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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF HELPING PROFESSIONALS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

A Dissertation Presented

by

MADELINE LORRAINE PETERS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 2010

Education

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF HELPING PROFESSIONALS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

A Dissertation Presented

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MADELINE LORRAINE PETERS

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DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Roland and Sylvia who taught me to dream big and to pursue those dreams. To always believe in myself and that only self could ever keep me from success. To my sister Claire the one person who really knows me, whose strength, strong beliefs, faith, pride and unconditional love keeps me ever strong. To my sons Kamil and Hassan, whose awesome talents inspired me, fulfill me and empower me. To my partner Sandra, whose love, confidence, and support have been steadfast and never ending. I am grateful for our yesterdays, for our today's and our tomorrows. To my step-sons Christopher and Manny, for their on-going love and support .To Judy Robison my life long friend whose love and support is a true foundation in my life. To Barbara Dreyer, my spiritual guide, who has helped me to find the courage to fail and keep going, to see the good when it is right here, and the ability to turn failure into a lesson which has liberated my soul and my spirit. To Diane Campbell a friend and colleague whose encouragement and support in our movement towards the liberation of people with disabilities has been unending. To Emma J. Williams, who believed in my abilities enough to walk me to STCC and enrolled me in my first college course. Finally, to the participants whose trials and victories are now part of our story thank you all.

In Memory

My dearly loved brother Petie who love is always with me on all the paths I take in life. To my beloved friend Patricia [Trish] Silver whose constant vigilance, iron will, and awe-inspiring beliefs helped to move me into a place where I could believe getting my doctorate was a possibility.

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For attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight;
for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;
for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young –
let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance –
Proverbs 1:2-5

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understand,
and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure….
Proverbs 2:1-4

Then you will understand what is right and just and fair-every good path.
For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you
Proverbs 2:9-11

My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around you neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
Proverbs 3:1-3

ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF HELPING PROFESSIONALS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

FEBRUARY 2010

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Directed by: Professor Barbara J. Love

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent, to which professionals in helping professions (PHPS) with learning disabilities are able to name the support, services, and assistance that they require to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living. Additionally, the study explores how PHPS describe their experiences with support, services, and assistance available to them. The study was conducted using a qualitative, phenomenological in-depth interview methodology. The study sample consisted of 10 helping professionals with learning disabilities that work in helping professions. Data was collected using audiotaping of interviews and field notes. Audio tapes were transcribed and data from the transcriptions was analyzed for this study.

Nine major themes emerged from the analysis of the study data the themes were disability, daily living, oppression, self-esteem, self-reflection, creative management, creative management adaptive behaviors, services and support. Key findings from the study suggest that professionals in helping professions (PHPs) with learning disabilities are creative, strong willed and persevere despite the odds. Most of the PHPs went through

school without accommodations and relied upon their own abilities and determination to pass. Two out of the ten PHPs were diagnosed with learning disabilities when they were children. Three of the PHPs were born before learning disabilities were formalized and labeled as a disability. The data suggests that people with learning disabilities need support, services and assistance in all areas of their daily living. Recommendations for change are provided for addressing the problematic themes that emerged from the data.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

> Aster: Because I have lived through disability I am not ashamed of it. I have suffered which has helped me understand. I believe when you have growth from opportunities you grow inside yourself.

As children we enter this world with a clean slate. No ideas about difference, or the laws of our society. Our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are learned by what is modeled to us by the interactions and information we receive from others throughout our years of socialization. Individual's families, educational systems, media exposure, religion, where one live, where one plays and health care system play a major role in how people formulate their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors towards others. Although times are changing and society is more aware of people with disabilities, there are still many myths, misinformation and missing information regarding disabilities and the effects they have on people.

It is by nature and nurture that humans are socialized to have certain values towards an individual's ability to perform particular tasks. Children who grow up in a society that is full of misconceptions about people with disabilities only learn to generate negative attitudes and behaviors towards people with disabilities (Nagler, 1993). These negative attitudes are ingrained in the fabric of American society and historically have been reflected in governmental policies and procedures (Nagler, 1993). Furthermore these attitudes are manifested institutionally in all areas of our culture. The institutionalization of these negative values, attitudes, and beliefs form a foundation of oppression that keeps people with disabilities from experiencing a holistic and environmentally balanced life.

Since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, society has begun to have an increased awareness of the accommodations required to support the equal access for people with physical disabilities. Still, this understanding is limited and people with mobility impairments still struggle for independence and access. For most able-bodied people, the tasks of daily living are performed unconsciously. Able-bodied people do not think about whether the bathroom at the meeting location will be accessible or whether they will be able to get to the second floor location of the meeting, nor do they organize their day to be able to meet an assistant at a specified time for daily needs such as eating or toileting for example. The need to perform daily living tasks such as toileting, bathing, dressing oneself, eating, opening doors, and transporting oneself are considered physical daily living tasks and for the able-bodied person these routine tasks are taken for granted.

Having a conscious awareness and understanding of physical daily living tasks is usually limited to those individuals who have had the experience of not being able to perform these tasks due to illness, surgery, or care of a loved one. On the other hand, understanding the requirements for daily living for people with learning disabilities is more complex and individuals are less aware of limits that are placed on people with learning disabilities in performing these daily tasks. The psychological categories of daily living tasks include language processing, reading, speaking, and writing. Other psychological categories of daily living include household tasks such as money managing, working, cooking skills, and shopping. There are daily business tasks such as processing medical forms, maintaining a home, paying bills on time, buying cars, buying houses, or signing a lease for an apartment. In addition, the task of maintaining good

social relationships is also a challenge. All of these daily living processes are psychological and can cause both physical and emotional energy drain for an individual with learning disabilities.

Not only is there a lack of awareness and understanding of these daily living processes, there is a tendency in our society to characterize the manifestations of disabilities as personal deficits rather than a characteristic of the disability that requires the able-bodied to become knowledgeable of. This knowledge can create the link towards able-bodied people understanding, being supportive of people with disabilities, