secure accommodations. Also, even though I wasn't an Access student I did sneak in on the access tutorials and lectures. I kept careful track of where the aboriginal students were and who was having tutorials with the access program and just walked in and acted like I belonged to get some help and it worked. None of the aboriginal students ever questioned me being there.

Meaning of Self-Identifying

Participants had mixed things to say about self-identifying, as some find self-identifying stigmatizing, and others find it empowering, and some participants had specific strategies associated with self-identifying their learning disabilities in order to secure accommodations. Self-identifying for accommodations is an experience that is almost isolated for participants to their post secondary educational experiences. In the K-S4 years participants reported that family members usually their mother advocated for them within education or they declined to self-identify. Participant narratives reflect some variation in the meaning of self-identifying among participants within the context of post secondary education.

Yvonne who does not self-identify for accommodations had this to say about what her learning disability means to her.

It doesn't mean anything to me now to have a learning disability. It is not a part of who I am, having an LD is just a little part of me it is not going to effect who I am. I think that people without LD have problems too. It is not part of who I am.

Ashley indicated that being able to self-identify was important because for her it means that she is okay with her learning disability and that by doing so it secures what she needs to succeed.

I think it is real important that I am able to do that now (self identify) because it means that I am finally okay with knowing that I have learning disabilities, and that I will fight to get the accommodations that I deserve and need to do as well as possible.

Nancy shared Ashley's view with regard to what self-identifying means to her, "Important to be able to self identify LD because it means its okay".

Kate explained that self-identifying is difficult for her but it is something that she can do now without getting extremely upset.

Before I could not self identify to anybody without getting upset and crying after saying two things. Now if I need to talk to a professor or if I am in a group and I have to say you know what I can't read your handwriting I am dyslexic or whatever, I can do that now. I still struggle with it but I can at least tell people and not cry.

David talks about the importance of not only approaching the Disability Service Centre to secure accommodations but also the importance of being proactive and following through with the request to get what you need.

DS services sends out a notice, but I have went to the professor because the professor hadn't put out a notice, but then the professor said well I am just going to give you the power point notes, which he had the intention of giving me the notes but he had no way of notifying me because of the system so he was waiting for me to come to him about the notes.

Erica mentions feelings of stigmatization associated with the experience of self-identifying for accommodations but shares David's view about the importance of being proactive to get the accommodations you need to succeed.

Sometimes I feel stigmatized when I have to disclose, but if I don't

I won't get the help I need. I had to tell my theatre teacher, at St. B campus I had to tell the teachers because the system wasn't there. If there isn't a system in place then I feel like I need to disclose to everyone...In theatre, I learn my lines through tapes, I record the first reading, someone reads my part during the first reading then I listen to that over and over again to learn the lines.

Elizabeth like Erica suggested that self-identifying can mean feelings of stigmatization, "Feelings of stigmatization surface if I need to self identify to my professors".

Meaning of Post Secondary Education Participation

When it came to describing what it meant to participate in post secondary education the narratives participants shared ranged. Some mentioned it meant being able to show others that they could succeed through personal self-determination. However, others mentioned their appreciation and reliance on the accommodations available that they view to provide them with the ability to accomplish long-term goals and secure careers in interest areas. Participant narratives are reflective of more positive educational experiences than were previously experienced during the K-S4 educational years. The following narratives provide a snap shot of what it means to participate in post secondary education.

Yvonne who had indicated that what motivated her to succeed in education was her self-determination to show others who she perceived as holding low expectations of her that she could succeed academically. She had this to say about what participation in post secondary means to her, "It means that I proved a lot of people wrong. A lot of people expected that I was going to go into some kind of

training program to get some sort of low paying job but I am dispelling those rumors a little bit”.

For Kate participation in post secondary education means that she is accommodated with what she needs to succeed and it is these accommodations that have made it possible for her to follow her goals.

That’s my goal, I would honestly not be happy if I didn’t, wasn’t able to accomplish my goal, if it suddenly changes, and I don’t get any accommodations, I’m not to sure what I am going to do because this is the only thing I ever wanted to do, I think I would jump off a cliff, or I’m not too sure but I’m glad that it is working out.

David added the importance of people being supportive, “the DS services, persons have been very supportive and they have helped me out a lot”. He highlighted how having access to accommodations and support was meaningful for his ability to participate in post secondary education.

Elizabeth whose motivation to participant in post secondary education was career and accomplishment oriented had this to say about what it means to her to have a learning disability in post secondary education and her experience with self identifying.

If I have to be honest and say I have a LD it makes me cry inside. It is almost impossible for me to do it (self-identify) with a stranger. If I am filling out a job or grant applications and my professors say to put what the special circumstances (why it took longer to complete something academically) when I had to fill in things like that it made me almost nauseous. To have to do that and it never helped anyway because I never got any of the grants or jobs where I put that in up front anyway. Self-identifying is reserved for when I am cornered and somebody that I trust has spotted something and I will share the real issue.

Academic Accommodations in Post Secondary Education

For the most part the accommodations available to participants in post secondary education are secured more easily, are provided more formally, and are considered appropriate for the learning disability they experience by participants. Experiences with accessing accommodations that participants view as effective are positive at the post secondary level and participants report fewer negative experiences within post secondary securing the accommodations they need compared to earlier educational experiences described in their shared narratives. Narratives reflect that the approach to accommodations in post secondary provide them with a sense of security that they will be able to succeed academically. Participant narratives provided insight into the differences most participants experienced with respect to current accommodations available and those available during earlier educational experiences in the public school system. There was an exception to the common views held by participants by three participants who reported having similar accommodations available to them while attending school in the K-S4 years. The three participants who had access to a more formally organized set of accommodations during the K-S4 educational years shared narratives that suggest they were limited to what type of accommodations were available to them initially and that their accommodations only became stable and more formally provided to them once they had IEP's and ITP's put in place for them.

Nancy who had an IEP and ITP in place during her K-S4 years indicated that the supports received during post secondary education are similar to those

received in previous education. The two other participants who had IEP's and ITP's in place reflected similar experiences because of the supports they received during early education, "Similar supports such as a note taker and scribe, the difference is it is more challenging".

Ashley remarks how much better the accommodations are in post secondary for her compared to her other educational experiences.

It is completely different in College both times compared to high school, and my earlier education because there is so much more help and there actually willing to do accommodations. The teacher's- professors they are willing to do as much helping as you're willing to work for, so if you're willing to do the work they are willing to help you out.

David who attended the specialized education program at Laureate Academy for students with learning disabilities elaborated on his self-determination and proactive approach to secure what it is he needs to succeed.

It's more self-directed, it's much more, at least for me it's much more self-directed it's much more what I want and that feeling of me going after it and trying to succeed.

Meaning to Interpersonal Relationships with Family, Educators, and Peers

Participant narratives reflected more positive experiences within their interpersonal relationships during their post secondary educational experiences than previous perceived relationships during their K-S4 educational years. Most participants had reported that interpersonal relationships tended to improve for them after the transition to high school. This is interesting because it was during the high school educational years S1-S4 that most participants reported gaining access to the help they needed for academic success or when they had gained access to an instructional intervention privately. It was these experiences that

brought participants understanding of their learning profile and their academic functioning up to par with other students within their peer cohort. Participants not only reported improved interpersonal relationships with educators and peers, but also found the instructors within their programs supportive and understanding of their needs for the most part. The following narrative quotes describe participant's interpersonal relationships with family, educators, and peers during post secondary education.

Nancy like many other participants pointed out that her interpersonal relationships in post secondary education are more positive and that she has an increased sense of self-confidence with her learning profile, "More positive than anything I feel like I have a place in the world. Changed to the positive because I am more comfortable with who I am".

Ashley shared the following information about her interpersonal relationships in post secondary and provided an explanation that relates to her ability to self identify her learning disability to be linked to the improvement with her interpersonal relationships with instructors and peers.

I think they're better now. Now I can come forth and say I have a learning disability and they understand better so there isn't as much miscommunication because I don't understand and they understand why I may not understand the material and they explain it until I do.

David has taken on a role of trying to change people's faulty opinions about individuals with learning disabilities within his interpersonal relationships through self-disclosure.

I have had people make comments out of ignorance about it, I do try to correct the thinking, I have had people make comments like

their feeling about people with an LD is that their just stupid right, and me saying obviously that isn't true because I have an LD, and look at my grades they are on par with yours.

Kate who indicated she experienced intense social isolation in the narratives elaborated on her earlier educational experiences because of her learning disability indicated limited interpersonal relationships with peers in university. Kate had elaborated on the family impact of her learning disabilities during the K-S4 educational years and continues to perceive family relationships to be affected because of her learning disability.

Hum...it's still the same, but it's alright because I don't go to University to make friends, because of the other things I don't talk to the other class mates unless I have to. As a respite worker, I have made two very good friends and the friends that I have are people that understand my learning disability and the reason why I do things. I don't hang out with anybody that doesn't have a clue as to what learning disabilities are or whatever.

With my mom and dad it is very good but I know there is huge conflict with my family and what is happening with my sister. I know that my sister and I are never ever going to be able to have the relationship that we should. Because my mom is very proud of my accomplishments and she is upset that my sister is not doing something along the same lines. It's a huge mess in my family and it has been like this for years.

Yvonne, who never did feel that her interpersonal relationships with peers or family were negatively affected, affirmed that this has remained the same during post secondary education. She indicated that her participation in post secondary education has proved a lot of people wrong regarding the educational expectations she perceived that early educators held for her.

None of my teachers know that I have an LD. A few of my friends know but it is not a big deal to them, not with peers. It doesn't really have any impact with my family. I proved a lot of people wrong. A lot of people expected that I was going to go into some

kind of training program to get some sort of low paying job but I am dispelling those rumors a little bit.

Elizabeth describes the meaning of her interpersonal relationships with students with whom she has had to the opportunity to teach and help with her knowledge about students with learning disabilities.

I am a lot more understanding of students that are not mainstream learners when I am a TA for courses. I have a reputation of being an excellent teacher. I also was invited to do a lectureship at the U of W. I got a position coordinating a course for eight years. I still have people coming up to me and saying that I made a profound difference for their learning and that is because of the personal experiences I had.

Awareness of Other Students with LD in Post secondary Education

Overall participants are unaware of other students personally at university with a learning disability, although students mentioned that they know there are other students registered with the Disability Services Centres. Students who are aware of other students with learning disabilities generally came to know them from a different setting than the university. Provided here are examples of what students had to say about awareness of other students with learning disabilities and what this means for them. Ashley indicated that she has met other students with learning disabilities at the college she attends.

I know other students with learning disabilities at RRC. We are in the same classes; you just kind of know because you have the same sort of thing, we understand each other better so we hang out with each other more because we are able to identify and bond. It is like having a support system; it rather tells you that you are not alone, removes feelings of isolation.

Nancy agreed with Ashley in terms of what it means to know other students with learning disabilities "Knowing other students with LD provides

support, understanding and less feelings of isolation". Other participants mentioned that it might be a good idea if there was a way to come into contact with other students registered because of learning disabilities in order to develop a support system. Tom indicated that he was aware of another student in his department who he only became aware of because of a comment made by a professor with respect to the individual.

I am only familiar with the one student in engineering, but I don't really know anyone personally. I really am isolated at the university level when it comes to having an LD at university; there really isn't a support system in place for students with LD. In fact, public comment made about another student with an LD in the engineering faculty contributed to me feeling stigmatized when needing to disclose for personal accommodations.

Kate indicated that she knows of other students with learning disabilities but not from the university setting. Kate mentioned what it means to her to have had the opportunity to come to know other adults with learning disabilities outside of the educational setting. In addition, she is another participant that reports having a family member with a learning disability.

I know of people but again it is from here (Destination Employment Program (DE) at Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba (LDAMB), and being a respite worker outside of the university is the only other time that I met people with LD. I haven't noticed anybody else in the University or aware of anybody other than those opportunities from here and from work. It means a lot, because I can finally get rid of that barrier, you know I am purple everybody else is whatever, I can finally realize that I am not the only one that can't read handwriting or I am not the only one that struggles with this.

Elizabeth who also has another family member with a learning disability became aware of other post secondary students with learning disabilities because she was a TA at the university. She further comments on how she has come to

view students with learning disabilities as being very much like an oppressed minority based on her interactions with them as an instructor as opposed to a peer.

I was a teacher assistant within my faculty. My awareness was of students who were in classes that I was a TA in who I was able to recognize were having difficulties because of LD. A few of these students I disclosed my LD to and that enabled them to disclose to me. Then I was able to show them ways that they could do things to help them. There were a couple of professors who told me they had this problem LD.

In a sense when you're learning disabled it is like you are a minority that's been oppressed and have had all these things happen and you're very much like an oppressed minority.

Perceptions of Stigmatization

Narratives were less reflective of experiences of stigmatization while attending post secondary education compared to the experiences of stigmatization participants described in their narratives that elaborated on the K-S4 educational years. Although some participants do report experiencing feelings of stigmatization in different contexts within their post secondary experiences some of these do relate to personal perceptions of other individual's potential responses. These perceptions of stigmatization seem to be linked particularly around the issue of self-identifying for securing accommodations or with peers when doing small group work. Two participants perceive the faculties in which they study to have gate-keeping characteristics that inhibit or make self-identifying particularly stigmatizing for them. However most participants share stories that reflect post secondary education as a supportive environment describing their professors as open to providing them with the accommodations they need along with individualized support to help them succeed.

What participants did have to say about experiences of stigmatization was more related to specific difficulties they experience because of their learning disability in the larger context, which requires self-identifying. Experiences of stigmatization are less associated with the negative attitudes of others as was the case reflected in the narratives during the K-S4 educational years. Furthermore experiences of stigmatization tend to be less reflective of the negative consequences of the associated features outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000) than reported during the K-S4 educational years.

Nancy's comment is reflective of what most participants had to say about feelings of stigmatization within their interactions with professors and peers: "No stigmatization now, there has been in the past. Professors have been really supportive and willing to help me out". Ashley shared Nancy's feelings about experiences of stigmatization in post secondary, "I haven't experienced stigmatization in College the way I did in earlier education. No feelings of stigmatization".

Yvonne who felt stigmatized when she first enrolled in university when disclosing for accommodations at the Disabilities Services Centre recalled the experience that helped her decide to for go accommodations in post secondary education.

The only feelings of stigmatization I have experienced in post secondary are when disclosing for accommodations at DS when first registering for university. I felt like I was judged negatively so I fore went accommodations. When I went to go see him (the DS coordinator) it felt like I was back in elementary school. I felt like I was that little kid that couldn't do any good. This was when I was first registered for university before I had even started. It was like he didn't think I was smart, it was that whole feeling of being

judged negatively. I felt like anything he was going to be giving would be like a chore and all that. I was telling him what kind of help I got in high school and he was saying the only thing we can provide you is extra time for tests. In grade twelve I had a scribe for a while and he said that he couldn't do anything like that here.

Kate shared stories about how she feels when disclosing to peers as being stigmatizing as well she worries that she will be judged negatively by others which in some cases she admits can be directly related to her own self-confidence and perceptions.

All the time, I think that, I feel that when I am in class, like if I have to go to the disability office I feel that they might think my questions are stupid. It is still just here but it could just be in my head. When I disclose my weaknesses people have said things like, "don't worry about it I will just do the assignment", so sometimes I wait to say anything until I can figure out what I think they are going to say and sometimes that screws me over because it can almost be too late before I say anything. Especially if I have to say that, I can't read handwriting.

Norm shared perceptions of stigmatization with regard of how he perceives the views of peers toward his accommodations, "It's been more of a thing by other students, so I don't want to tell anything about other students, and it's almost like your getting a free pass. I think that's how other students see my accommodations". Tom reflected on the feelings of stigmatization that arises for him when having to self-identify his learning disability to professors within his faculty.

I have been hesitant to go to my professors with the information about my assessment, in part, because I didn't see the accommodations as affecting my outcome. They (the accommodations) wouldn't have helped. I felt stigmatized going to talk to them about my learning disability.

Elizabeth regarded experiences with the amount of effort she needed to put out as stigmatizing. This is because it required that she had to continuously self-identify to get special permission to take other courses that required the completion of the course she struggled with to move forward.

Required calculus was so difficult that I had to register 5 times before I felt that I could pass the course the sixth time. I sat through the course five times and learnt a little each time before I could complete the course the sixth time. I often had to go and get special permission to take other courses with these required courses in order to keep moving forward with a full course load to complete my major and minors. It has to do with not being able to make it through the gatekeeper courses when I know that those gatekeeper courses don't have anything to do with my inherent intelligence or my inherent ability to do science and do it well. I can't get past those barriers.

The other thing I mentioned about if you say you have an LD the competition is so fierce that people don't have time to deal with it.

Stigmatized with peers in grad studies for the people that are in there for the science well than the LD is irrelevant but for the people that are in there because they are mainstreaming the system and they want to have the biggest best grants and the fanciest office and it is all about the outward measure of success their response to me is my LD can get in their way and slow them down and screw that they don't want to deal with it. It tends to bring out people who are honestly interested in the science than what I can contribute to the science.

Advocacy, Learning Style, and Educational Interventions

Participant narratives reflect individuals who have developed the ability to self-advocate for ensuring that they gain access to the accommodations they need for educational success. Their narratives suggest that the Student Disability Service Centres at their institutions provide them with the support they need for academic success. Most students mentioned experiences with educators that have been supportive within their fields of study. They view the accommodative

supports available to them as appropriate and provided in a formal way.

Participant narratives reflect views that post secondary education is a positive educational experience. Overall participant narratives suggest that their abilities to self-advocate play a huge role in promoting positive educational experiences for them academically.

Ashley refers to herself as an effective self-advocate and she finds that her instructors are responsive to her needs.

I know how to self-advocate because I know what I need and how to tell people what I need. At RRC, I have teachers that are very helpful; they go beyond what they have to do.

Kate has had direct instruction on self-advocacy outside of the education system that she finds helps her be an affective self-advocate. All participants indicating they have had direct instruction on learning style and self-advocacy report gaining access to this instruction in the private or non-profit sector. This is what Kate had to say about learning style and self-advocacy skill instruction, "The advocacy stuff is not from U of W but what I learnt here at Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba. Specific instruction about self-advocacy and learning profile was first received in the DE program".

Norm commented on the advocacy skills of the Disability Services Centre at his educational institution as being important for him although he did mention at a previous point that he had received direct instruction on his learning style in private school when he attended Laureate Academy.

Advocacy within the post secondary institution really relies on the strengths of the DS office and hum, they basically, the strengths of the accommodations really depends on the strengths of how they advocate...U of W it was the DS office that had the authority to put

accommodations in place...it is really the testing accommodations that makes the difference for me...we discuss what I need, I try to use as little additional extra time as possible...removing the pressure of the test situation lets me focus, I don't have the pressure of other people leaving the room once their finished or the feeling of competitiveness.

David talked about what it meant to him to have accommodations available to him in university and reflected on what it meant for him to not have accommodations available to him in high school or a confident to advocate for him.

For myself at least in university I found the accommodations a savior, incredibly helpful. I didn't have the motivation for myself or anyone to advocate for me once I was in high school so I didn't have any supports in high school, my parents weren't willing to walk me through everything at that point.

Elizabeth recognized that she had developed a number of strategies to help her succeed academically before she had been diagnosed with a learning disability in university but indicated that if she had needed more help that she believed it would have been available to her.

I feel that if I had needed more strategies that there would have been help there for me but I had already developed effective strategies therefore direct instruction on how to cope with my LD for academic success was not an issue.

Overall participants indicated that they receive their accommodations they need directly through the Student Disability Service Centres personnel. However a few students indicated that they do use private tutors to help them with the areas of difficulty they experience, such as private tutoring with academic writing and grammatical errors.

Challenges and Barriers

Participants reported challenges and barriers are more directly related to their specific areas of strengths and weaknesses that interfere with their academic abilities within the post secondary education context. External experiences within the environment, interpersonal relationships, negative attitudes of others, and negative consequences of the label, lack of access to appropriate interventions or accommodations, or perceptions of stigmatization play less of a role with respect to challenges and barriers experienced within the post secondary setting. This is especially evident when narratives are weighed against those narratives shared with respect to the challenges and barriers experienced during the K-S4 educational years. Participants do have challenges and barriers they experience that are considered direct consequences of their learning profiles. These challenges and barriers have had an impact on specific abilities to function because of particular areas of weaknesses. The following comments reflect what challenges and barriers mean for them during their post secondary education.

Tom elaborated on the challenges he experiences because the instructional method of his department is not a good match with his learning profile along with the challenges he experiences in being able to take advantage of the recommendations of a decreased course load because of his learning disability.

Main challenge is not the course load itself it is learning the material. I understand but I don't necessarily follow their method of instruction. Difficulty understanding material in the way it is presented. They have a very rigorous approach that is devoid of analogy. One professor is good at giving analogies to help you understand. I am not able to get support I need from my work environment to be able to take advantage of the accommodation of a decreased course load.

Yvonne who does not self-identify for accommodations at her post secondary institution continues to face challenges in academic areas because of her learning disability. She describes her management strategy as gaining assistance from her mother to help her cope with the academic challenges she experiences.

I have a huge problem with writing papers, grammar, and sentence formation. I have problems writing papers, being up to par on grammar, sentence structure and all that. My mom helps me...she edits my papers. I just write, write, write, write, when my mom goes through it she says this doesn't make any sense, you forgot words.

David also made reference the specific challenges he experiences with writing papers and having a confident to help him manage this challenge.

The biggest challenge is the papers, at this point I have only really had two courses that were paper oriented, you just struggle through them and get as much as you can, my wife helps me and she has a friend who loves editing papers so she helps me. I can't see where my mistakes are in the thought stream, I have to get my thoughts out then edit later.

Ashley reported challenges relating to continued difficulty with specific academic tasks and shared information about how she manages with the use of specific strategies.

Through RRC right now the early childhood education course is very much reading and memorizing and theories and it's very hard to remember a lot, it's very different from the wood working where it was very hands on and visual, so I find it challenging. I read the material over and over, I highlight, I type information, and I use strategies to help me. These strategies are working for me so far. I use study strategies.

Kate looked at the challenges that she expected to experience in the long-term because of the continued academic challenges she faces as a direct result of her learning disability.

All of the time, I mean reading the textbooks for example. I know things are going to get a lot harder, and there is going to be so many challenges I am going to have to face. I know I am going to have to take math or science class, when I have grade two math ability. I know that not all of my professors are going to print for me; I am going to have a lot that are going to hand write. I know that I am not going to find a note taker every single class that will do this. I know that as the years go on that there will be lots of stuff that I don't know yet how I will handle them. I am willing to face these things as they come along and find solutions.

Norm also looks at the challenges he anticipates experiencing over the long-term of his educational experience elaborating on the importance of being able to advance your skills to manage these anticipated challenges.

Over the long-term like a year and a half down the road you feel like your learning might hit a brick wall you don't know what to do next; you sort of don't know how you will advance your knowledge and your study skills and this kind of deal. Institutions require documentation, something that is official, that there is no subjectiveness to, it can be a barrier for students that don't have the documentation...I worked with one of their teaching professors who did an hour of testing, and wrote something internally so I could get accommodation at U of W.

Erica mentioned the challenges she experiences in vary aspects of her day-to-day living and the impact on her ability to function as a direct result of her specific learning profile, "Reading the posters around campus, or reading notes on the class door saying class is cancelled or moved to another room, doing the professor course evaluations".

Participant Identified Solutions

Exploring the identified solutions that participants believed could lead to educational success for children and adolescents based on their personal educational experiences is one of the primary objectives of this study. Participants had an array of ideas that they believe would be beneficial for interventions or preventative measures to promote academic success. Their suggested solutions focused on overcoming the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities often experienced within the educational system. Participant identified solutions take a global approach in that they cover a variety of specific problem areas in which they direct their recommendations. They provided recommendations for helping students at all levels in order to promote more positive educational experiences. Participant identified solutions touched on a number of areas that they believed could have a positive impact on promoting abilities for academic achievement among students with learning disabilities.

Participants articulated the importance of having an advocate during early education along with the importance of developing personal awareness and self-understanding for promoting the development of skills necessary to be able to self-advocate. Identified solution recommendations encompassed increased knowledge about learning disabilities for educators, peers, and students themselves. Proposed solutions were directed at the impact of interpersonal relationships and the negative views of others including lowered academic expectations from educators. Emphasis was placed on the need for increased knowledge about learning disabilities to overcome these problem areas. Also

mentioned were the difficulties students with learning disabilities often experience with stigmatization and the associated features of learning disabilities outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000).

Participants suggested that difficulties in these areas be recognized and preventive measures developed. Participant narratives showed consensus with respect to what they thought were important areas in which to focus interventions and preventative measures for promoting high school completion and participation in post secondary education.

Participant Recommendations for Students in K-S4 Education

Students recommended having an advocate because of the role that advocates play in helping students to gain access to the appropriate instruction, inventions, and accommodations. Participants mentioned how having an advocate helps student's deal with the difficulties they experience in school and provides personal support to students. They suggested that having an advocate helps ensure that the education system is working toward dealing with the student's academic difficulties. Learning how to self-advocate for personal and academic success was highlighted as essential for educational success among participants. The importance of learning how to self-advocate was also an expressed recommendation. They viewed personal self-advocacy skills as essential for gaining assess to needed accommodations. This is what participants had to say about what it means to have someone to advocate for students with learning disabilities and learning to self-advocate to help promote educational success.

Ashley commented on the support having an advocate provides, "Having an advocate is important because it helps the person be able to look up to someone; it gives (students with LD) someone they know they can count on". Norm thought having an advocate was important because the educational system doesn't know what they're dealing with so students need someone to be a voice within education. Norm believed that advocates take an important role as a voice and mediator to ensure that student needs are recognized and met within the education system. Other participants at various points of the interviews shared this view. Norm shared the following analogy to show why the role of advocate as a voice and mediator for the student was an important role.

Having an advocate is important because they (educators) don't really know what their coping with, it's sort of like the doctor you know something is wrong if you're sick but you need the doctor to tell you what you need to do to get better.

Participants shared views about what it means to be able to self-advocate and why this is an important skill for students with learning disabilities to develop. Nancy viewed this skill in the following way, "You are your best advocate". Ashley mentioned a positive personal attribute of being able to self-advocate, "It makes you a stronger person and able to go to someone to get the help you need". Norm suggested that these skills should be developed early, and most participants made the same suggestion, "earlier is better". Erica viewed being able to self-advocate as an important skill to develop but also pointed out that self-advocacy skills have limitations because of the lack of knowledge about learning disabilities among educators.

It is better to be dealing with people who know because saying that

I am dyslexic can you help me doesn't matter because then you have to provide a definition and a proof that you are dyslexic. So self-advocacy is not the main answer. If your dealing with someone that doesn't know what dyslexia is it is much easier to go I am stupid could you help me rather than telling them you are dyslexic because everyone knows if your stupid you can't do much. When you just want help you don't want to have to justify the help.

A couple of participants recommended developing positive relationships with educators as advocates. They thought the most important people for students to connect with during their middle, secondary and post secondary education to provide support for increasing educational success would be the educators. Norm commented on the importance of educator encouragement to build self-confidence and self-esteem; "Hum encouragement from the school system, from the teachers, or the DS offices at the universities, just have a welcoming environment, here people feel comfortable and an inclusive environment". David viewed the following support staff within the school, "I would assume that the guidance counselors and resource teachers are important for keeping the expectations and gradually building up to what is needed".

Promoting educational success was captured in the themes that encompassed increased knowledge for students, families, teachers, and peers. Recommendations of increased knowledge focused on educator understanding of the appropriate instructional and educational accommodations to help students succeed. The themes that emerged included the importance of both the perceptions and attitudes of others as well as personal perceptions and self-awareness. Recommending students with learning disabilities have the opportunity to have contact with educators with positive attitudes about student's

potential abilities for developing positive personal perceptions and self-awareness. The importance of educators not lowering the academic expectations came into focus for promoting academic success. Erica brought attention to the negative self-concepts that arise when students are not able to gain access to educators that have the knowledge or understanding to help students. She brought forth the need of a focus for developing preventative and intervention measures for the negative self-concepts often developed. Erica's views in this area are highlighted in the narrative below.

Well information, people who know what they're dealing with, people who know how to deal with what they're dealing with. What really helped me out was the fact that at least something was being done, not necessarily the right thing, the fact that my mom would get up and do something, having an advocate during that time is essential to make me realize that its not just me, its other people as well. These things should be done as early as possible otherwise you think it is you, I thought it was me; I thought I was stupid until my mom crushed that thought quite quickly.

Elizabeth recommended increased awareness of the formal regulations that direct educational approaches for families as advocates and students as learners to know their rights to education.

Understanding the obligations of teachers and professors is important and the rules and regulations that they are supposed to follow within the educational institution with whom they are employed is important information for students with LD to have.

She further recommended a focus be given in recognizing that different learning styles require different approaches without lowering the academic expectations for removing the barriers to learning that occur in an inflexible educational structure.

I think it is acknowledgement that there are different ways of

learning and that it is okay to learn differently. A lot of people have a narrow view of what is required to get ahead, I think allowing people to substitute in equivalency is very important and it needs to be formalized. There are ways to substitute equivalency that would remove the barriers but not lower the standards. I don't believe in lowering the standards at any educational level but if you can find other ways of doing it that is the key.

Participants provided information about potential solutions based on instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations that would possibly require changes in the current skill sets of educators and the resources available to help. The following narratives cover a range of recommendations for intervention and preventative measures. Kate touched on the importance of providing children with the appropriate instructional methods. All participants reiterated the importance of appropriate instructional methods as being essential components of effective intervention. Kate highlighted the need to promote positive self-esteem, increased personal understanding, and social intervention. Kate's narrative is reflective of the overall participant views.

For children there needs to be something, I think there needs to be different ways of teaching. Something to work on self-esteem, so they don't become like me when they get older and they have absolutely no self-esteem and they get frustrated and they think everybody, you know, is talking about them. There definitely needs to be something for kids to help them. I think it would be nice if they did something in elementary school like they do here (LDAMB) where a group of kids could get together. I know when I talk to other people I know that they mention that when they were in school they didn't have any other friends either. That would be a good way to solve a few problems. Self-esteem intervention is important for educational success.

Kate further expressed how the current approaches and materials used are stigmatizing and ineffective which was a commonly held participant opinion.

There needs to be programs, I don't think that having someone in

grade eight to read to kids in kindergarten is the best way to go about things because that just was so damaging to my "self" and that is horrible. There needs to be some other programs. Before if you struggle with math, I know you have to start at the beginning but I don't think its fair to make them do things the same way as every one else. I learnt from my private tutor how to do my times tables on my fingers, I learnt things with little tricks and I think there needs to be more of that thing I guess.

Norm referred to the need for students with learning disabilities to have specialized instruction and access to teachers that understand students with learning disabilities.

I think that the best thing would be is for the Government to have scholarships for young kids to go to the Laureate for private specialized education. I think having this understanding is essential and they teach you these things at Laureate.

Participants elaborated on the importance of the accommodations available within post secondary education. Recommending similar accommodations be provided during their K-S4 educational years as a means for promoting educational success. They unanimously agreed that more appropriate educational interventions are needed for students with learning disabilities as early as possible. The following suggestions were offered about educational interventions and accommodations that are comparable with those available within the context of post secondary education. Ashley suggested that providing accommodations that are available in post secondary education as a way of promoting academic success for students at all levels, "I think all accommodations available in College should be available in earlier education because it would help these students a lot sooner". David pointed out that the concept of accommodations can be misunderstood by others and perceived as a process of having expectations

lowered suggesting increased knowledge is needed with regard to what accommodation really mean.

The lowered expectations of others, the problem with that there is the double sword, your saying I want accommodations but your saying within those accommodations you want to succeed as much, but I think it is easy for people to misinterpret the accommodations as lowered expectations. I frequently get that subtle feeling when people hear the idea of accommodations for instance for essay exams that I will take time and a half in that they go that the expectation is therefore lowered so there is that double play.

All participants commented that they viewed lowered expectations as a problem for their interpersonal relationships with educators and peers. They indicated that these lowered expectations created personal problems for individuals with regard to their desire and ability to accomplish what they should be able to academically. All participants linked the lowered expectations they perceived coming from educators as a factor associated with their experiences of lowered motivation as well as the consequences of the associated features of learning disabilities. In the following narrative, David comments on the importance of not lowering the expectation bar and providing a supportive environment as a preventative measure of the associated features.

In high school my relationship with teachers was incredibly poor, but that is because I gave off the impression that I didn't want to be there and 50% was good enough for me. A support environment helps with the emotional and psychological consequences, I mean my parents were incredibly supportive but I still felt that I wasn't going to succeed, and it is incredibly subtle the way that its expressed to you, the pressures outside of me has an underlying feeling, don't try your not going to succeed. Understanding that these are the expectations and you need to meet them. I am glad my parents were the way they were because they let me be self directive let me fail the way I was going to fail and learn from that failure, it took me back but at least it was me, if they had of sat me down and said your going to succeed were going to force you to

succeed I wouldn't have developed that feeling of me succeeding on my own terms of being able to do that.

Yvonne suggested that lowered expectations that others hold of students with learning disabilities have a negative impact on their motivation to reach higher levels of achievement. Yvonne had this to say about what she perceives to be negative attitudes of others with respect to true student abilities and potentials.

Even when you're given a simple task and then told by the teacher oh you can't do that and then another teacher says oh yea you can do that no problem I have seen you do stuff like that before. That makes a huge difference; you will probably do it faster and do it better. If students think less of themselves they will achieve less. I think we only do what is expected of us and if you're not expected to do much you don't. If student expectation is lowered then achievement is lowered we need to do what is expected of us.

Ashley highlighted teacher attributes as being important to help students with learning disabilities; positive teacher attributes were mentioned as being an important factor for helping students with learning disabilities succeed by all participants, "I think the best thing is if the teachers would be more willing to spend time with the students, be patient, and go over things". Ashley further comments on the important roles teachers play in being able to help students with learning disabilities have more positive experiences globally.

A lot of prevention has to do with teachers and structure. I think that again, a lot has to do with the teachers in the school system, the other kids have an impact, but if the teachers take the time to help the kids with an LD and work with them as much as possible that person would likely be more successful.

Participants made the following suggestions to help students at all educational levels gain self-confidence and self-esteem. Tom who always felt

socially isolated during the K-S4 educational years mentioned the importance of developing positive self-views for promoting self-confidence and self-esteem.

A sense of belonging and a vision of where you're going are important. You need to see a future because your vision is your future. When people get frustrated they are not sure what to do and people with LD/ADHD often walk away from the social vision of what people are supposed to do. People need to know that there are other visions they can pursue that are suited to them. People need to recognize there are other options... "Sense of belonging where they are going... vision is your future.

Although all participants shared the view that focusing on strengths was incredibly important it was also acknowledged that understanding specific areas of weaknesses was essential for dealing with these difficulties. Ashley commented on the importance of student awareness to help provide the student with an understanding of specific academic areas that would require more effort for success, "I think this knowledge is important, it can help for example, reading, writing, and spelling is not my strength so I know I have to work hard at these". Further stating that, "You need to learn as much as you can about your learning disability". Nancy suggested that to develop self-awareness it is important to, "Accept disability and from there research your disability so you better understand".

Participants believe that direct instruction that helps increase personal self-knowledge to be important. Participants viewed increased knowledge as important because it results in increased understanding of learning profiles, which they consider an essential personal attribute for reaching academic success.

Participants perceive increased understanding of personal learning profile to enable students with learning disabilities to have clear understanding of learning

weaknesses as well as strengths. Awareness in this sense is thought to promote positive self-views, self-confidence, and more positive self-esteem. Ashley believes self-knowledge is important to help students at all educational levels, "They just take education on their type of LD and learn how to explain it to others. Knowledge based education for self-awareness is most important to help students at all levels". Erica had this to say, "Understanding your learning strengths, not just focusing on the weaknesses", to be an important factor in personal self-awareness.

Participants held views about the negative consequences of learning disabilities expressing the need to develop programs for educators to increase their awareness that these consequences often occur among students with learning disabilities. They suggested that proactive steps be taken to prevent these negative consequences from occurring. They also felt that intervention measures be provided to students who are experiencing global difficulties. Comments about stigmatization are closely linked to the associated features of learning disabilities. Developing increased understanding of how the instructional approaches and judgmental interpersonal relationships can create feelings of stigmatization was viewed to be an area that requires greater focus. Ashley shared her perception about how negative attitudes are perceived by peers within the environment and the reactive responses are reflected in social difficulty with peer relations.

Attitudes held by others help create the challenges and barriers because others then react negatively too. Yes, hum if you take that other kids react negatively to LD kids and bully you for being different that are not positive on that child's self-esteem.

Elizabeth also viewed the negative attitudes of others as having consequences of creating challenges and barriers for students rather than opening the doors for success.

The negative attitudes held by others help create the challenges and barriers experienced by LD students, because if you have somebody that has positive attitude there's no issue or there is a way to get around it if there is an issue but if you have somebody with a negative attitude that is rigid it becomes an absolute barrier.

A couple of participants touched on how feelings of stigmatization, which was a commonly expressed experiences described as being particularly intense during their earliest educational experiences need a proactive focus of prevention. Yvonne alludes to the negative consequences of learning disabilities that students often experience and teacher limitations to cope with these students effectively.

I think the whole system needs to change because right now it seems like many teachers need to see it as not a problem with the individual student but that different people learn different ways. Teachers might not see that they are being prejudiced toward individual students but they definitely are sometimes. Teachers need better knowledge of what LD's are...

Summary

In general participant identified solutions relate directly to their personal experiences of having a learning disability within the context of education. It is important to note that participants had strong feelings about their personal experiences within education. They believe that many of these experiences influenced the perpetuation of increased difficulties for them rather than provide them with relief. They are passionate toward promoting changes for students with learning disabilities believing there are several changes required within the context of education that include methods of instruction, materials, overall

understanding of others, and specifically increased knowledge among educators. The predominate participant recommendation that emerged in the data focused on developing an overall better approach within the context of education as necessary for promoting positive academic outcomes that support high school completion and participation in post secondary education.

Participant Recommendations for Post Secondary Students

Participants elaborated on recommendations for post secondary students with learning disabilities with regard to securing the academic accommodations needed for educational success. Participant recommendations highlight the importance of self-awareness and self-advocacy skills for being able to gain access to the accommodations needed for academic success. Ashley highlighted the importance for post secondary students to understand their learning disability and advocate for the accommodations they need for educational success.

Hum... just basically all the accommodations I have mentioned, you have to understand what your disability is, how you learn, get a recent assessment, bring it to a counselor and tell them straight out what you think you need. Have an assessment, understand your learning profile, and self-advocate.

Erica held similar views with respect to the importance of students having the supportive documentation, knowing what it is they need to succeed, and being proactive in self-advocating for educational success in post secondary.

Get a diagnosis and get everything in writing. Keep pushing, asking, asking and asking because if you don't ask you're never going to get what you need. The DS person should go and ask for volunteers in the class rather than wait for someone to walk into their office before I can get a note taker.

Norm suggests getting the support of the appropriate person and developing contacts with other students with learning disabilities as important for post secondary students with learning disabilities to succeed.

Go to the DS office, right away, before your classes start, and get registered, learn the persons name and understand what they do there, and maybe talk with some other students that have been at the university for awhile so you can understand what going to university is like (other students with LD).

Elizabeth had the following remarks around potential experiences of stigmatization and provided suggestions for promoting educational success.

If the people your dealing with are educated and don't react negatively your not stigmatized. Accommodations are critical and office hours you can count on because persons with LD need the extra help. Networking with peers is critically important. Access to old exams are critically important, practiced exams, accommodations for exams, accessing student groups, extra peer-to-peer help, and reliable office hours are all critically important.

Kate supported other participants' suggestions that developing a way for helping students with learning disabilities to connect maybe helpful for removing the isolation and developing support networks.

I definitely think that most of the accommodations I have I am pretty happy with and I don't know what else I would need. I wish that there was at the university besides there just being a room where you go where you write your tests that they had some programs like they do here where students with learning disabilities can get together and they can talk about what courses they took and they could say I found this one hard because you know there's a lot of reading or whatever just stuff like that. I know even talking to the academic advisors about what courses to take in the future I get absolutely nowhere with them because they work with the whole average population of the university they weren't helpful you can't take this course because blab. Need for more community within the university of LD students.

Additional Participant Views

Participants added the following additional information or personal views that they thought were important and wanted to share. Some of the additional points they made overlap with previous narrative information they shared. However they wanted to emphasize the importance of these specific views to promote educational success for students with learning disabilities. Other points reflect participant critiques based on their personal experiences during the K-S4 educational years with respect to the educational system. These critiques resulted in recommendations related to evaluating the instructional and intervention methods that are currently being used within the educational system for students with learning disabilities. Their suggestions are directed at promoting educational success and alleviating the negative consequences that all participants reported experiencing. Not all participants had additional information to share feeling that what they had presented in their narrative stories had covered their personal experiences and views adequately.

When is the method of instruction examined within education to determine overall effectiveness? Does this occur when overall educational outcomes are not meeting specific goals? If so, what are the specific goals of education? These questions come forth from what Tom had to say in his additional comments. Tom reflected on the overall structure of the educational approach indicating that better evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional methods would be important for being able to provide appropriate education to a wider range of student's at all educational levels.

One thing that is missing is an evaluation of the method of instruction in education to make sure that the method of instruction is meeting the needs of individual's at all educational levels.

People with learning disabilities need to have things explained to them over again...there has to be some understanding that the pressure to perform sometimes gets in the way of the person's ability to perform...this results in feelings of frustrations, stigmatization and hesitation to ask for help.

Increased faculty awareness about students with LD. There is no expectation of the effectiveness of instruction and the needs of individuals. Alternative teaching approaches and faculty willingness to explain materials is important.

Nancy promoted the idea of increased knowledge about learning disabilities on a broader range than the institution of education to promote a global increase in both professional and general awareness, "Education is key for everybody; parents, teachers, peers, government, schools, health professionals, social workers, psychologists, basically everyone".

Norm added the following insight about the overall experience of having a learning disability, touching on what he views important for students to increase success, and open opportunities for support, again affirming the previously shared view that increased knowledge among educators is needed, "My whole situation was based on early intervention and I know that the problem snowballs as years go on. Having the choice to connect with other students with LD if you wanted to know your peers with LD, and raising awareness to help people with LD". David added an appreciative remark about the support he has received in post secondary education. He said, "I found professors incredibly understanding". His comment is reflective of what the majority of participants reported to have been their overall experiences with faculty members within post secondary education.

Yvonne who felt stigmatized when self identifying her learning disability recommending that the individuals who are responsible for providing services to students with learning disabilities require particular attributes so that students are not stigmatized when self identifying. She believes that positive personal attributes and understanding to be essential qualities for individuals responsible for providing students with services to help students gain access to the help they need for success. Her perceptions brought about a decision on her part to forego accommodations.

I think that it is important that you have the right people to encourage students that they receive the help they need. It shouldn't be seen as a chore to them...it should be that they are open to everyone. I am glad that I didn't receive help from there (her DS department) but if I really needed it I don't think I would have pursued it because of the feelings I got when I went there. It is important that you have the right people to encourage students to receive the help they need.

Kate who has had positive experiences securing accommodations within post secondary education elaborated on the importance of supports received through the Disabilities Services Centre and the ability of students with learning disabilities to be able to access post secondary education.

I am really glad that there is this place here...there are lots of things that people can join at the university; I wish that there were more things that students with LD at the university could join... If I wasn't going to university I would be stuck with my job for the rest of my life...because I am not to sure what adults who don't want to go to university what their options are....

Erica comments on the need for not only increased education for educators about the issues students with learning disabilities often experience but also the need for overall increased knowledge within the general population. She describes

the impact of daily living that is part of her experiences because of her learning disability.

There needs to be more education for teachers to be aware of what some students require and public education so there is increased awareness of what some people require.

It is telling the secretaries at the registers office that it is not a problem but it is a special circumstance. Talking in front of me about my problem is a demoralizing experience. This comes up time and time again in new situations. It's not a visual thing people with downs you have a physical feature that is recognized. For me I don't have dyslexia written on my forehead which means people don't know when they meet me.

The social expectation for my age is that I can read and write therefore, I need to explain myself continuously. Voting was complicated because I needed someone to read the ballot, which meant people, had to go get the supervisor and the whole thing became a big process so that I could vote. Reading is extremely draining after about five sentences it is easier for me to say that I can't read a word to avoid the expectation that I can read more than I can.

Elizabeth added the following view about the importance of having access to extra time to complete a degree, and the need for greater public awareness within post secondary education.

One of the big things that I can look back on now is because of my LD it took longer to complete my education. Get a professional degree then go for your Ph. D. because this will protect you against the problems you will encounter because of your LD. Greater public awareness such as pamphlets, and something like the rainbows on professors doors showing they are gay friendly there should be LD stickers that show professors have an understanding of LD's.

Summary

In summary, participants reported positive experiences during their post secondary education in which they described the environment as accepting and

supportive. Participants reported fewer negative experiences in areas of academic difficulties because of the access to accommodations available. Interpersonal relationships particularly with educators were viewed as both accepting and supportive. Participant experiences with negative consequences with the learning disability label decreased from what had been previously perceived during the K-S4 educational experiences. Most participants reflected on positive aspects of the label in terms of providing increased self-awareness, personal understanding, and access to the academic supports needed for educational success. Participant narratives reflected decreased experiences with stigmatization particularly when it related to negative attitudes of others, experiences with specific intervention or accommodation approaches, or within their interpersonal relationships with educators and peers.

Participant narratives reflect a long journey to the interventions and positive educational experiences they needed for academic success and personal well being. Participant suggested solutions are reflective of their personal experiences that encompass the global impact learning disabilities had for them when left without an appropriate intervention action plan to promote academic success. How the various experiences participants described fit together will be determined in Chapter Eight, Theoretical Development, and the final chapter of the findings section. What does appear to have emerged from the data of the two narrative interviews is personal knowledge that increased self-awareness and understanding of individual learning profiles, appropriate academic intervention and educator support, positive regard, and experiences with academic successes changed

participant experiences. This shift in the educational experience with learning disabilities changes from being best described as *Unique Learning Dispositions* reflective of early educational experiences to being better described as *Unique Learning Styles* within later education as core properties of the developing theory. The data derived from these narratives will be further analyzed to develop a theoretical model to explain what it means to have a learning disability at different educational points for students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 8

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter, grounded theory is used to gain insight into how students experience and manage with a learning disability at different educational points. The purpose of developing a theoretical model in this study is to promote understanding of successful educational experiences that lead to high school completion and participation in post secondary education. The theoretical model developed in this research endeavor is not intended to show cause and affect relationships between the conceptual categories. A path analysis of the data was not applied to the conceptual categories that emerged for the purpose of showing cause and effect relationships. Grounded theory as a research methodology is exploratory by nature and provides a way of developing theoretical models to promote increased understanding of the phenomena of interest in which participant experiences within a specific context are the primary focus.

The conceptual model developed from the narrative data reflected cyclic experiential conditions of how learning disabilities were reported to be experienced at various educational points by the participants. The data derived from participant narrative story lines were analyzed for the central themes that crossed participant experiential accounts. It is these central themes that provide insight into the experience of having a learning disability within the context of education. The emergent categories and subsidiary properties embedded in the data are the fundamental elements that shape the theoretical model developed to describe participant experiences using the grounded theory approach. This study

was undertaken to explain the personal educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities at different educational points. The core categories have certain properties, and processes evolving in the context of education that can be studied with regard to sequences, movement or change over time. A conceptual model of the emergent theory will provide the visual representation of the causal conditions and corresponding properties that emerged during theoretical development. In this chapter the core categories and the subsidiary properties will be defined, described, and a conceptual model will be developed for explaining participant accounts of experiencing a learning disability at different educational points.

The core categories that capture the essence of having a learning disability at different educational points emerged during the selective coding process of data analysis as *Unique Learning Dispositions* and *Unique Learning Styles*. These core categories are comprised of conceptual attributes that consist of causal conditions and subsidiary properties of intervening conditions, action/interaction, and consequences. These conceptual categories and the subsidiary properties of intervening conditions action/interaction, and the consequences reflect negative and positive cyclic experiential patterns reflective of participant experiences in the context of education. The core categories in this theoretical model *Unique Learning Dispositions* and *Unique Learning Styles* are shaped by four interrelated causal conditions: academic difficulty; awareness; labeling; and challenges and barriers. These four causal conditions interact in ways that vary in how they are experienced by students and their impact appears to be dependent on the degree of

difficulties experienced within each condition. Causal conditions are shaped by the subsidiary properties reported in the data. Causal conditions, by definition, refer to the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of the phenomenon under study within a specific context (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Intervening conditions are broad and general conditions that either act to facilitate or constrain the action/interaction strategies taken within a specific context. Three intervening conditions emerged with the core *Unique Learning Dispositions*: perceived support, assessment and diagnosis, and self-determination and motivation. Two of which: perceived support, and self-determination and motivation, shifted to being positive consequences when the core category *Unique Learning Dispositions* shifted to *Unique Learning Styles*. The intervening conditions that emerged with the core *Unique Learning Styles* are: academic success, and increased understanding of learning profile. These concepts first emerged as positive consequences when the experiential essence was representative of *Unique Learning Dispositions*. The intervening condition assessment and diagnosis crossed both of the descriptive core categories *Unique Learning Dispositions* and *Unique Learning Styles*. The intervening conditions potentially constrain or facilitate aspects of the action/interaction or failure to take action/interaction.

Action/interaction has process-oriented properties that evolve in terms of sequence and movement, or change over time. The process-oriented nature of action/interaction ultimately shapes movement and change over time of the intervening conditions and the subsequent consequences. Two action/interaction

concepts emerged with *Unique Learning Dispositions* as advocacy, and method of instruction (which includes intervention and accommodation). Two action/interaction concepts emerged with the core category *Unique Learning Styles* as self-advocacy, and academic managing strategies. Action/interaction conditions have intended or unintended consequences and reflect either actions taken to remedy the phenomena of interest or the failure to take such actions.

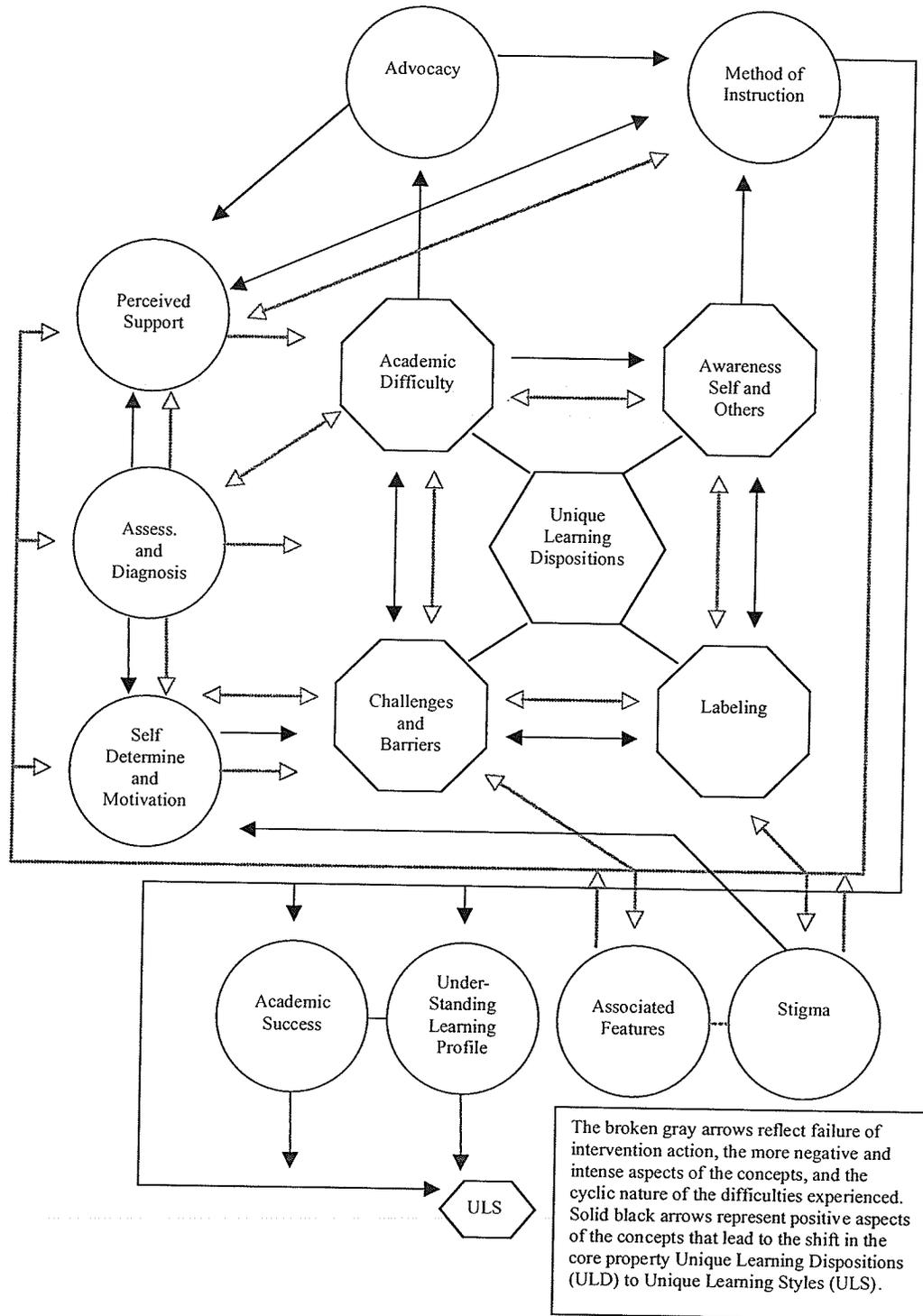
There were eight specific consequences that emerged in the theoretical model. These consisted of levels of stigmatization, associated features, academic success, increased understanding of learning profile, perceived support, self-determination and motivation, pursuit of long-term educational goals, and participation in post secondary education. Increased experiences with positive consequences were reflected in the narrative data with overall decreased experiences of the negative consequences stigmatization, and associated features for students with *Unique Learning Dispositions*. There are varying degrees of experiential intensities corresponding to the causal conditions and the subsequent subsidiary properties. These depict the severity of the condition generally described as mild, moderate, severe, or profound with respect to describing academic difficulties. In addition, causal conditions and corresponding subsidiary properties hold qualitative attributes that relate to negative or positive qualities that are influenced either intrinsically or extrinsically.

The conceptual model portrays the above-mentioned causal conditions and the subsidiary properties that emerged from the data. These causal conditions and subsidiary properties are interrelated in complex ways influencing and shaping the

essence of the core properties *Unique Learning Dispositions* or *Unique Learning Styles* as they reflect participant experiential accounts. These as the core categories of the theoretical model capture the essence of experiencing a learning disability within the context of education at different points. In-depth descriptions of each causal condition and the corresponding subsidiary properties will follow the conceptual model presented below.

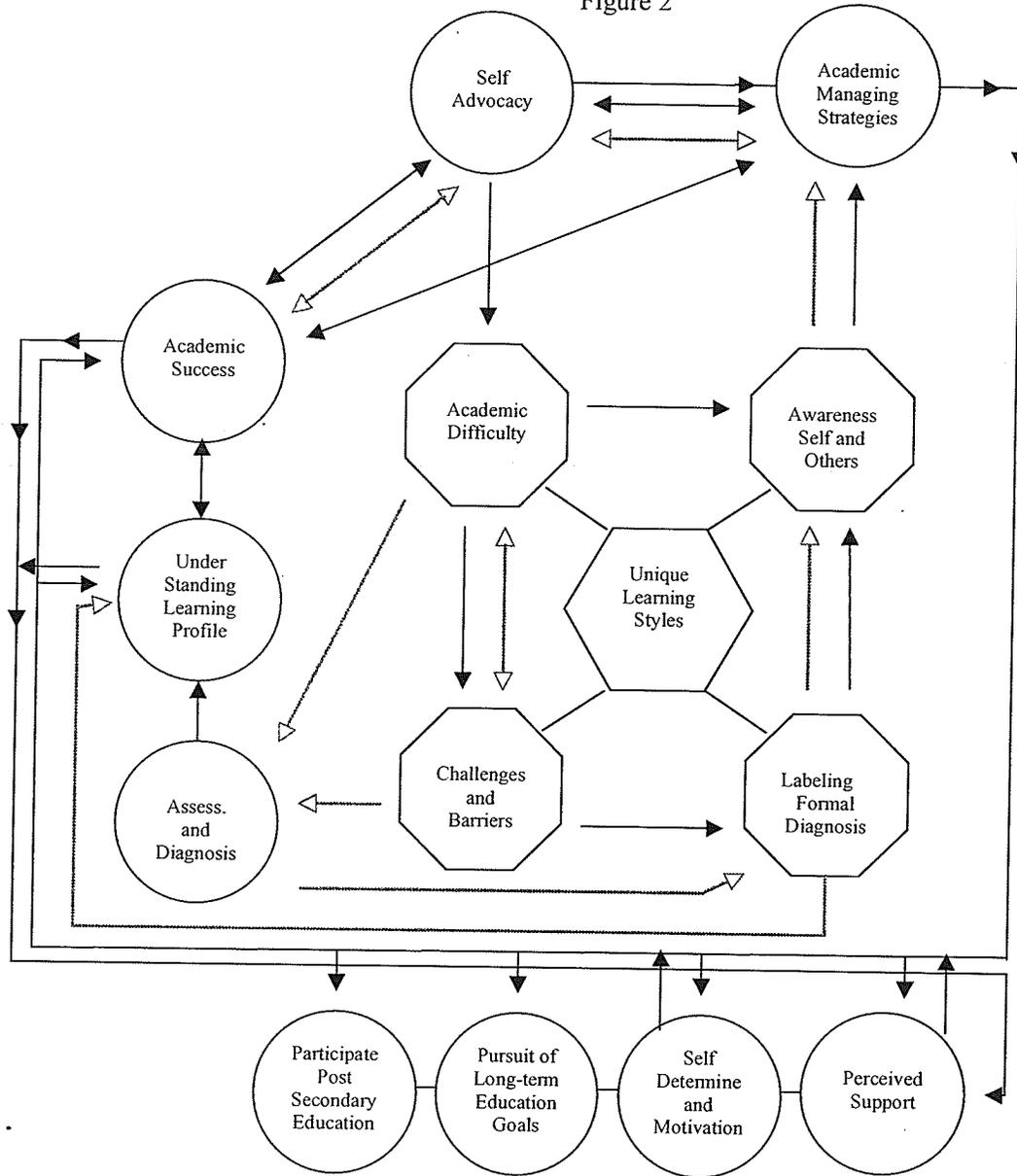
CONCEPTUAL MODEL UNIQUE LEARNING DISPOSITIONS

Figure 1



CONCEPTUAL MODEL UNIQUE LEARNING STYLES

Figure 2



The solid black arrows represent experiences of ULS that occurred because appropriate interventions lead to academic success, which resulted in positive consequences that are represented as intervening conditions in the shift of educational experiences of ULD to ULS. The diagram reflects the new emerging action/interaction properties and the intended consequences. The broken gray arrows reflect the process of experiencing academic difficulties, having challenges and barriers, assessment, diagnosis, and being labeled with a ULS in the context of post secondary education.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 depicts the core as *Unique Learning Dispositions* for capturing the essence of experiencing a learning disability during the K-S4 educational years. The core in the conceptual model presented in Figure 2 is depicted as *Unique Learning Styles* capturing the essence of the experiential shift during later educational experiences, specifically within post secondary education. *Unique Learning Dispositions* and *Unique Learning Styles* as the core properties share the same causal conditions: academic difficulty; awareness; labeling; and challenges and barriers. The positive consequences of the action/interaction and the corresponding intervening conditions influenced and shaped the core shift from *Unique Learning Dispositions* to *Unique Learning Styles* for better capturing the essence of participant educational experiences. The positive experiential consequences of academic success and increased understanding of learning profile occurring with *Unique Learning Dispositions* influenced and shaped additional shifts of the original intervening conditions highlighted as perceived support, and self-determination and motivation as positive consequences of *Unique Learning Styles*.

The action/interaction conditions relative to *Unique Learning Dispositions* shifted from advocacy to self-advocacy and from method of instruction to academic management strategies as two action/interaction conditions of *Unique Learning Styles*. Additional positive consequences emerged with the shift to *Unique Learning Styles* presenting as pursuit of long-term educational goals, and participation in post secondary education. Previous intervening conditions self-determination and motivation, and perceived support relative to *Unique Learning*

Dispositions shifted to positive consequences reflected as self-determination and motivation, and perceived support as positive consequences relative to *Unique Learning Styles*. The unintended negative consequences of the action/interaction of *Unique Learning Dispositions*, stigmatization, and associated features were not consequential conditions reflected with the experiential condition of *Unique Learning Styles*.

Figures 1 and Figures 2 depicted above represent the negative or positive cyclic experiential conditions that emerged in the data that represent the personal and educational experiences of having a learning disability within the context of education. The theoretical model that emerged in this study provides increased knowledge that reflects the negative or positive cyclic experiential conditions found to be predominant among the participants of this study. The theoretical model provides insight into the conditions that potentially promote positive conditions for educational success characterized by high school completion and participation in post secondary education. The concepts depicted in the conceptual model are defined and described in detail in the remainder of this chapter.

Core Category K-S4: Unique Learning Dispositions (ULD)

Unique Learning Dispositions is the core category that emerged in the data that describes what set participants apart from peers during early educational experiences K-S4 years (their learning disability). *Unique Learning Dispositions* as the core category contains the essence of the phenomenon of what it means to be a student with a learning disability during the K-S4 educational years. This core category has a number of properties and dimensions that establish

relationships between the thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions, described in the shared participant narratives.

Unique Learning Dispositions is the commonality experienced by all participants in the study and relates directly to their initial academic struggle and at some point the formally diagnosed learning disability during the K-S4 educational years. *Unique Learning Disposition* is comprised of four main causal condition properties: academic difficulty; awareness; labeling; and challenges and barriers. These interact and reflect the overall meaning of having a *Unique Learning Disposition* in the K-S4 educational years under particular conditions. It is these causal condition that give rise to the subsidiary properties of action/interaction in a goal-oriented attempt to manage the core *Unique Learning Dispositions*.

Core Category Post Secondary Education: Unique Learning Styles (ULS)

At various points in participant's educational or employment experiences the category that captures the essence of the experience of having a learning disability within K-S4 educational year's shifts from being best categorized as *Unique Learning Dispositions* to being more accurately categorized as *Unique Learning Styles*. *Unique Learning Styles* as a core category better captures the essence of the meaning of being a post secondary student with a learning disability. There appears to be a set of positive experiences with action/interaction, intervening conditions and consequences that bring about the sequential movement and changes through time of the central themes that captures participant experiences. These positive experiences with

action/interaction, intervening conditions, and consequences may or may not occur in the context of education. The context in which these experiences occurred varied for individuals, as some participants reported positive experiences in high school that resulted in changes to their educational experiences and influenced their post secondary participation. While others reported these successes occurring first within employment, and later in educational settings, often within an adult education program or educational experiences within a college setting.

This shift that occurs with the core categories *Unique Learning Dispositions* to *Unique Learning Styles* is a reflection of differences in the negative or positive cyclic experiential conditions of having a learning disability at different educational points. The experience of *Unique Learning Dispositions* was reflective of participant experiences in the K-S4 educational years that were associated with the more negative cyclic experiential conditions of having a learning disability within the context of education. *Unique Learning Dispositions* capture the essence of the experience of having a learning disability when the student is in the height of their struggle and experiencing an array of negative aspects of the four causal conditions. These negative aspects of the four causal conditions were perceived by participants to be aggravated by their exposure to methods of instruction that did not result in the desired learning outcomes, low perceived support, or degraded self-determination and motivation. Further aggravation was perceived to occur as a direct result of unintended consequences associated with experiences of stigmatization, and the associated features of

learning disabilities. This negative cyclic experiential condition participants described in their narratives is represented by the broken gray arrow pattern in Figure 1 of the conceptual model *Unique Learning Dispositions*.

The manifestation of the experience of having a learning disability in the context of education, as a *Unique Learning Style* does not occur until the action/interaction taken to manage *Unique Learning Dispositions* has resulted in the intended positive consequences. Action/interaction that serves to produce the intended affects brings forth the relief necessary for a shift from the negative cyclic experiential conditions to the positive cyclic experiential conditions captured as a condition of *Unique Learning Styles*. It is at this point that the intervening conditions facilitate positive consequences giving rise to sequential movement and changes of the central themes that captures participant experiences. It is at this point that the process-oriented properties of action/interaction become evident and the intervening conditions and consequences that are descriptive of *Unique Learning Dispositions* evolve. The manifested experience of *Unique Learning Styles* ultimately gives rise to new action/interaction properties, intervening conditions, and consequences. Deriving to the positive cyclic experiential conditions participants described in their narratives is represented by the solid black arrowed pattern in Figure 1 of the conceptual model *Unique Learning Dispositions* and is further represented by the black solid arrow pattern in Figure 2 of the conceptual model *Unique Learning Styles*.

Regardless of the specific context in which positive successful experiences occurred, it was these experiences that helped participants work through their learning weaknesses and provided them with insight about the specific strategies for success that enabled them to recognize and build on strengths. These successes also had positive consequences for participants' self-confidence and self-esteem thus opening doors for new challenges and successes.

Causal Conditions Properties

Academic Difficulty (causal condition to ULD and ULS)

Academic difficulty is viewed as the experience described by participants in which they were unable to learn the basic academic concepts expected given their age, grade, exposure to education, and overall intellectual potentials. Academic difficulties were reported to occur in the areas of reading, spelling, writing, and math. The cognitive difficulties associated with the academic difficulties were indicated to affect memory, attention, time management and organization in which the processing of information was affected. There are different degrees of academic difficulties that ranged from mild to moderate, severe, or profound. Severe or profound difficulties are reflective of difficulties that are more academically global as learning becomes problematic across academic domains and individuals fail to respond to interventions. In general, severe or profound difficulties are associated with language arts such as reading, writing, spelling, and often impact on mathematical abilities as well. Severe or profound difficulties tend to have a broader range of difficulty with specific cognitive processes. Individuals who experience severe or profound learning disabilities are at greater

risk for experiences with stigmatization and the associated features of learning disabilities. Mild or moderate academic difficulties were expressed when the impact of the learning disability did not span across all academic areas and was generally limited to a specific subject area or cognitive task. Mild or moderate academic difficulty is better described as difficulties that are specific to particular cognitive or academic tasks, for instance rote memory tasks specifically relating to the subject of math. Nine of the ten participants in this study described difficulties that would be better described as severe or profound. Academic difficulty is considered in this theory to be a causal condition property of the core category *Unique Learning Dispositions*. Academic difficulty is the primary feature that brought forth awareness among students themselves and other awareness among family, teachers, and peers of student *Unique Learning Dispositions*.

Post Secondary Education

At the post secondary level academic difficulty occurs because of the intrinsic difficulties associated directly to a learning disability. The developed awareness of personal learning profiles and the management strategies employed by students along with the academic support received enable students to work through the continued intrinsic difficulties experienced. Increased personal understanding and awareness of personal learning profiles is a positive aspect that provides students with the tools to cope with areas of weakness and draw on strengths. Nine of the ten participants have continued to experience severe or profound academic difficulty within post secondary education. These difficulties

continue to cross all subject areas in which reading, writing, or spelling remains problematic. At the post secondary level however the developed skills in these areas and the incorporated academic management strategies employed enable post secondary participation. It is at this point that the academic difficulties experienced and the corresponding causal conditions are better captured by the core property *Unique Learning Styles*.

Awareness of Learning Disability (causal condition to ULD and ULS)

Awareness of learning disability refers to at what age or in which grade a student becomes aware that they learn differently from peers. This includes the specific personal characteristics, experience, or environmental situation that contributes to this personal awareness. Awareness reflects how students come to understand or react to their *Unique Learning Dispositions*. Early awareness of *Unique Learning Dispositions* occurs because of the academic difficulties experienced along with the response by others to these difficulties. Interpersonal difficulties experienced with teachers and peers are additional benchmarks to early recognition of being set apart within the educational setting. In addition, awareness of learning disability is also affirmed with the failing action/interaction processes of instructional methods, specific instructional materials, and resource help. At some point failure to respond to intervention and awareness of others will lead to the intervening conditions of assessment and diagnosis to determine a formal causal label. The process of the intervening condition of assessment and diagnosis was described to bring forth a self-perceived awareness that there is something wrong that no one understands.

Post Secondary Education

Self-awareness at the post secondary level is a positive aspect of *Unique Learning Styles* as it relates to increased understanding of specific learning profile attributes. Awareness at this point is coupled with the knowledge of the specific academic management strategies necessary to compensate weaknesses and draw on strengths for academic success. Awareness at this point is associated to self-advocacy skills for securing the resources necessary for academic success. Awareness among others was reflected as positive experiences at the post secondary level as this other awareness was perceived as helpful and associated with the provision of accommodations. Overall participants in this study perceived the post secondary educational environment as inclusive and supportive.

Challenges and Barriers (causal condition to ULD and ULS)

Challenges and barriers varied depending on the severity of the learning disability experienced, the degree of academic difficulty, access to appropriate interventions that facilitate learning, personal understanding, and the development of strategies to overcome weaknesses and draw on strengths. The degree and form of which the above mentioned conditions of the experience within education either facilitated positive or negative consequences influenced the extent of which challenges and barriers were experienced by students. The positive or negative consequences that relate to the level of academic difficulty, aspects of awareness of self and others, the label, and the negative consequences of perceived stigmatization were described to contribute to the global impact of the associated

features and the perceived challenges and barriers students recalled experiencing. These elements combine and are instrumental in shaping the degree and intensity of challenges and barriers experienced by students with learning disabilities.

Challenges and barriers take two forms, the first is directly related to the difficulties students experience because of their learning disability (intrinsic challenges and barriers). The second extrinsic or imposed challenges and barriers are those created in the context of interpersonal relationships evident when educators are not knowledgeable in the area of learning disabilities and therefore are unable to provide students with the understanding or appropriate interventions for academic success. Extrinsic challenges and barriers are also evident within the context of interpersonal relationships with peers and experiences of social isolation. Challenges and barriers are perceived to be created with the overall global impact that occurs when appropriate method of instruction, accommodation, and interventions are not provided. Challenges and barriers vary in intensity on a continuum from mild, moderate, to severe for both intrinsic and extrinsic forms. Intrinsic challenges and barriers vary with the degree of academic difficulty, the level of developed personal awareness, and the overall global impact experienced. Created challenges and barriers are considered extrinsic and reflect the unintended impact of action/interaction or failure of action/interaction of effective instructional methods, intervention, and accommodations. The severity of challenges and barriers will vary depending on aspects of other conditions experienced with regard to attributes that either create additional pressures or alleviate the pressures experienced.

Motivating factors that help students face the challenges and barriers are important aspects of how challenges and barriers are approached and the overall academic outcomes. Motivation to continue to face challenges and barriers is influenced both positively and negatively with regard to striving to reach higher levels of academic achievement, completion of high school education, and participation in post secondary education. Levels of perceived negative attitudes of others that participants associated with lowered academic expectations of teachers and experiences of stigmatization actually served to be a positive influence on motivation for a number of the participants in this study. Participants reported that these negative experiences became motivating factors with regard to their overall self-determination. This was particularly the case when self-determination was described as a vengeance to prove those who were perceived as having negative attitudes about their capabilities, as wrong. This self-determination became a motivator to overcome the challenges and barriers experienced with academic difficulties. Positive experiences such as academic success along with the modeling of parental advocacy were also influential for increasing motivation for facing challenges and barriers. Personal attributes are influential in developing aspects of motivation for overcoming challenges and barriers such as the desire to succeed academically, gain access to a career, and the level of self-determination to overcome the challenges and barriers.

Post Secondary Education

Within post secondary education challenges and barriers are more directly linked to the intrinsic difficulties that result directly from having learning

disabilities because of the impact on academic abilities within specific areas. Extrinsic challenges play less of a role within post secondary education. Self-advocacy when it means disclosing a learning disability can be challenging for students. This is especially true when needing to disclose to peers when working in small groups. Overall the increased understanding of learning profile and specific academic management strategies students employ assist with the difficulties experienced by self-disclosure. Extrinsic challenges and barriers occur for students in other contexts in which various tasks associated with aspects of daily living in the larger community can be challenging or present barriers because of *Unique Learning Styles*. The previously mentioned motivating factors are particularly influential aspects for facing the academic challenges and barriers, achieving academic success and participation in post secondary educational settings.

Labeling (causal condition to ULD and ULS)

Labeling is defined as anything functioning as a means of identification or as a descriptive term, formal or informal (Barga 96). Goffman (1963) stated that when someone comes into our presence, we first label and categorize the individual based on his or her appearance, to size up social status and place the person in a category of social identity. Gallagher (1976:3) defined labeling as “convenient shorthand” by which we obtain information and use such information to focus attention on a particular characteristic of that person. These definitions of labeling were used by Barga (1996) to describe the experiences of labeling that

occurs among students with learning disabilities. These definitions are appropriate to apply to the term labeling within this study.

There are both positive and negative consequences associated with the label. The negative consequences related to the label being linked to feelings of stigmatization and holding meanings described as the associated features of learning disabilities in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The positive consequences of the label occur when the label leads to appropriate support and academic interventions for personal growth and academic success. Labeling in this study takes on two forms informal and formal labeling in which both forms have potential positive and negative consequences. The first form of labeling is referred to as informal labeling that is based specifically on the early academic difficulties and the subsequent awareness of self and others. This form of labeling occurs in two ways. The first is referred to as informal self-labeling which is labeling that students apply to themselves influencing the development of self-concept in early childhood. The second is labeling placed on students by others within the educational environment referred to as informal external labeling.

The first type of this labeling initially occurs as an intuitive intrapersonal awareness that one learns differently than peers. The forces of external labeling experienced within the context of education may or may not contribute to this intuitive awareness during early recognition of academic difficulty. However, at later grades when students are able to articulate concrete examples about their early awareness of *Unique Learning Dispositions* it appears that factors associated

with external labeling play a role in the self-imposed labeling. This type of self-labeling relates to negative personal thoughts and feelings about academic abilities.

The second type of informal labeling is the external labeling that occurs among others. External labeling occurs in response to a developed awareness that a student is not functioning at the academic level expected given their age, grade, and access to education. External labeling becomes the springboard for the various action/interaction of institutional intervention that take place in an effort to help these students. This type of labeling is perceived to be coupled with stigmatization by way of lowered academic expectations by teachers and interpersonal relationship difficulties evident with name-calling and social isolation from peers.

There are negative consequences associated with informal labeling. For instance external labeling has a negative impact on student self-confidence and self-esteem. External labeling is thought to contribute to the self-labeling already underway. External labeling may possibly influence a shift from self-labeling being associated with the early misunderstandings about academic difficulties to the development of negative personal thoughts and feelings. These negative thoughts and feelings are verbalized by students in statements such as, "I thought I was stupid", or "I am dumb", reflecting the impact on developing a self-concept with a negative self-evaluation. The interpersonal experiences of actions, reactions, and interactions between educators, peers, and students with learning

disabilities of negative interactions and intonations potentially increase the intensity of experiences with the associated features.

Positive consequences of informal labeling are brought about as a result of the awareness that arises among parents that their child's *Unique Learning Dispositions* have lead to manifestations of academic and interpersonal difficulties. This awareness forces parents to take on the role of advocate within the educational system. Parental awareness leads to an interpersonal relationship shift; in which parents become their child's support system for academic, emotional, social, and psychological difficulties by helping them cope with the global impact often experienced. Parental awareness provides the opportunity to seek alternative resources outside of public education to determine the nature of the specific difficulty. External labeling provides the opportunity for educators within the system to bring about an action plan to intervene in response to the overall difficulties students with learning disabilities are experiencing. In addition, at some point, external labeling will lead to a formal assessment with the recognition that planned interventions are not leading to the desired academic achievement outcomes. This response is taken in an effort to come up with a formal diagnosis to help determine why students are continuing to struggle despite efforts to intervene.

Formal labeling occurs when an assessment has lead to a specific diagnostic description of a student's *Unique Learning Disposition*. Negative consequences of a formal label relate to increased experiences of stigmatization from teachers and peers. These experiences are described as occurring with: the continued lowered

expectations; the lack of an effective formal academic action plan along with a continued overall misunderstanding of how to best intervene; continued feelings of teacher or peer ostracizing; and social isolation. The positive consequences of formal labeling occur when increased understanding of the academic difficulties and a formal effective action plan of appropriate instructional methods, intervention, and accommodations are implemented. The positive aspects of the knowledge that can be gained from a formal label increases the likelihood that students can come to understand their learning disability and develop management techniques for academic success. This occurs particularly when students gain access to the appropriate intervention for their specific learning profile that result in the desired academic outcomes. In addition, a formal label provides parental advocates with the knowledge to make better-informed decisions with respect to advocating within the public school system or accessing alternative private intervention resources and services.

Post Secondary Education

The label is experienced positively within the context of post secondary education. It is the formal label that enables students to secure the accommodations needed through the Disability Services Centre. These needed resources are not available to students without formal diagnosis documentation therefore the label is helpful for enabling students with learning disabilities access to higher levels of education. The emerging data was not abundant with aspects of negative consequences of the label at the post secondary level. Post secondary students in the Canadian context suggest that experiences of stigmatization as a

result of the learning disability label are minimal or nonexistent experiences within the context of post secondary education.

Intervening Conditions

Perceived Support (intervening condition ULD, consequence ULS)

Perceived support is an intervening condition that relates to the overall views held with regard to advocacy received from family and supportive educators. Perceptions of support related to contact with those who were able to provide moral support, understanding, and interventions that resulted in learning success. In contrast, lack of support was perceived to occur when students were misunderstood, ostracized, and access to what they needed for learning success was not provided. In each case the consequences varied drastically. Therefore again there exists the flip side of a coin in which perceived support takes on either a positive or negative vector. Perceived support within the context of family and the advocacy role taken by parents provide a buffer or counter balance to the negative experiences often occurring within the context of education. Students attribute the advocacy role that was taken on by the family, usually their mother, to have contributed to their overall academic success. Students viewed their parents' advocacy as motivating for developing the self-determination to overcome the challenges and barriers experienced and positively influencing personal self-views. The importance of the perceived support with regard to advocates was considered essential for gaining access to the intervention supports needed to succeed academically.

Perceived support as an intervening condition of *Unique Learning Dispositions* either facilitated or constrained the action/interaction conditions. In the positive forms this perceived support was viewed to lead to the supports needed for success and motivate students to strive to succeed. Perceived support was seen to be provided by positive individuals who had patience and understanding of their *Unique Learning Dispositions*. In contrast, perceived lack of support is thought to create challenges and barriers and viewed to constrain access to the action/interaction that promote academic success among students with learning disabilities, create feelings of stigmatization, and intensify experiences with the associated features of learning disabilities.

Post Secondary Education

Students perceive post secondary education as an inclusive supportive environment. Students described the access to accommodations, the support of professors, instructors, administrative, and counseling staff within the Disability Service Centres to be positive experiences. Most participants commented on the importance of this support within the context of post secondary education as contributing to their ability to participate in post secondary education and succeed academically. Perceived support at the post secondary level is a positive consequence of *Unique Learning Styles*.

Assessment and Diagnosis (intervening condition ULD and ULS)

Assessment and diagnosis are intervening structural conditions undertaken as a consequence of the *Unique Learning Dispositions* experienced by students who struggle academically. It is the awareness of others, particularly educators

and parents, of the academic difficulty being experienced and the failure of the interventions being provided within education for accomplishing the desired learning outcomes that lead to a formal assessment. The purpose of assessing or diagnosing an individual is to determine the nature of learning challenges and barriers are for developing a better understanding of an individuals learning profile. Increased knowledge of the nature of learning challenges and barriers helps determine appropriate methods of instruction for facilitating learning. Assessments are carried out within the school system to help educators better understand how to teach students with learning disabilities with methods that facilitate learning. Assessment and diagnosis is viewed as positive intervening structural conditions when the diagnosis obtained facilitates the effective management of *Unique Learning Dispositions*. It is viewed as a negative intervening condition when students experience continued misunderstanding of educators for providing the effective interventions or the failure to do so for successful learning outcomes.

Post Secondary Education

Within the context of post secondary education the process associated with assessment and diagnosis tended to relate to positive experiences in which the knowledge obtained was used to enable students to gain access to the assistance needed for academic success. The label associated with the formal diagnosis provided students with the necessary documentation to gain access to the needed accommodations for post secondary participation. The overall process of the assessment and diagnosis and the associated label lead to a formal approach of

intervention considered to be effective by students when it avoids the negative aspects of stigmatization or experiences with the social, emotional, and psychological implications of the associated features of learning disabilities.

Self-determination and Motivation (intervening condition ULD, consequence ULS)

Self-determination and motivation developed out of the frustration experienced as a result of the negative views held by others. The desire to invalidate these negative assessments appeared to have a motivating influence on self-determination. Self-determination, in this regard, is a developed attitude to prove to others who are perceived to hold negative attitudes toward the students' overall abilities and future possibilities that they are wrong. This attitude of self-determination tends to develop in the high school years. Self-determination acts as a motivating factor to achieve academic and long-term career goals. The development of self-determination and motivation is thought to be fostered by family member advocacy or the advocacy within education in which students perceived others as having positive views about a student's capability to learn as well. An additional aspect of self-determination as a motivating factor is the student's desire to fit in with peers, which include being able, to learn along side with peers in school. Self-determination and motivation as an intervening condition of *Unique Learning Dispositions* is a positive attribute that helps students face the challenges and barriers often experienced.

Post Secondary Education

At the post secondary level self-determination doesn't take on the form of vengeance to prove others with perceived negative attitudes about personal capabilities that they are wrong. Rather, self-determination at this stage seems to be the motivation to succeed academically because of personal learning or long-term goal aspirations. Self-determination takes on a form of belief in personal abilities and recognition that success will require an extraordinary amount of effort in order to accomplish these goals. Self-determination and motivation as a consequence of *Unique Learning Styles* assists students in aspiring to reach their true potentials.

Action/Interaction

Advocacy (action/interaction ULD, self advocacy action/interaction ULS)

Advocacy takes on two forms, the first form of advocacy occurs initially in response to the academic difficulties experienced by students with learning disabilities. This first form of advocacy is described, as being taken by another, with students identifying their mothers as primary advocates. Advocates provide support with homework, support, understanding, encouragement, and became a voice for students within education to help ensure access to the help needed for academic success. Advocates can also be educators who provide similar supports as described above. Advocates within education are teachers who understand and motivated students to academically succeed. Students viewed educators as advocates to be important, describing them as teachers with qualities that consist of attributes of encouragement, patience, and flexible with providing the time

needed to accomplish academic success. Both parents and educators as advocates were described as personal motivators to succeed academically and pursue post secondary education. Uses of an advocate as a voice within education for academic success is predominate during the K-S4 educational years. In contrast, self-advocacy is the predominate form of gaining access to the accommodations and supports needed for educational success within the context of post secondary education. Advocacy as an action/interaction of *Unique Learning Dispositions* is instrumental in promoting the management of the difficulties experienced that is taken on by another on behalf of the student.

Post Secondary Education

Self-advocacy is the second form of advocacy described in detail. Self-advocacy is a developed skill that follows increased knowledge of personal learning profile in which specific strategies are incorporated to overcome the experience with *Unique Learning Dispositions*. It was suggested that the support and understanding provided by someone who had knowledge about learning disabilities and the ability to provide the method of instruction, intervention, and accommodations for learning success was an essential foundation for the development of self-advocacy skills. The ability to self-advocate is a positive outcome of the advocacy of others with the intended results of action/interaction leading to the desired learning outcomes for students with *Unique Learning Dispositions*. It is initially a component associated with increased self-understanding of a students learning profile. It is this self-knowledge that provides the key capacity to self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is an important feature of the

core category *Unique Learning Styles*, as it becomes one of the two related action/interaction conditions, however now it is the voice of self for managing difficulties.

Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Accommodations (action/interaction ULD)

The action/interaction consisted of the instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations that were provided either through resource help within public education or access to private tutors and specialized private education. Action/interaction leads to outcomes or consequences that are either intended or unintended and the interaction component refers to self as well as other interactions. Instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations are reflected as method of instruction in Figure 1 Conceptual Model *Unique Learning Dispositions* on page 165. Students highlighted experiences that tended to depict experiences of failure of action/interaction within the context of public school. In general a failure to provide action/interaction that facilitates academic success is thought to be a common barrier within the context of public education. The interventions received within public education predominately were reflected as ineffective and perceived to facilitate unintended increased negative experiences considered to be damaging. These unintended consequences of action/interaction or failure of action/interaction consist of experiences of stigmatization and negative consequences of the associated features of learning disabilities. It is fairly safe to conclude that in most instances that the action/interaction taken

within the context of public education resulted in unintended negative consequences.

The intended consequences of the action/interaction approaches were perceived to have been obtained primarily, at least initially, within the context of private resources. Interventions took on positive forms when supportive educators, knowledgeable about learning disabilities, with an ability to provide students with instructional methods led to the intended learning outcomes and academic success. Approaches taken within the private sector consisted of action/interaction that facilitated academic success, increased personal self-knowledge, awareness of effective strategies, development of self-advocacy skills, and personal attributes of self-determination and remain motivated to academically succeed. The increased personal self-understanding of learning profiles enabled students to manage academic difficulties with strategies to overcome their experience with *Unique Learning Dispositions*.

Post Secondary Education

The intended outcomes of action/interaction lead to positive consequences of academic success and increased personal understanding of learning profiles. These intended outcomes influenced positive perceptions of support, increased levels of self-determination as intervening conditions that enabled students to develop long-term goals that became motivators for high school completion and participation in post secondary education. These positive experiences with intended outcomes of action/interaction, positive aspects of the intervening conditions, and the above mentioned consequences facilitated the shift of the core

feature from *Unique Learning Dispositions* to *Unique Learning Styles* for capturing the essence of personal educational experiences of post secondary participation. At the post secondary level action/interaction relates to personal attributes and abilities that encompass self-management strategies to meet academic expectations and use of self-advocacy skills to obtain the needed support to accomplish academic success and achieve long-term educational and career related goals.

Consequences

Stigmatization (consequence of being labeled and of failed action/interaction ULD)

Barga (1996) referred to stigmatization as receiving deferential treatment based on the perceptions of others. Stigmatization is a direct consequence of being a labeled individual within a specific social structure according to Barga (1996). Labeling in this context is reported to have a direct consequence of experiences of stigmatization within this context. Stigmatization results from the negative aspects of the label as it relates to students with *Unique Learning Dispositions* and ultimately it appears to be the label itself that justifies the stigmatization of those in which the label applies.

Stigmatization relates to the perceptions of students with respect to the responses of others within the context of education that are reflective of the developed interpersonal relationships among teachers, peers, and students with learning disabilities. The quality of these interpersonal relationships are influenced by the academic difficulties experienced by students with learning

disabilities, the overall awareness and understanding by educators, the public response to these difficulties, and how this response is perceived by teachers, peers, and students themselves. The corresponding response to the informal and formal labeling of self and others of the evident academic difficulty experience contribute to aspects of perceptions of stigmatization. Perceptions of stigmatization occur in correspondence to the negative attitudes held by others, which included lowered academic expectations of educators, social isolation of peers, and the instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations within public education. The negative aspects of interpersonal relationships associated with stigmatization fundamentally takes on a form of gate-keeping as students are set apart from others within the context of education as unintended consequences of failed action/interaction to intervene. Stigmatization is thought to facilitate increased negative experiences with more global emotional, social, and psychological consequences descriptive of the associated features of learning disabilities. The most common examples of stigmatizing experiences that students recall relate to experiences with resource help, being removed from the class to receive this help, the public display of age and grade inappropriate academic materials which inform others of academic difficulties and setting them apart within the educational context.

Post Secondary Education

Post secondary experiences are perceived to have limited experiences of stigmatization. The limited expressed experiences of perceptions of stigmatization emerge with regard to disclosing learning disabilities to peers in small group

activities. Disclosing for accommodations at Disability Service Centres or to professors are more limited than the above mentioned experiences of stigmatization within the context of post secondary education. In fact, stigmatization does not emerge as a common experiential theme during post secondary education. This is viewed to be associated with the positive aspects of increased personal and other awareness, understanding of learning profiles, developed academic management strategies, and self-advocacy skills as common attributes facilitating the diminished experiences of stigmatization.

Associated Features (consequence of stigmatization and failed action/interaction ULD)

Meaning of learning disabilities within the context of education goes beyond the academic difficulties experienced because of learning disabilities. The social, emotional, and psychological consequences can be devastating and considered the associated features of learning disabilities as are outlined in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Associated features can be experienced to different degrees depending on the overall educational experience. Severity of the learning disability and the challenges and barriers presented with regard to academic performance, perceived support, negative interpersonal relationships, the label, attributes of action/interaction, and the degree of perceived stigmatization will undoubtedly have varying degrees of associated features as a negative consequence. The associated features are in essence preventable consequences of learning disabilities. The various aspects that are descriptive of associated features require a proactive preventative approach for limiting the

intensity and commonality of experiencing associated features as a negative consequence among students with *Unique Learning Dispositions*.

Post Secondary Education

Experiences with the associated features are limited during post secondary education. Students have specific experiences that shake confidence or self-esteem from time to time. A students' ability to manage their *Unique Learning Style*, results from drawing on personal strengths and self-advocacy skills in order to buffer for the limiting intense negative consequences of the associated features. Self-determination is fostered once students have had experiences with successes and have had the opportunity to work through previously experienced negative consequences of the associated features of learning disabilities.

Academic Success (consequence ULD, intervening condition ULS)

Academic success is depended upon gaining access to the appropriate instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations that facilitate learning. Student experiences with academic success motivate them to put out the efforts required to complete high school and participate in post secondary education. The personal attributes of self-determination can motivate them to strive for academic success, face the challenges and barriers, and develop long-term goals that involve participating in post secondary education. Academic success initially helped facilitate the development of increased understanding of personal learning profiles, specific strategies needed to succeed, decreased experiences of stigmatization and the negative consequences of the associated features. The increased academic success of a student can act to change the negative views that

teachers and peers may have held serving to improve interpersonal relationships and decrease experiences of being set apart from peers within the context of education. These positive aspects of academic success provide protection from the global negative impact of learning disabilities for students.

Post Secondary Education

Academic success in post secondary education requires the continued use of self-management techniques and strategies. These self-management techniques consisted of self-advocacy to gain access to the needed support. Self-management techniques are specific strategies, and use of available accommodations that enable students to overcome or by-pass weakness and draw on strengths. Personal management skills consist of study skills, time management, organization, and support from someone who helps in areas of continued weaknesses such as editing written papers. Confidants as Troiano (2003) refers are individuals who continue to support students with learning disabilities at the post secondary level who are generally described as being either a parent usually their mother or a spouse. The formal accommodations available within post secondary education are reported to be in the form of the assistance secured through Student Disability Service Centres such as use of: note takers; scribes; extra test time; private test area; and use of technologies such as computer soft ware programs or spell checkers, or calculators.

Increased Understanding of Learning Profile (consequence ULD, intervening condition ULS)

Increased understanding of their learning profile provides students with learning disabilities the necessary tools to manage their learning disability within education and employment. Increased understanding of learning profile provides students with the knowledge needed to succeed academically. Students are able to develop awareness of the specific management techniques that assist them in overcoming weaknesses and enhance their ability to draw on strengths. The development of increased understanding of personal learning profiles reflects a positive consequence of the appropriate actions taken that led to the capacity for academic success. Specifically, it is the appropriate action/interaction associated with instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations that enable them to develop increased personal knowledge. The contexts in which increased understanding of learning profiles differed, as for some students this began to develop in high school, while for others it was in employment, adult education programs, or courses in college. Regardless of the context participants were able to develop this knowledge. It is positive learning experiences within these contexts that change the overall essence of having a learning disability. Increased understanding of learning profile was experienced as a consequence to *Unique Learning Dispositions* and acts as an intervening condition of *Unique Learning Styles*.

Post Secondary Education

Increased understanding of learning profiles and the knowledge associated with this personal self-awareness are crucial for being able to manage ones *Unique Learning Style* within the context of post secondary education. This

increased understanding facilitates students with the essential self-advocacy skills needed to articulate needs and secure accommodation within post secondary education. Students consider the development of self-awareness and the ability to self-advocate as essential skills for successful post secondary participation. Increased understanding of learning profile also facilitates student ability to employ academic management strategies for academic success within post secondary education. The shift from *Unique Learning Dispositions* as capturing the overall essence of having a learning disability within the context of education to *Unique Learning Styles* cannot be explained by maturation, the development of personal agency, or the successful transition from childhood to adulthood alone. It is more likely that the increased understanding of personal learning profiles and the knowledge associated with self-awareness along with ones ability to manage a *Unique Learning Disposition* in a way that it manifests as a *Unique Learning Style* will promote personal agency and successful transitions into adult roles.

Pursuit of Long-term Educational Goals and Participation Post Secondary Education (consequences ULS)

The ability to pursuit long-term educational goals and participate in post secondary education are positive consequences that occur for students whose *Unique Learning Dispositions* have been transformed to being experienced as *Unique Learning Styles*. It appears that students with learning disabilities go through a range of developmental struggles and tasks before they experience their *Unique Learning Dispositions* as a *Unique Learning Styles*. Participant narrative data suggested that unless appropriate interventions were received within the

context of education that the process of experiencing this transformation of personal experience might require other positive transitional experiences in employment, adult education programs, or successful experiences in college courses. Regardless of how this transformation was experienced all participants within the study experienced their learning disability as a *Unique Learning Style* within the context of post secondary education. It was experiencing their learning disability as a *Unique Learning Styles* that appeared to enable them to pursuit long-term educational goals and participate in post secondary education.

Summary

The theoretical model that emerged confirms the common arguments found throughout the literature with regard to the negative global impact of learning disabilities. This complex model highlights the potential conditions of the fundamental pathways for promoting high school completion and participation in post secondary education for students with learning disabilities. The complex interactions of the conceptual conditions that emerged bring forth an increased understanding of the experience of having a learning disability at different educational points. This theoretical model highlights both negative and positive cyclic experiential conditions and the subsequent consequences common to the participants in this study. This insight into the negative or positive cyclic experiential conditions representative of participant experiences provides us with increased knowledge about the personal educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities. The shared narrative data highlighted a broad range of experiential knowledge that can potentially guide

best practice approaches for the development of proactive intervention and preventive policies directed at increasing positive educational outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Determining how to create conditions that facilitate greater experiences with the positive cyclic experiential conditions, as a focus, warrants attention when developing educational best practice approaches and policies.

Chapter 9

**COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND DIRECTIONS FOR
FUTURE RESEARCH****Theoretical Comparisons**

Two U.S. studies found in the literature review using the same research methodology for developing theoretical frameworks for understanding the experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities (Barga 1996; Troiano 2003) will be compared with the theoretical model that emerged within this thesis. This theoretical comparison will explore the similarities and differences of educational experiences for students with learning disabilities that emerged within the data of the three studies. Determining how these theoretical models compare is important for increasing knowledge about the lived experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities.

In addition, comparing these models helps deal with the limited sample sizes of these three research endeavors. Barga (1996) and Troiano (2000) had sample sizes of $n=9$ and the sample size in this investigation was $n=10$. Participants within these samples were similar in ages as in Barga's (1996) study reported participant ages ranged from 20 to 47 years with the mean age being 25.4 years. Participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 45 years with a mean age of 27.5 years. All three studies recruited participants from post secondary institutions Student Disability Service Centres and collected narrative data through face-to-face interviews. Educational success was defined as those who had graduated from high school and were currently completing a college degree in Barga's

(1996) and Troiano's (2000) research studies. This definition fits with how participants in this study defined educational success for themselves.

The first study undertaken by Barga (1996) examined factors that contributed to the success of students with learning disabilities to explain how students with learning disabilities manage their difficulties from kindergarten through college. There were two main objectives the first objective was to describe how students with learning disabilities managed their learning disabilities in education. The second objective was to examine the factors that contributed to the academic success of students with learning disabilities. Troiano (2000) research also examined the phenomenon of experiencing a learning disability in post secondary education. The emergent theory of that study pointed to "self-style" as a means to operationally define the construct of learning disability in post secondary education (Troiano 2003:404). Both theoretical models Barga's (1996) and Troiano (2000) are described in detail in the literature review and therefore the points made will only highlight the significant similarities or differences found within the emergent theories.

Barga's (1996) theoretical model found themes embedded in the data that suggest students experience various interrelated forms of labeling, stigmatization, and gate keeping that create barriers in education. These themes were also embedded in the narrative story lines that emerged in the data of this study. They were found to be specifically descriptive of student experiences during early educational years K-S4. Labeling was perceived as positive in all three studies during early education when it helped students make sense of their academic

struggles and involved getting help. Therefore labeling in this sense provided relief to students. Labeling was perceived as negative in all three studies when it created conditions of being set apart from peers or receiving differential treatment from others. The common experiences that emerged in the data of all three studies were descriptive of the experiences of being removed from the classroom to receive resource help and experiences of being ostracized by peers and teachers for being different. Barga (1996) argued that findings associated with the concept of labeling show that students define themselves in terms of “normalcy” at a young age, based on how they measure up to peers academically, and school success is an early benchmark of how students view “normalcy” (Barga 1996:415). The themes that emerged from the narrative data within this research support this finding.

Additionally, perceptions of labeling and stigmatization were described by participants to occur in similar form, experience, and thought to contribute to similar consequences across these three studies. The participants in each of these three studies perceived labeling and stigmatization as occurring and being experienced as a direct consequence of the believed negative attitudes of educators and peers. Consequently, they were viewed as creating additional challenges and barriers within the context of education. Also, in each study participant perceptions of the impact of perceived lowered educator expectations were viewed as creating additional challenges for student academic progress and functioned to facilitate the negative peer attitudes that were described as occurring in the form of bullying, name calling, and exclusion.

At the post secondary level, Barga (1996) found labeling was self-imposed, or forced; because students were required to self identify their learning disability to receive accommodations. Self-imposed stigma occurred when students had to self disclose the nature of their learning disability to department professors for securing accommodations, such as extra test time, or test readers (Barga 1996). The worst stigmatization occurred when faculty or departments would suggest students with learning disabilities change to another field of study because the current field would be too difficult for them to succeed academically. The student's learning disability was perceived to be linked to their intellect rather than to the need for accommodations. This experience at the post secondary level for students with learning disabilities was also evident in Troiano (2003). Barga's (1996) and Troiano (2000) study seemed to describe the process of gate-keeping continuing to occur at the post secondary level. Troiano's (2000) study had themes that emerged at the post secondary level that supported Barga's findings suggesting continued perceptions of stigmatization, negative aspects of labeling, and experiences of gate-keeping continue to create challenges and barriers at the post secondary level for students with learning disabilities.

In contrast, the narrative data of the current research endeavor differed greatly with regard to these negative experiences at the post secondary level. In fact participant reports of this study indicated post secondary education to be an inclusive supportive environment in which experiences with labeling and perceptions of stigmatization were limited or non-existent. Post secondary experiences were described by participants in the study as having the opportunity

to gain access to the supports and accommodations, understanding and supportive professors. Disclosure was not associated with requests to change to another field by the students participating in this study. Aspects of external labeling were not viewed as a problem among participants; therefore gate-keeping was not a central theme that emerged within the narrative data of the current research study.

Coping strategies were found to be positive in nature within all three research investigations at the post secondary educational level. Positive techniques were divided into subcategories that included benefactors, self-improvement techniques, and study skills and management strategies that help students to manage their disability in positive ways (Barga 1996). Benefactors function to provide understanding and emotional support, act as sounding boards for personal problems, help with homework, act as advocates, and drive students to appointments (Barga 1996). The most frequently cited advocate in all three studies were participants' mothers who were relied upon for help with homework, providing positive views, and became a voice within education to ensure that students gained access to the help they needed. These examples of the positive coping techniques were similar in theme and description within Barga (1996), Troiano (2000), and the narrative data story lines that emerged in this research endeavor.

The role of advocacy seemed to take on a more significant role among students within the Canadian context for securing access to the help needed within education or more commonly the private sector. This might be because we do not have federal legislation that exerts legal pressure on the institution of education

once a student has been identified as having a learning disability that directs educational protocol and provides designated funding for these students. In contrast, approaches are fragmented and a lack of consistency exists both within and between regions across Canada. This fragmentation and in consistency also exists within and between board of education provincial jurisdictions particularly during the educational years K-S4.

The impact of this fragmentation and the lack of consistency may be evident in the differences in the narrative data that emerged in Barga (1996) and Troiano (2000) findings and those of this study. These differences relate to the specific implications of instructional method, intervention, and accommodations that follow assessment and diagnosis. The narrative data that emerged in Barga (1996) and Troiano (2000) suggests early assessment and diagnosis consequently have more positive implications for gaining access to the interventional approaches within the public school system in the U.S. This is possibly a direct result of the federal legislation in place within the U.S. that provides clear guidelines and access to funding for educating students with learning disabilities. In the Canadian context, participants reported receiving much of the same interventional approaches they were provided previous to the assessment process. Participant narratives provided themes indicating use of resources outside of public education as being necessary for gaining access to the resources needed for academic success more frequently than their American counterparts. These resources consisted of accessing private tutoring or private specialized education as common experiences among participants in this research endeavor. In contrast,

the themes that emerged in the two U.S. studies suggested that access to appropriate methods of instruction and interventions were secured within the public school system as the emergent themes did not highlight private sector resources as the primary source for meeting student academic needs.

Post secondary education in the Canadian context appears to have formally developed guidelines and available resources to students through Disability Services Centres, at least within Manitoba, that seems to be more closely matched with the post secondary institutions within the U.S. Experiences for students however within post secondary education appear to be more positive for students within Canadian post secondary institutions. Narrative data that emerged in the two U.S. studies continued to highlight themes associated with negative experiences with labeling, stigmatization, and gate-keeping as common experiences of students with learning disabilities in post secondary education. More research in this area might be needed to explore the similarities and differences between U.S. and Canadian post secondary institutions for providing support to students with learning disabilities.

Similarities exist in the student reports across the narratives of the three research endeavors in terms of what was involved in being able to succeed academically. Participant narratives that emerged in all three research endeavors suggested the need to develop particular techniques to help them realize their potential for high school completion and participation in post secondary education. Study skills and management strategies were the most commonly used strategies for academic success, which varied according to specific needs but

included management strategies such as use of computer technology, time-management skills, taping classes, note takers, scribes, and time management techniques. Participants also reported continuing to seek the support of an advocate who helped with things such as the editing of papers and the provision emotional support. Methods of managing post secondary education were consistent within the narrative data across all three these research undertakings.

Troiano (2003:416) concluded that the theory that emerged in his study “offers a complex view of the developmental tasks associated with experiencing a learning disability in post secondary education”. The theoretical model that emerged came together to form what was labeled the “self-styled learning disability” (Troiano 2003:407). The core category “self style learning disability” is comparable to the core category *Unique Learning Styles* that describe how participants manage their post secondary education. Troiano’s (2003) “self-styled learning” and the core category that emerged in the theoretical model of this study *Unique Learning Styles* have similar descriptive qualities that relate to necessary personal attributes of students with learning disabilities in post secondary education. These include ability to self-advocate, strategies around disclosure, academic management strategies, aspects of self-determination and motivation. However as mentioned above there were distinct differences in the perceptions of stigmatization that continued for participants at the post secondary level in Troiano’s (2000) theoretical model compared to what was reported in the narrative data of participants in this study.

Summary

Two specific areas of difference seemed to emerge in the narrative data that described educational experiences of students with learning disabilities between the U.S. and Canadian contexts. The first relates to what seems to be early identification, assessment and diagnosis, and formal action/interaction plans to follow within the public education system in the U.S. context compared to Canada. However, it is unclear if the formal action plan provides students with the appropriate interventions that lead to the desired academic outcomes. At the same time, there doesn't seem to be an emergent theme suggesting students accessed private resources to gain access to the instructional methods, interventions, or accommodations in the U.S. studies, to the same degree, as was described in the narrative data of this study. It is not clear if this is because narrative data did not emerge that described use of private resources as a common method for overcoming academic difficulties or if it merely wasn't reported within Barga's (1996) and Troiano's (2000) overall findings. The second area that was distinctly different was highlighted in the narrative data that emerged in this research endeavor that suggests post secondary students experience limited stigmatization and minimal consequences with the associated features of learning disabilities. This is in stark contrast to the themes that emerged in the narrative data in the two U.S. studies that suggested continued experiences within both of these domains.

Implications

Current literature continues to report the negative consequences experienced by individuals with learning disabilities associated with high rates of school drop

out, poor transitions from high school to work or post secondary education participation, unemployment or underemployment, poor social and emotional adjustment, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and living on the margins of society. Increased knowledge about the educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities provides insight into what works, what doesn't work, and what looks promising. We can assume if the literature that highlights the negative consequences of learning disabilities and the challenges and barriers individuals experience is reported correctly that increased knowledge on this topic is necessary to improve the lives of individuals with learning disabilities. Increased knowledge has the potential for decreasing the negative consequences and reducing the challenges and barriers experienced. Increased educational success rates of high school completion and participation in post secondary education create equal opportunity and social equity for individuals with learning disabilities. Increased educational success rates for students with *Unique Learning Dispositions* would reduce the need to provide adults literacy programming and employment supports in response to experiences related to lack of access to the educational interventions that promote academic successes.

There are a number of potential positive implications of the findings from this research inquiry. First, it puts a Canadian perspective on the experience of having learning disabilities among post secondary students that providing insight into their experiences at different educational points. Exploring educational experiences from the perspective of students enables us to have a better

understanding of the processes that create challenges and barriers. In addition, it provides the opportunity to reduce those challenges and barriers often experienced by students with learning disabilities for securing needed interventions for academic success. Insight gained about the early educational experiences has the potential to help increase educator awareness of the global difficulties often experienced among students with learning disabilities. In turn, provides the opportunity to initiate the necessary actions needed to help these students thrive within the inclusive education model that promotes high school completion and post secondary participation.

In addition, gaining an in-depth understanding of the experience of having a learning disability within education makes way for potential best practices solutions for promoting educational success among a greater number of students attending Canadian schools. Developing best practices policies based on the identified solutions of successful students with learning disabilities that was provided in the participant narrative data would involve a focus in the following areas:

- Early detection that students are experiencing difficulty accomplishing the expected academic learning goals given their age, grade, and exposure to education.
- Wider use of comprehensive assessment programs during early years education to assist in the identification of students that may require interventions for meeting the expected educational goals.

- Early implementation of intervention programs for promoting early years learning and proactive monitoring of students' learning outcomes.
- Early detection and quicker reactions by educators of failure to respond to current method of interventions being implemented in which the desired learning outcomes are not being accomplished.
- Earlier access to assessments within education once it is recognized that the expected learning outcomes to the implemented interventions are not being accomplished.
- Implementation of the recommendations that arise from the assessment findings that highlight the most appropriate method of instruction, interventions, and accommodations given a students' specific learning profile that are consistent, well planned, and proactively monitored for the desired learning achievement outcomes.
- Implementation of alternative intervention approaches need to be explored based on specific learner profiles, if response to intervention is not corresponding to academic achievement, until the most appropriate intervention method for achieving desired learning outcomes is determined.
- Recognition of specific student strengths and the cultivation of student strengths and interests for assisting students in reaching their potentials in these areas and promoting positive school attachment.

- Proactive measures for increasing self-confidence and promoting positive self-esteem among students with learning disabilities.
- The development of more effective resource programming and the development of strategies for decreasing the stigmatization associated with receiving resource help.
- Organized resource help approaches that limit the interruption of non-related subject areas such as math, science, and social studies while receiving assistance for specific areas of learning weakness such as reading or writing, so that students do not fall behind in subjects that may be of high interest or areas of strengths.
- Resource strategies that enable students to learn in other subject areas particularly those of high interest areas regardless of specific student learning weaknesses through the use of technology, diverse instruction, and appropriate accommodations.
- Use of resource materials that are not stigmatizing when considering a given students' age, grade, or expected developmental interests based on age and grade.
- Use of high-level interest materials that are not more of the same from one year to the next but are specifically selected for being learner motivating while directed at achieving the desired learner outcomes.

- Use of scientific based instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations that have been proven successful approaches for teaching students with learning disabilities.
- Educator training that enables proactive early identification and academic intervention implementation to help students with learning disabilities as early as possible.
- Educator training of the best methods of instruction, interventions, and accommodations that leads to academic success.
- Increased educator support within the educational system so that the personal resources of educators are not limited to help students with learning disabilities.
- Increased educator knowledge about learning disabilities and the global impact often experienced by students affected.
- Increased educator and professional training that provide proactive prevention and intervention methods to help poor interpersonal relationships and social difficulties.
- Increased educator and professional training that provide proactive prevention and intervention methods to help with difficulties that go beyond academics such as the social, emotional, and psychological consequences highlighted as associated features of learning disabilities.
- On going educator support and the provision of regularly up dated knowledge through workshops and professional training conferences

for educators in order to equip them to work successful with students who have learning disabilities.

- Increased funding within education to help students with learning disabilities in an inclusive educational setting and additional funding available to families for accessing private services.
- Early implementation and increased use of individualized education plans (IEP) and individualized transition plans (ITP) to promote access to the appropriate methods of instruction, interventions, and accommodations for students with learning disabilities within the public school system.
- Direct instruction programs within middle years and high school education that highlight individual learning profiles, learning styles, strategies, and use of technology for students with learning disabilities to promote high school completion and participation in post secondary education.
- Access to an assessment during high school and the provision of the written documentation required for gaining access to accommodations within post secondary education should be provided to students with learning disabilities when graduating or exiting high school.
- Educational pilot projects developed, implemented, and evaluated that focus on proactive early identification, interventions, and

academic outcomes for students with learning disabilities at different educational points.

- Educational pilot projects developed, implemented, and evaluated that focus on proactive prevention and intervention programming to deal with bullying, increase personal and peer understanding of learning diversity, provides mentorship opportunities and exposure to other students with learning disabilities for decreasing feelings of isolation.

Finally, by using the knowledge gained from participants to increase our understanding of their personal experiences we are able to gain insight into what participants perceived to be helpful and unhelpful. This knowledge provides the opportunity for policy makers, administrators, government and educators to develop best practice policies and adjustments to the current method of instruction, interventions, and accommodations based on the views of students already displaying positive academic outcomes and educational success. The narrative stories shared by participants in this research endeavor are powerful resources of knowledge for guiding intervention and prevention policy and programming within the province of Manitoba. The identified solutions that participants shared have the potential to increase the success rates of students with learning disabilities. The identified solutions presented reflect the voices of those with the personal experience of having a learning disability within the context of education.

These identified solutions also speak to the need for increased understanding of the negative consequences of learning disabilities when an early response of appropriate interventions is not provided. The negative experiences need to be considered for determining best practice policies that would allow for the prevention of these global negative experiences in the province of Manitoba. Learning disabilities require interventions that examine methods of instruction, materials, approaches, and accommodations where as negative associated features require a preventative approach within best practice policies to promote high school completion and participation in post secondary education among students with learning disabilities.

Summary

The identified solutions that were provided by participants were derived from the experiences participants viewed to be helpful or unhelpful at various educational points. Participant narrative story lines emerging within the data described the early educational years K-S4 as being most affected by the negative aspects of experiencing a learning disability within the context of education. Participants described more positive experiences during their post secondary education. They attribute their ability to participate in post secondary education because of exposure to effective action/interaction conditions experienced with advocacy and instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations that produced positive consequences. This exposure to the positive aspects of action/interaction was determined to occur at some point in public education, employment, adult education, or a college environment that influenced the

occurrence of positive consequences. It was these consequential positive experiences and increased personal self-knowledge that ultimately became catalysts for shifting personal experiences with a learning disability from being best described as *Unique Learning Dispositions* to being better described as *Unique Learning Styles*. This descriptive experiential shift was described within the narrative data to occur within the context of high school education or other transitional environments such as adult education, a college program or employment.

Limitations

Generalization of the theory developed in this research is limited because of the small sample size and the limited sampling frame of post secondary students with learning disabilities in the province of Manitoba. Although, theoretical saturation was satisfied with the narrative interview data available from the participants in this study enabling the researcher to move forward with the development of a theoretical model reflective of the narrative data it is not clear if theoretical saturation would have been satisfied if additional narrative data from a larger sample would have contributed additional themes for analysis. The theory developed in this study will need to be substantiated by additional research and further theoretical development on the topic before its generalizability strengths and limitations can be fully identified. The theory developed in this research endeavor can and should be used as a springboard for further research investigations using the same research methodology. It would be useful to have

both matched and different populations of individuals with learning disabilities to further develop and validate the theoretical model developed in this study.

Additional investigations for instance might examine if adults who are accessing programming to help them with literacy or employment fit the core category of *Unique Learning Dispositions*? If so, once they have gained access to help that promotes personal knowledge and the supports needed do they better fit the core category *Unique Learning Styles*? Again, if so, what are the attributes, resources, and personal gains that occurred for them that were consequences and intervening conditions that influenced the shift? Continuing research in this area is important for bettering the lives of Canadian children, adolescents, and adults with learning disabilities. Continuance of in-depth theory development about the lived experiences of individuals with learning disabilities should be the catalyst for increasing knowledge and promoting best practice policies within education as well programming provided within the community whose consumers are individuals with learning disabilities.

Research limitations also surround the degree to which the findings can be generalized outside of the context of education, such as programming for adults with learning disabilities for literacy or employment. These limitations also apply to educational contexts outside of Manitoba. This is because of the variation that exists with regard to how learning disabilities are defined, identified and managed during the K-S4 educational years from region to region in the Canadian context. Therefore findings are limited to the province of Manitoba or to provinces that have similar public educational structures, and similarities in how learning

disabilities are defined, identified and managed during the K-S4 educational years.

When comparing the theoretical model that emerged in this study with Barga (1996) and Troiano (2000) the narrative story lines and subsequent properties and categories that emerged consisted of similar causal conditions, action/interaction, intervening conditions, and consequences. Yet differences existed with how specific categories were grouped during the selective coding process. Overall the participant story lines within all three of these research endeavors described similar experiences within education at different points. These relate to the academic struggles, labeling, stigmatization, experiences with the associated features, advocacy, self-advocacy, management strategies, and the challenges and barriers experienced. Therefore the research findings and the theoretical model developed in this study are supported to some degree, when compared to the previously developed theoretical models by Barga (1996) and Troiano (2000).

An additional limitation exists with aspects of the sample. All participants of the sample were individuals with diagnosed learning disabilities and histories of global difficulties within education, who succeeded academically and currently participating in post secondary education. However the research design lacked a control group of individuals who were not diagnosed with a learning disability, lacked histories of difficulty within education, who succeeded academically, and were currently participating in post secondary education. Research findings of this study are also void of information about students with histories of learning

disabilities whose post secondary educational experience differed in which they entered university or college and then dropped out of post secondary education. Therefore we are not able to determine how participants with learning disabilities personal educational experiences who have succeeded in post secondary education narratives would differ or be similar to the narrative data that might emerge from control groups with different educational histories or post secondary experiences.

Finally, findings of this research describe the experiences of students with learning disabilities who at some point gained access to the help they needed for high school completion and participation in post secondary education. The theoretical model that emerged is limited to being generalized to students with learning disabilities who gained access to the instructional methods, intervention, or accommodations that promotes academic success. Within the Manitoba context it appears that these students came from families with the means to gain access to private resources or the ability to effectively advocate for gaining access to these resources within the context of public education. It should be noted that the theoretical model that emerged is only applicable to students with learning disabilities who did gain access to the appropriate interventions that lead to the desired learning outcomes. There is another group of students with learning disabilities who may have experienced similar early educational experiences as the participants in this study but lacked access to the appropriate interventions for academic success. Therefore, the generalizability of the theoretical model that emerged in this study to this specific population of students with learning

disabilities is limited. Additional research that examines the early educational experiences of students with learning disabilities who dropped out of school is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the personal educational experiences of students who were unable to succeed in education.

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Appendix A

**NATIONAL DEFINITION OF LEARNING DISABILITIES ADOPTED BY THE
LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

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

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

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- Oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding)
- Reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension)
- Written language (e.g. spelling and written expression)
- Mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving)

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction, and perspective taking.

Learning disabilities are lifelong. The way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs. Learning disabilities are suggested by unexpected academic under-achievement or achievement, which is maintained only by unusually high levels of effort and support.

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner that affects one or more processes related to learning. These disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities may co-exist with various conditions including attention, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions.

For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community, and workplace settings. The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include:

- Specific skill instruction
- Accommodations
- Compensatory strategies and self-advocacy skills

Appendix B

DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA DSM-IV - TR (2000)***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) Diagnostic Criteria
(315.00) Reading Disorder****(Axis I)*

Criterion A

- Reading achievement, as measured by individually administered standardized tests of reading accuracy or comprehension, is substantially below that expected given the person's chronological age, measured intelligence and the age-appropriate education.

Criterion B

- The disturbance in Criterion A significantly interferes with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require reading skills.

Criterion C

- If a sensory deficit is present, the reading difficulties are in excess of those usually associated with it.

Coding Note:

- If a general medical (e.g. neurological) condition or sensory deficit is present, code the condition on Axis III.
- Other listed learning disorders in the DSM follow the same criterion as that for reading disabilities.
- The essential feature of reading disorder is reading achievement (i.e. reading accuracy, speed, or comprehension as measured by individually administered standardized tests) that falls substantially below that expected given the individual's chronological age, measured intelligence, and age-appropriate education.
- Associated features and disorders are mathematical disorder and disorders of written expression, which are rarely found in the absence of reading disorder.

DSM-IV-TR p. 50

Associated Features and Disorders

Demoralization, low self-esteem, and deficits in social skills may be associated with Learning Disorders. The school dropout rate for children or adolescents with Learning Disorders is reported at nearly 40% (or approximately 1.5 times the average). Adults with Learning Disorders may have significant difficulties in employment or social adjustment. Many individuals (10%-25%) with Conduct Disorders, Oppositional Defiant Disorder,

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Major Depression Disorder, or Dysthymic Disorder also have Learning Disorders. There is evidence that developmental delays in language may occur in association with Learning Disorders, (particularly Reading Disorder), although these delays may not be sufficiently severe to warrant the separate diagnosis of a Communication Disorder. Learning Disorders may also be associated with a higher rate of Developmental Coordination Disorder.

There may be underlying abnormalities in cognitive processing (e.g., deficits in visual perception, linguistic processes, attention, or memory, or a combination of these) that often precede or are associated with Learning Disorders. Although genetic predisposition, perinatal injury, and various neurological or other general medical conditions may be associated with the development of Learning Disorders, the presence of such conditions does not invariably predict eventual Learning Disorder, and there are many individuals with Learning Disorders who have no such history. Learning Disorders are, however, frequently found in association with a variety of general medical conditions (e.g., lead poisoning, fetal alcohol syndrome, or fragile X syndrome).

Specific Culture Features

Care should be taken to ensure that intelligence testing procedures reflect adequate attention to the individual's ethnic or cultural background. This is usually accomplished by using tests in which the individual's relevant characteristics are represented in the standardization sample of the test or by employing an examiner familiar with aspects of the individual's ethnic or cultural background. Individualized testing is always required to make the diagnosis of a Learning Disorder.

Prevalence

Estimates of the prevalence of Learning Disorders range from 2% to 10% depending on the nature of ascertainment and the definitions applied. Approximately 5% of students in public schools in the United States are identified as having a Learning Disorder.

Appendix C

SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS SECTION E: 2**FISCAL RESOURCES****Special Needs Funding Categorical Funding**

Special needs funding is available for students requiring and receiving extensive supports based on a comprehensive educational needs assessment. Support is provided at three levels:

- Level I support
- Level II and Level III support

Guidelines for level I Support

Level I support is included in the school division's/ district's base support funding. A portion of base support funding is designed for students requiring supports for a major part of the school day.

Students with the following conditions may be eligible for Level I support:

- Moderate mental disability: The student has an intelligence quotient (IQ) of less than 50 (plus or minus 5) based on a valid intelligence test administered by a qualified person, and has significant difficulty in adaptive functioning.
- Severe physical functioning: The student has a severe physical disability that requires significant specialized support and physical rehabilitation.
- Moderate multiple-disabilities: The student has more than one moderate disability, the combination of which affects his or her adaptive functioning at school.
- Very severely learning disabled: The student's reading, language, and/or mathematics performance is significantly lower than expected on the basis of his or her intelligence or learning potential.
- Severely emotionally disturbed: Based on a comprehensive psychological assessment administered by a qualified specialist, the student is confirmed to have severe emotional, social and behavioural disorders.
- Severe hearing loss: Based on a comprehensive assessment administered by a qualified specialist (audiologist, deaf education specialist, and/or speech-language pathologist), the student is confirmed to have severe hearing loss that affects speech and language development.
- Severely visually impaired: After all possible visual correction is made, the student with visual impairment requires special materials and services, but uses visual media (including print) as the primary method of learning:

Decisions about a student's eligibility and the expenditures under Level I support are made by the school division/district.

Guidelines for Level II and Level III Support

Categorical support is available for students with special needs who require and receive extensive supports based on a comprehensive educational needs assessment. Level II and Level III support is in addition to Level I, co-ordinator and clinician support.

Definitions of conditions considered for Level II and Level III support are provided to assist school divisions/districts in selecting students for funding applications. The Program and Student Services Branch determines final eligibility.

The school requesting Level II or Level III support for students with special needs will complete an individual education plan (IEP) for each student. All applications requesting a level of funding and providing identifying information are to be forwarded by school division/ district administration to the Program and Student Services Branch, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth.

Level II Support - \$8,560 per student

Funding eligibility criteria for Level II support are based on the student's need for individualized instruction for a major part of the school day.

Students with the following conditions are considered for Level II support:

- Severe multiple-disabilities: The student has a combination of two or more severe disabilities that produce severe multiple developmental, behavioural and/or learning difficulties. The student may have a severe cognitive disability compounded by a physical disability so severe that he or she requires adaptations and modifications beyond the usual education programming provided for students with moderate special needs. If not cognitively disabled, the student may display two or more severe physical disabilities and consequently requires intensive assistance and/ or individualized supervision.
- Severely autistic: Student with autistic characteristics presents a combination of behaviours such as extreme self-isolation, severe language and communication L problems, hypersensitivity and/or hyposensitivity in the sensory dimensions and ritualistic behaviours. The severely autistic student exhibits characteristics that severely inhibit his or her learning and overall functioning and therefore requires highly individualized programming.
- Deaf or hard of hearing: The student is confirmed to be deaf or hard of hearing based on a comprehensive assessment administered by a qualified specialist (audiologist, deaf education specialist and/ or speech-language pathologist). Due to a hearing loss, that has significantly affected the development of speech and/or language, the student requires major programming modifications to participate effectively and benefit from instruction in the educational setting.
- Severely visually impaired: The student's vision is so severely impaired that the primary learning mode is not visual, necessitating extensive accommodation into the learning environment and adaptations to materials.

Section E: 2

- Very severely emotionally behaviourally disordered: The student exhibits very severe emotional behavioural disorders, characterized by inappropriate or disproportionate emotional and behavioural responses to various life situations. The student requires individualized programming and supports with ongoing formal inter agency involvement.
- Severely psychotic: This diagnostic category includes students with severe thought disorders and associated inappropriate behaviours that are beyond control and that do not appear to be caused by inappropriate school expectations. The severely psychotic student displays highly inappropriate school behaviour that is both chronic and excessive and may necessitate his or her removal from the regular classroom and placement in a specialized, highly intensive therapeutic setting.

Other special conditions can be considered.

Level III Support - \$19,055 per student

Funding eligibility criteria for Level III support are based on the student's need for individualized instruction for the entire school day, additional specialized supports provided by the school division/district, and programming requirements significantly beyond those established for Level II support.

Students with the following conditions are considered for Level III support:

- Profound multiple-disability: The student has a combination of extremely severe disabilities that produce profound multiple developmental, behavioural and/ or learning difficulties. Consequently, the student requires continuous individualized attention and instruction, as well as extensive additional supports.
- Deaf: The student is deaf or has a hearing loss that affects communication so profoundly that he or she requires appropriate, full-time, individualized programming to participate effectively and benefit from instruction in the educational setting.
- Profoundly emotionally behaviourally disordered: The student exhibits profound emotional behavioural disorders and associated learning difficulties requiring highly individualized programming and intensive support services at school and in the community.

This applies to the student:

- who is a danger to self and/or to others and whose actions are marked by impulsive, aggressive and violent behaviour
- whose behaviour is chronic - the disorder persists over a lengthy period of time.
whose behaviour is pervasive and consistent - the disorder negatively affects all environments, including home, school and community
- who requires or receives a combination of statutory and non-statutory services from Manitoba Education and Training, Family Services, Health and/or Justice as defined within the Child and Family Services Act, the Mental Health Act and the Young Offenders Act

The request for Level III Support for a student with profound emotional/ behavioural disorders must be accompanied by a detailed IEP with a comprehensive multi-system 24-hour treatment intervention plan (Circle of Care) to address the student's problems. .

Blind: The student's vision is impaired to the degree that the primary learning mode is not visual. This necessitates extensive adaptations to the learning environment, specifically to print medium. Individualized programming is required. This may include direct instruction in braille and Orientation and Mobility.

- URIS Group A Healthcare Procedures: The student requires one or more of the following complex medical procedures that must be performed by a registered nurse:
- ventilator care
- tracheotomy care
- suctioning (tracheal/pharyngeal)
- nasogastric tube care and/or feeding
- Complex administration (e.g., via infusion pump, nasogastric tube, injection other equivalent)
- Central or peripheral venous line interventions
- Other clinical interventions

School divisions are required to submit an application to the URIS Committee.

Documentation required for the application:

- Special Needs Categorical Grant Level m funding application
- URIS Application Form (5.2)
- Individual Health Care Plan

Please refer to section 4 of the *URIS Policy and Procedure Manual* for further assistance when submitting an application.

Appendix D

LETTER: UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA DISABILITY SERVICES

Cheryl Nicholson
 B.A. Advanced
 Masters of Arts Student
 Department of Sociology
 University of Manitoba

E-mail
 Phone

University of Manitoba
 Disability Services
 155 University Centre
 Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2

Attention: Accessibility Advisor for Students with Learning Disabilities

Dear Roslyn Gates,

I would like to inform you of the research study I am undertaking for completion of my Masters of Arts Degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) to conduct this research study. This can be verified by contacting the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. I am writing this letter to you with the attached information in a request for assistance recruiting participants.

This research will involve recruiting students diagnosed with learning disabilities through Student Disability/Counselling Service Departments at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Red River College or involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba.

The study entitled, "Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities" aims at gaining a better understanding of the experiences associated with having a learning disability from the perspective of post secondary students with learning disabilities. The Grounded theory approach is the research methodology being used in this study. This approach aims at giving voice to individuals who have first hand experience with phenomena in order to develop a theoretical model that is representative of their lived experience. Each participant will receive an honorarium of a \$20.00 restaurant gift certificate to show my appreciation for the time spent participating in this study.

I would like to ask your assistance in informing individuals with learning disabilities registered with Disability Services about this research by forwarding the attached request for participant's letter to these individuals through your regular correspondence. I have attached a request for participant's letter that explains the research project and provides interested individuals with a contact email address and telephone number. I am also wondering if it would be possible to post request for participant's posters in the common area at Disability Services, which are included with the participant recruitment letters.

Thank you for your time on this matter!

Best Regards,

Cheryl Nicholson
B.A. Advanced
M.A. Student, Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba

Appendix E

LETTER: UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG DISABILITY SERVICES

Cheryl Nicholson
Masters of Arts Student
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba

E-mail :

Phone . . .

University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Office OGM12B
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3T 2N2

Attention: Disability Services Coordinator

Dear Heather Myers,

I would like to inform you of the research study I am undertaking for completion of my Masters of Arts Degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) to conduct this research study. This can be verified by contacting the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. I am writing this letter to you with the attached information in a request for assistance recruiting participants.

This research will involve recruiting students diagnosed with learning disabilities through Student Disability/Counselling Service Departments at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Red River College or involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba.

The study entitled, “Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities” aims at gaining a better understanding of the experiences associated with having a learning disability from the perspective of post secondary students with learning disabilities. The Grounded theory approach is the research methodology being used in this study. This approach aims at giving voice to individuals who have first hand experience with phenomena in order to develop a theoretical model that is representative of their lived experience. Each participant will receive an honorarium of a \$20.00 restaurant gift certificate to show my appreciation for the time spent participating in this study.

I would like to ask your assistance in informing individuals with learning disabilities registered with Disability Services about this research by forwarding the attached request for participant's letter through your regular correspondence. I have attached a request for participant's letter that explains the research project and provides interested individuals with a contact email address and telephone number. I am also wondering if it would be possible to post request for participant's posters in the common area at Disability Services, which are included with the participant recruitment letters.

Thank you for your time on this matter!

Best Regards,

Cheryl Nicholson
B.A. Advanced
M.A. Student, Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba

Appendix F

LETTER: RED RIVER COLLEGE DISABILITY SERVICES

Cheryl Nicholson
B.A. Advanced
Masters of Arts Student
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba

E-mail :
Phone

Red River College
Counselling Services
2055 Notre Dame Avenue
Winnipeg Manitoba, R3H 0J9

Attention: Director of Counselling Services

Dear Dave Rogalsky,

I would like to inform you of the research study I am undertaking for completion of my Masters of Arts Degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) to conduct this research study. This can be verified by contacting the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. I am writing this letter to you with the attached information in a request for assistance recruiting participants.

This research will involve recruiting students diagnosed with learning disabilities through Student Disability/Counselling Service Departments at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Red River College or involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba.

The study entitled, "Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities" aims at gaining a better understanding of the experiences associated with having a learning disability from the perspective of post secondary students with learning disabilities. The Grounded theory approach is the research methodology being used in this study. This approach aims at giving voice to individuals who have first hand experience with phenomena in order to develop a theoretical model that is representative of their lived experience. Each participant will receive an honorarium of a \$20.00 restaurant gift certificate to show my appreciation for the time spent participating in this study.

I would like to ask your assistance in informing individuals with learning disabilities registered with Disability Services about this research by forwarding the attached request for participant's letter through your regular correspondence. I have attached a request for participant's letter that explains the research project and provides interested individuals with a contact email address and telephone number. I am also wondering if it would be possible to post request for participant's posters in the common area at Disability Services, which are included with the participant recruitment letters.

Thank you for your time on this matter!

Best Regards,

Cheryl Nicholson
B.A. Advanced
M.A. Student, Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba

Appendix G

LETTER: LDA MANITOBA

Cheryl Nicholson
Masters of Arts
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba

E-mail
Phone

Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba
Executive Director
617 Erin St.
Winnipeg, MB R3G 2W4

Attention: Executive Director

Dear Marilyn McKinnon,

I would like to inform you of the research study I am undertaking for completion of my Masters of Arts Degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) to conduct this research study. This can be verified by contacting the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. I am writing this letter to you with the attached information in a request for assistance recruiting participants.

This research will involve recruiting students diagnosed with learning disabilities through Student Disability/Counselling Service Departments at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Red River College or involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba.

The study entitled, “Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities” aims at gaining a better understanding of the experiences associated with having a learning disability from the perspective of post secondary students with learning disabilities. The Grounded theory approach is the research methodology being used in this study. This approach aims at giving voice to individuals who have first hand experience with phenomena in order to develop a theoretical model that is representative of their lived experience. Each participant will receive an honorarium of a \$20.00 restaurant gift certificate to show my appreciation for the time spent participating in this study.

I would like to ask your assistance in informing individuals with learning disabilities registered with Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba about this research by forwarding the attached request for participant's letter through your regular correspondence. I have attached a request for participant's letter that explains the research project and provides interested individuals with a contact email address and telephone number. I am also wondering if it would be possible to post request for participant's posters in the common area at your organization, which are included with the participant recruitment letters.

Thank you for your time on this matter!

Best Regards,

Cheryl Nicholson
B.A. Advanced
M.A. Student, Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba

Appendix H

LETTER: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Researcher: Cheryl Nicholson
 B.A. Advanced
 Masters of Arts Student
 Department of Sociology
 University of Manitoba

E-mail
 Phone

**POST SECONDARY STUDENTS DIAGNOSED WITH A LEARNING
 DISABILITY**

YOUR PARTICIPANTION IS VERY MUCH NEEDED...

Project Title

**“Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with a Learning
 Disability”**

Dear Students:

I would like to inform you of the research study I am undertaking “Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with a Learning Disability” for completion of my Masters of Arts Degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. This participant recruitment letter was attached to a letter of request for assistance to appropriate personnel at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Red River College, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba. It was requested that information about this research study be shared with post secondary students by distributing this letter through regular correspondence to individuals enrolled in their services. Please be assured that your personal information was not communicated to me through the cooperating educational institutions or organization. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Manitoba, Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) to conduct this research study. If you require any additional information about this research endeavor contact my academic advisor Dr. Russell Smandych, (Ph. D, Toronto) Professor, Chair of Graduate Students in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba telephone number 474-6446.

I am looking for participants to assist me in this research endeavor. This research will involve interviewing post secondary students diagnosed with learning disabilities (LD). The study entitled “Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with a Learning Disability” aims at gaining a better understanding of the experiences

associated with having a learning disability from the perspective of those who have struggled with learning difficulties during their educational experiences.

Participation in this research study is voluntary and declining to participate will not affect any services currently received nor will it affect any services you may receive in the future at the above mentioned educational institutions or organization. Participation will involve a time commitment of three hours to meet with the researcher for three separate interview sessions.

The first interview will involve completion of a forty-six, closed-ended, yes/no participant screening survey questionnaire. These questions will relate to ten specific topic section themes. These themes focus on information reported in the literature thought to be relevant to the experiences of students with learning disabilities. Survey questions will be reflective of the ten-topic section themes gathering information with regard to subject matter such as: when individuals became aware of learning difficulties; assessment, diagnosis and impact of LD; meaning of LD; meaning to personal interactions; advocacy, learning style, and educational interventions; awareness of others with LD; educational history and personal educational views; participation and academic management in post secondary education; challenges and barriers, and participant identified solutions. The main objectives of this first interview are described more fully in the participant consent form.

The second and third interviews are semi-structured open-ended face-to-face interviews. These interviews will consist of seven specific topic sections from the participant screening survey and require that participants share their narrative stories about their personal and educational experiences. Question probes within each specific topic area will be used during conversational lags, as the objective is to obtain spontaneous narratives for each topic section. The final sections of each of these interviews will provide participants the opportunity to contribute additional information they feel is important that is not captured within the outlined topic sections. These interviews will be tape-recorded using a voice activated digital recorder. Participants can stop the tape-recorder at any time, and decline from elaborating on any topic section or question probe. These interviews will be transcribed into written narratives. Any information linking individual participants to the transcribed material will be replaced with a numerical code. Additional information about these semi-structured interviews is provided in the participant consent form.

Anticipation of risk to participants is not associated with this research. However, to guard against any unforeseen emotional impact ten-minutes will be spent at the end of each interview to debrief with participants. Any participant reporting they are experiencing negative emotions because of their participation in this study will require additional debriefing time to determine the extent of these negative feelings, and to evaluate if there is any psychological, emotional, or physical risk to the participant. This will be done by discussing and problem solving around the upsetting issue, referring knowledge based information, if the difficulty is anxiety or depression related referral to the appropriate professional would be provided. A follow-up call will be arranged with each participant

for the day after the interviews. If participants report experiencing negative emotions they will be directed to the appropriate counselling services department at their post secondary institution, Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba, Anxiety and Depression Association of Manitoba or provided names of private psychologists who specialize in learning disabilities.

Any information you share with the researcher will be strictly confidential and the written report will ensure anonymity of participants. The researcher will stringently comply with the regulations outlined by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (RSREB) and privacy regulations outlined by the Privacy Act to protect participant confidentiality and anonymity. The findings of this research will be shared with participants on its completion. The final report of this research will be completed no later than August 30, 2007 therefore participants will have receive a written summary of the research results no later than that date. In addition, all research materials will have been shredded and disposed of no later than August 30, 2007. It is hoped that this project will be completed before the fore mentioned date in which case participant summary mail out and material disposal will occur simultaneously. Participants will receive a twenty-dollar restaurant gift certificate to show my appreciation for the time spent participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the nature of this research study, please feel free to contact me. Please refer to the research title "Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities" in the e-mail subject reference. If you are interested in participating, please contact me by telephone at

or by emailing me at _____ or _____

Thank you in advance for your time on this matter!

Best Regards,

Cheryl Nicholson

B.A. Advanced

M.A. Student, Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba

The University of Manitoba Psychological/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) has approved this research. This can be verified by contacting the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca

Appendix I

RECRUITMENT POSTER

**“Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary
Students with Learning Disabilities”**

MASTERS STUDENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

NEEDS PARTICIPANTS

ARE YOU A STUDENT ATTENDING...

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

RED RIVER COLLEGE

ARE YOU A STUDENT THAT...

- ☞ Has a diagnosed Learning Disability
- ☞ Is interested in sharing personal and educational experiences about the barriers and challenges associated with having a Learning Disability
- ☞ Can you share your identified solutions to the difficulties experienced because of your Learning Disability?
- ☞ Are you able to commit three hours of your time to participate in a study aimed at developing a theory that is reflective of student perspectives on the topic?
- ☞ If so, please contact Cheryl at _____ for further details...

The University of Manitoba Psychological/Sociology Research Ethics board (RSREB) has approved this research. This can be verified by contacting the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitob.ca

Appendix J

PARTICIPANT SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

ID Code _____

Section A

Date: _____

Name: _____

Date of birth: _____

Gender: Male Female

Telephone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Student Status: Full-time Part-time

First language English: No Yes

18 years plus of age: No Yes

Three-hour commitment: No Yes

Diagnosis of LD: No Yes

Type of Learning Disability: _____

Type of professional: _____

Last Diagnosis Date: _____

MB Elementary School _____

MB Middle School _____

MB High School _____

Post secondary Institution _____ Faculty of Study _____

Declared major _____ Declared minor _____

Section B

This questionnaire has been developed to provide the researcher with information about each potential participant. This information will help in the selection of participants that will increase the variation within the sample so it is most representative of individuals with learning disabilities. Questions in this questionnaire consist of primarily yes or no alternative responses and your approximations of the grade ranges at which you had specific experiences related to your learning disability. If you are selected to participate in the study after today's screening interview, the ten questionnaire categories we cover today will be further explored during each of the additional two interviews that will focus on gathering narrative data about your early educational experiences, post secondary educational experiences, and your identified solutions to the challenges and barriers often experienced by students with learning disabilities. Please answer each question as accurately as possible.

1. Awareness of Learning Disability:

1. Are you able to tell me what age you were when you first recognized that you learnt differently from your peers? _____
2. In which grade level were you first aware that you had difficulty learning compared to your peers:
 - a) primary years grades K-4
 - b) middle years grades 5-8
 - c) secondary years grades S1-S4
 - d) post secondary education

2. Assessments, Diagnosis, and Impact:

3. Which of the following grade ranges were you first assessed for a learning disability?
 - a) primary years grades K-4
 - b) middle years grades 5-8
 - c) secondary years grades S1-S4
 - d) post secondary education
4. Which of the following grade ranges were you first formally diagnosed with a learning disability?
 - a) primary years grades K-4
 - b) middle years grades 5-8
 - c) secondary years grades S1-S4
 - d) post secondary education

5. Which of the following areas were problematic for you as a direct result of this learning disability during grades K-S4?

- a) Reading
- b) Writing
- c) Spelling
- d) Math
- e) Taking notes
- f) Attention
- g) Memory
- h) Other
- i) Specify _____

6. Which of the following areas are problematic for you as a direct result of this learning disability during post secondary education?

- a) Reading
- b) Writing
- c) Spelling
- d) Math
- e) Taking notes
- f) Attention
- g) Memory
- h) Other
- i) Specify _____

7. Did a formal learning disability diagnosis result in a specific academic action plan during the school years K-S-4?

Yes No

8. In which grade range did a formal academic action plan begin?

- a) primary years grades K-4
- b) middle years grades 5-8
- c) secondary years grades 9-12
- d) post secondary education

3. Meaning of Learning Disability:

9. Often people with learning disabilities have areas in which they function in the superior range, which becomes evident in the results of formal standardized assessments. Can you tell me about areas in which you show strengths?

- a) Visual spatial (good with maps, building, art)
- b) Kinesthetic skills (athletic, highly coordinated)
- c) Musically inclined
- d) Strong in specific subjects (science, social studies)

10. Often people with learning disabilities have specific areas they experience problems usually referred to as the associated features (social, emotional, psychological) of learning disabilities. Can you tell me if you encountered social difficulties that you think are linked to having a learning disability such as:

- a) difficulty making friendships
- b) maintaining friendships
- c) being teased
- d) bullied

11. Can you tell me if you have ever experienced emotional difficulties such as:

- a) feelings of hopelessness
- b) helplessness
- c) feeling stupid
- d) feeling unworthy
- e) feeling unable
- f) feeling overwhelmed

12. Can you tell me if you have ever experienced psychological difficulties such as:

- a) depression
- b) anxiety
- c) low self-esteem
- d) self-confidence
- e) poor self-concept
- f) thinking you should drop out of school
- g) negative coping such as substance use
- h) thoughts of suicide

4. Meaning to Personal Interactions:

13. Do you think having a learning disability impacted on your personal interactions with family members?

Yes No

14. Do you think having a learning disability impacted on your personal interactions with teachers or professors?

Yes No

15. Do you think having a learning disability impacted on your personal interactions with peers?

Yes No

16. Do you recall specific individuals who supported you that directly contributed to your educational success?

Yes No

17. Is there someone you encountered during your high school experience who guided you to participate in post secondary education?

Yes No

5. Advocacy, Learning Style, Educational Interventions, and Transitional Support:

18. Did you count on someone who advocated for you during your early educational grades K-S4?

Yes No

19. Can you tell me if you have ever used any specialized strategies or accommodations such as:

- a) specific study strategies
- b) specific time management strategies
- c) technological support
- d) accommodations provided through resource teacher
- e) extra test time
- f) private testing area
- g) reader
- h) scribe
- i) note taker
- j) taped books
- k) one on one teaching support
- l) participation in small groups
- m) tutor within the school
- n) private tutor
- o) help with homework

20. Did you have a formal individual educational plan (IEP) during the school years K-S4?

Yes No

21. If yes, in which of the following grade ranges did you have an IEP introduced?

- a) primary years grades K-4 _____
- b) middle years grades 5-8 _____
- c) secondary years grades 9-12 _____
- d) post secondary education _____

22. Did you have a formal individualized transition plan (ITP)?

Yes No

23. If yes, in which of the following grade ranges was an ITP introduced?

- a) primary years grades K-4 _____
- b) middle years grades 5-8 _____
- c) secondary years grades 9-12 _____
- d) post secondary education _____

6. Awareness of others with Learning Disabilities:

24. Were you aware of other students with learning disabilities during the K-S4 school years?

Yes No

25. Are you aware of other students in your post secondary institution with learning disabilities?

Yes No

7. Educational History and Personal Educational Views:

26. Did you complete your high school credits in a regular high school?

Yes No

27. If not, did you attend any adult educational programs to complete your high school credits?

Yes No

28. Did you enter the workforce before attending post secondary education?

Yes No

29. Do you consider yourself academically successful?

Yes No

8. Participation and Academic Management in Post Secondary Education:

30. Did you transition to post secondary education directly from high school?

Yes No

31. Was your initial enrollment in post secondary education as a mature student?

Yes No

32. Is your focus of study your first study area choice?

Yes No

33. Do you experience academic difficulty because of your learning disability in post secondary education?

Yes No

34. Do these difficulties occur in your major or minor areas of study?

Yes No

35. Do you currently use specific management strategies to help you succeed in post secondary education?

Yes No

36. If yes, can you tell me if you use any of the management strategies listed below:

- a) specific study strategies
- b) specific time management strategies
- c) technological support
- d) accommodations provided through the university
- e) extra test time
- f) private testing area
- g) scribe
- h) note taker
- i) taped books
- j) record lectures
- k) participation in study groups
- l) tutor
- m) other person supports
- n) other personal self management strategies
- o) specify other responses _____

9. Challenges and Barriers:

37. Can you tell me if you have experienced challenges as a direct result of having a learning disability?

Yes No

38. If yes, in which contexts listed below have you experienced challenges:

- a) school
- b) home
- c) sports
- d) relationships with family
- e) relationships with teachers
- f) relationships with peers
- g) other
- h) specify _____

39. Have you experienced barriers as a direct result of having a learning disability?

Yes No

40. If yes, can you tell me in which contexts listed below that you have experienced barriers:

- a) school
- b) home
- c) sports
- d) relationships with family
- e) relationships with teachers
- f) relationships with peers
- g) other
- h) specify _____

41. Have you experienced barriers in post secondary education as a direct result of your learning disability?
Yes No
42. Have you ever felt stigmatized as a direct result of having a learning disability?
Yes No
43. Have you ever felt you were directed away from an area of study because of the need to disclose your learning disability for accommodations?
Yes No

10. Identified Solutions:

44. Do you find the accommodations available to you during post secondary education are different then those that were available to you during the school years K-S4?
Yes No
45. Do you have recommendations that you think would increase academic success for students with learning disabilities in the school years K-S4?
Yes No
46. Do you have recommendations that you think would increase academic success for post secondary students with learning disabilities?
Yes No

Thank you for the interest you have shown to participate in my study. I recognize that students have a number of time pressures associated with their academic responsibilities and therefore would like to thank you in advance for your willingness to spend three hours participating in this study. I will contact you once the information gathered in the screening surveys has been analyzed to set an appointment for the second interview, if you are one of the students who I select to participate in the rest of the study. The second interview will involve gathering your narrative story about your educational experiences during the school years K-S4. If you are not selected to participate in the rest of the study, I will nonetheless also contact you to let you know and to once again thank you for the time you have given for today's screening interview.

Appendix K

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of project:

“Personal and Educational Experiences of Post Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities”

Researcher:

Cheryl Nicholson
Masters of Arts Student
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
E-mail _____
Phone _____

Academic Advisor:

Dr. Russell Smandych
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Phone 474-6446

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of Research

This study will explore the personal and educational experiences of post secondary students with learning disabilities. The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical model for understanding the challenges and barriers post secondary students with learning disabilities have experienced during their educational histories and their identified solutions that address these difficulties for successful high-school completion and participation in post secondary education.

Procedures

Participation in this research study is voluntary and declining to participate will not affect any services currently received nor will it affect any services you may receive in the future at the cooperating educational institutions the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, or Red River College or the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba. Participation will involve a time commitment of three hours to meet with the researcher for three separate interview sessions.

First Interview: Participant Screening Questionnaire

- The first interview will involve completing a survey questionnaire. There are two main objectives for this interview, the first is to screen participants for the predetermined criteria of a diagnosed learning disability, post secondary student, previously educated in Manitoba, he or she will speak English as a first language, be eighteen years of age or older, able to commit three hours of time.
- The second objective is to gain insight that will capture participant background information that will highlight differences in initial experiences such as age and the grades of diagnosis, type of learning disability, specific differences in experiences with educational interventions and accommodations, personal interaction experiences, high school completion, post secondary entrance, and workforce participation.
- The participant-screening questionnaire will consist of forty-six closed-ended yes/no response questions within ten topic sections.
- These topic sections focus on themes that gain information about when the participant became aware of learning difficulties, when assessed, diagnosed, and impact of LD, meaning of LD, meaning to personal interactions, advocacy, learning style, educational interventions or transitional supports, awareness of others with LD, educational history and personal educational views, participation and academic management in post secondary education, challenges and barriers experienced, and participant identified solutions.
- The initial participant screening questionnaire interview is anticipated to take forty-five minutes to complete with a ten-minute debriefing at the end to ensure that negative feelings did not arise because of the questions asked during the interview.

Second Interview: Early Educational Experiences K-S4

- The second interview will involve participants sharing in-depth narratives about their early educational experiences during the educational years K-S4. These narratives will be gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews using interview probes that will have participants elaborate on their personal early educational experiences grades K-S4.
- This interview will be tape-recorded; participants can stop the tape-recorder at any time, and decline from elaborating on any topic section or question probe within the topic sections.
- There are seven-topic sections themes outlined from the first survey questionnaire with a final section that invites participants to provide any additional information

not captured within this semi structured interview that participants feel is important.

- In total there are thirty-three open-ended question probes developed for this semi structured interview that are presented within the specific topic sections. The interview question probes within each topic section will be used during conversational lags, as the goal is to obtain spontaneous participant narratives within each topic section.
- The second interview is anticipated to take one hour in duration. However, to avoid making the participants feel pressured to share their narrative stories within a restricted period participants will be directed to take as much time as they feel is needed. Actual interview times will be recorded.
- A ten-minute debriefing will take place at the end of this interview to ensure that negative feelings did not arise because of the topic sections or probe questions referenced during the interview.

Third Interview: Post Secondary Education and Identified Solutions

- The third interview will be semi structured and involve gathering in-depth participant narratives that describe participants' post secondary education experiences and their identified solutions to the challenges and barriers students with learning disabilities often experience.
- This interview will be tape-recorded; participants can stop the tape-recorder at any time, and decline from elaborating on any topic section or question probes within the topic sections.
- There are seven themes from the topic sections outlined from the first survey questionnaire with a final section added that invites participants to provide any additional information not captured within this semi structured interview participants feel is important.
- In total there are thirty-eight open-ended question probes developed for this semi structured interview that are presented within the specific topic sections. The interview question probes within each topic section will be used during conversational lags, as the goal is to obtain spontaneous participant narratives within each topic section.
- The third interview is anticipated to take one hour in duration. However, to avoid making the participants feel pressured to share their narrative stories within a restricted period participants will be directed to take as much time as they feel is needed. Actual interview times will be recorded.

- A ten-minute debriefing will take place at the end of this interview to ensure that negative feelings did not arise because of the topic sections or probe questions referenced during the interview.

Description of Risk

Anticipation of risk to participants is not associated with this research. However, to guard against any unforeseen emotional impact ten-minutes will be spent at the end of each interview to debrief with participants. Any participant reporting they are experiencing negative emotions because of their participation in this study will require additional debriefing time to determine the extent of these negative feelings, and to evaluate if there is any psychological, emotional, or physical risk to the participant via the following strategies:

- Discussion and problem solving around the issue the participant finds upsetting.
- Referral of knowledge based information that will help the participant develop.
- Better understanding of the problem and strategies to help them deal with the issue in the future (i.e. learning styles and study skills information for academic difficulty, if the difficulty is anxiety or depression referral to the appropriate professional will be provided).
- An additional follow-up will be arranged with any participant being provided information or professional referrals to ensure they found these appropriate and helpful.
- Participants continuing to report negative emotions after additional debriefing time or during the follow up call will be directed to the appropriate counselling services department at their post secondary institution, Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba, Anxiety and Depression Association of Manitoba, or provided names of private psychologists who specialize in learning disabilities.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained during the interview sessions will be strictly confidential. Participant identity will be linked to a code number during the initial participant screening interview and this code will be attached to information obtained from the second and third transcribed narrative data to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. All materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office at the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba, in which only I have access. Information collected in this study will be reported in an aggregate fashion of the emerging themes. If any narrative quotes are used, they will be attached to pseudo-names to protect participant identity. On completion of the final written report, any materials that contain participant identities will be shredded and disposed of in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. The final report of this research will be completed no later than August 30, 2007 therefore participants will have receive a written summary of the

research results no later than that date. In addition, all research materials will have been shredded and disposed of no later than August 30, 2007. It is hoped that this project will be completed before the fore mentioned date in which case participant summaries and material disposal will occur simultaneously. The researcher will stringently comply with the regulations outlined by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (RSREB) and privacy regulations outlined by the Privacy Act.

Study Related Feedback and Remuneration

Once the final report is completed, an executive summary will be dispersed to individual participants. Each participant will receive a twenty-dollar restaurant gift certificate at the end of the final face-to-face interview as a token of my appreciation of the time spent participating in this study.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from providing any information you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification of new information throughout your participation.

The Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba has approved this research. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Signature of Participant Telephone Number Date

Principal Researcher Telephone Number Date

Appendix L

POST SECONDARY PARTICIPATION TRENDS IN MANITOBA

1. How many students are currently registered with Disability Services (DS) because of assistance needed due to Learning Disabilities (LD)?
2. Do you have the enrolment rates of students with LD registered for DS for the academic years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006, that you could share with me?
3. Do you know the gender representation for LD students registered with DS?
4. Do you know what faculties that students with LD are most commonly registered?
5. Do you know what percentage of students with LD register as mature students?
6. Do you know what percentage of students with LD come to post secondary education directly from high school?
7. When students making the transition to post secondary education directly from high school how often do they have someone (parent or high school representative) come to DS to help with the transition to post secondary education?
8. What is the age range of students with learning disabilities registered with DS and do you know the mean age of those students registered?
9. Is there any other aggregate information about post secondary students with LD available that you think is important that you could share with me?

Appendix M

SECOND INTERVIEW: EARLY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES K-S4

Identification Code _____

This interview will be tape-recorded and later your narrative story will be transcribed for analysis. You can ask me to stop the tape recorder at any time. If there are any topic areas you do not wish to comment on please let me know and we will continue on to the next topic area. I will introduce each topic area to you with an initial question. Although I do have a couple of questions under each topic area I will only refer to these questions during conversational lags or if you are having difficulty getting started in the topic area. The aim of this interview is to obtain your spontaneous experiential story concerning each topic area. You will be given the opportunity at the end of the interview to contribute any additional information you feel is important.

1. Awareness of Learning Disability:

(age, grade, learning problems, specific experiences, environments, understanding)

1. Can you tell me about your experience of first recognizing you were experiencing difficulty learning?
2. What were the specific problems that let you know learning was difficult for you?
3. How did you deal with your earliest recognitions that you had a difficult time learning compared to peers?
4. Were there situational factors related to the task at hand (academic requirements, learning strengths and weaknesses) and the environment (noise, visual stimuli, information presentation, and stressors) that contributed to either learning success or learning difficulties?

2. Assessments, Diagnosis, and Impact:

(age, grade, who assessed, number of times assessed, formal diagnosis, school action plan)

5. Can you tell me what the experience of being assessed for a learning disability meant for you?
6. What was the academic impact of the learning disability with which you were diagnosed?
7. What did having a formal learning disability diagnosis mean to you?

3. Meaning of Learning Disability for the Grades K-S4 Educational Experiences:

(overall meaning, socially, emotionally, psychologically, harmful and helpful experiences)

8. Can you tell me from your perspective what it meant to have a learning disability during grades K-S4 (positive things and negative things)?
9. What are some of the things you consider to have been most helpful during your primary grades K-S4 in terms of individual support, accommodations, tutoring, resource, or specific learning strategies?
10. Are there experiences you consider to have been the least helpful for you during the grades K-S4 school years?
11. If you had trouble in the social, emotional, or psychological domains as associated features related to the experience of struggling with a learning disability, can you tell me what you consider to have contributed to these difficulties as a direct consequence of having a learning disability?
12. Can you summarize for me some of the negative or positive consequences of the label learning disability?

4. Meaning to Personal Interactions:

(family, teachers, peers, guidance)

13. What did having a learning disability mean for your personal interactions?
14. How do you think your personal interactions were impacted as a direct result of having a learning disability?
15. Who were the people during your educational experiences grades K-S4 that were most helpful to you (specific individuals, or characteristics of individuals)?
16. Were there individuals during your educational experience grades K-S4 whom you found to be the least helpful (specific individuals, or characteristics)?
17. Can you summarize for me experiences of stigmatization because of your learning disability?

5. Advocacy, Educational Interventions, and Transitional Support:

(primary advocate, self-advocacy, direct learning style instruction, interventions and transitions)

18. Can you tell me what your experiences were with advocacy, educational interventions, transitional supports, or specific instruction about your learning profile?
19. If there was a specific person that advocated for you during the school years grades K-S4 will you tell me about them?
20. What did having an advocate during the school years K-S4 mean for you?

21. What does self-advocacy mean to you?
22. Did you receive any specialized educational interventions and accommodations for academic difficulties during the K-S4 school years?
23. Who provided any extra interventions and accommodating supports to you?
24. Can you tell me what having educational interventions and accommodations meant for you?
25. If you had Individualized Education Plan or Transition Plan in place during the K-S4 educational years, what did these mean to you?

6. Awareness of others with Learning Disabilities:

(high school completion, drop out, post secondary, work transitions)

26. Can you tell me about other students you knew with learning disabilities during the educational years K-S4?
27. How did you come to know these other students?
28. If you know, can you tell me what the educational outcomes were for your peers with learning disabilities in terms of high school completion, and transitional experiences to post secondary education or the workforce after high school?

7. Challenges and Barriers:

29. Can you summarize for me what you view the most significant challenges experienced in the school years K-S4?
30. If so, what were the most significant motivating factors that have helped you overcome these challenges?
31. Will you summarize for me if you experienced barriers during the school years K-S4?
32. If so, what were the most significant motivating factors that helped you continue to face barriers you experienced?

8. Additional Information Important to Participant:

33. Is there anything else you would like to add not touched on during this interview?

I would like to thank you for the time spent participating in this interview. The information you have shared will be transcribed into a narrative representative of your story. I will contact you to set up an appointment for the third interview, which will focus on your post secondary educational experiences and your identified solutions to the challenges and barriers faced by students with learning disabilities.

Appendix N

THIRD INTERVIEW: POST SECONDARY EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

Identification Code _____

This interview will be tape-recorded and later your narrative story will be transcribed for analysis. You can ask me to stop the tape recorder at any time. If there are any topic areas you do not wish to comment on please let me know and we will continue on to the next topic area. I will introduce each topic area to you with an initial question. Although I do have a couple of questions under each topic area I will only refer to these questions during conversational lags or if you are having difficulty getting started in the topic area. The aim of this interview is to obtain your spontaneous experiential story concerning each topic area. You will be given the opportunity at the end of the interview to contribute any additional information you feel is important.

1. Personal Educational Views and Experiences:

(post secondary education transition, influences for academic outcomes, workplace transitions)

1. What motivated you to attend post secondary education?
2. What does educational success mean to you?
3. If you do perceive yourself as educationally successful, what in your post secondary educational experience has contributed most to your educational success to date?
4. If you transitioned from high school to post secondary education, can you tell me if a particular individual helped influence your participation to attend post secondary education?
5. If you attended an adult education program to complete high school credits, can you tell me what this experience meant for you?
6. If you transitioned to the work before attending post secondary education, can you tell me what the experience of work meant for you?
7. How did you make the decision to participate in post secondary education?

2. Participation and Academic Management in Post Secondary Education:

(post secondary participation, academic management, accommodations, major and minor areas of study)

8. Were there other areas of study you considered other than the area you are currently studying in now?

9. Why you did not pursue these areas of study?
10. What are the supports available to you through your post secondary institution to help you succeed academically?
11. How do you secure these supports at your post secondary institution?
12. If you need to self-identify, what does it mean for you to self-identify your learning disability to secure accommodation supports?
13. What does participation in post secondary education mean to you?
14. Will you elaborate on how your post secondary educational experience is similar to or differs from earlier educational experiences?

3. Meaning to Personal Interactions:

(family, teachers, peers, guidance)

15. Can you tell if you think your personal interactions since beginning your post secondary education have been impacted in any way as a direct result of having a learning disability?
16. What does having a learning disability during post secondary education mean for your personal interactions with family, instructors, or peers?
17. Can you summarize for me any feelings of stigmatization you have experienced as a post secondary student as a direct result of having a learning disability?

4. Advocacy, Educational Interventions, and Transitional Support:

(primary advocate, self-advocacy, direct learning style instruction, interventions and transitions)

18. What are your experiences with advocacy, educational interventions, transitional supports, or specific instruction about your learning profile you receive as a post secondary student?
19. Can you tell me who provides any extra interventions and accommodating supports to you?

5. Awareness of others with Learning Disabilities:

(post secondary, work transitions)

20. Can you tell me if you know other students with learning disabilities at your post secondary institution?
21. How did you come to know these students?

22. If you know other students with learning disabilities attending your post secondary institution, what does knowing other students with learning disabilities mean to you?

6. Challenges and Barriers:

(context of challenges and barriers, motivators to face challenges, barriers yet to be overcome)

23. Can you tell me about any challenges or barriers experienced at the post secondary level, and how you deal with these experiences?

7. Identified Solutions:

(diagnostic knowledge, accommodations, advocacy, learning styles, social, emotional, psychological, or other)

24. Can you summarize for me what you think the most appropriate educational interventions or accommodations are for promoting educational success for children and adolescents?
25. Do you think that having personal knowledge of learning strengths and weaknesses and an understanding of personal learning styles is important for achieving academic success for students at all levels?
26. Can you tell me how students with learning disabilities can develop self-awareness of their learning profiles?
27. Do you think having an advocate to help children and adolescents with learning disabilities cope in the educational setting are important?
28. How important is it to learn how to self-advocate?
29. Can you tell me how you think the negative associated features linked as consequences of learning disabilities can be prevented for students at all levels?
- a) social consequences
 - b) emotional consequences
 - c) psychologically consequences
30. What skills, resources, or supports do you think are necessary for students with learning disabilities to overcome challenges?
31. Do you think that negative attitudes held by others help create the challenges or barriers students with learning disabilities often experience?
32. What skills, resources, or supports do you think are most important to help students at all levels deal with the misinformed or negative attitudes others often have toward students with learning disabilities?

33. How are feelings of stigmatism best dealt with?
34. Who are the most important persons for students to connect with during middle, secondary, and post secondary education to lend support for increasing student educational success?
35. What do you think is most important for students at all levels to gain self-confidence and positive self-esteem?
36. Are accommodations available at the post secondary level that were not available during grades K-S4 that you would recommend be available to students in lower grades to increase academic success?
37. What recommendations would you give to other post secondary students to help them secure the resources they need for academic success?

8. Additional Information Important to Participant:

38. Is there anything else you would like to add not touched on during this interview?

I would like to thank you for the time spent participating in this study. The information you have shared will be transcribed into a narrative representative of your story. Participants will be contacted on the completion of this study and informed on how to obtain a summary of the primary research findings.

Table 1

**STUDENTS REGISTERED WITH DISABILITY SERVICES ACADEMIC
YEARS 2003-04 THROUGH 2006-07**

Table Key

dk=don't know | ni=no information

2003-04 Table 1-1

Name of Institution	Total # Receiving Support Services	Total # of LD Students	Total # of LD/ADHD Students	Total # of ADHD Students	% of LD Students using support service	% of LD/ADHD Students using support service	% of ADHD Students using support service
University of Manitoba	597	117	37	42	19.6%	6.2%	7%
University of Winnipeg	290	79	dk	61	27%	48%	Dk
Red River College	407	dk	171	dk	dk	42%	Dk

April 2004

2004-05 Table 1-2

Name of Institution	Total # Receiving Support Services	Total # of LD Students	Total # of LD/ADHD Students	Total # of ADHD Students	% of LD Students using support service	% of LD/ADHD Students using support service	% of ADHD Students using support service
University of Manitoba	689	95	34	29	13.8%	42%	4.2%
University of Winnipeg	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	Dk
Red River College	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	Dk

July 2007

2005-06 Table 1-3

Name of Institution	Total # Receiving Support Services	Total # of LD Students	Total # of LD/ADHD Students	Total # of ADHD Students	% of LD Students using support service	% of LD/ADHD Students using support service	% of ADHD Students using support service
University of Manitoba	737	80	36	42	10.9%	4.9	5.7%
University of Winnipeg	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	Dk
Red River College	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk	Dk

July 2007

2006-07 Table 1-4

Name of Institution	Total # Receiving Support Services	Total # of LD Students	Total # of LD/ADHD Students	Total # of ADHD Students	% of LD Students using support service	% of LD/ADHD Students using support service	% of ADHD Students using support service
University of Manitoba	dk	132	38	dk	dk	dk	Dk
University of Winnipeg	dk	56	dk	dk	dk	dk	Dk
Red River College	dk	281	dk	dk	dk	dk	Dk

July 2007

Table 2

STUDENT TRENDS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEARS 2004-05 THROUGH 2006-07

Table Key

dk=don't know | ni=no information | U1=University 1 | Sc.=Science | Ed.=Education

2004-05 Table 2-1

Name of Institution	Gender Representation	Area of Study Commonly Registered	% Mature Student Status	% Transition Directly from High School	% Support by Parent or School Personnel
University of Manitoba	dk	U1 18.7% Arts 19.2% Sc. 12.7%	dk	dk	dk
University of Winnipeg	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk
Red River College	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk

July 2007

2005-06 Table 2-2

Name of Institution	Gender Representation	Area of Study Commonly Registered	% Mature Student Status	% Transition Directly from High School	% Support by Parent or School Personnel
University of Manitoba	dk	U1 17.1 % Arts 19.5% Sc. 12.6%	dk	dk	dk
University of Winnipeg	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk
Red River College	dk	dk	dk	dk	dk

July 2007

2006-07 Table 2-3

Name of Institution	Gender Representation	Area of Study Commonly Registered	% Mature Student Status	% Transition Directly from High School	% Support by Parent or School Personnel
University of Manitoba	71 males 91 females	dk	dk	dk	dk
University of Winnipeg	28 males 28 females Age range for this year was 19-42 years of age.	Arts 46% Ed. 5.4% Sc. 8.9% Undeclared 39%	Mature Student 7% Registered this way, student could fit status but be registered as "regular"	43%	Parent or adult attends 80% when student has completed high school 100% if still completing high school
Red River College	143 females 138 males	Community Services and Nursing Marketing and Management Apprentice Programs	dk	dk	dk

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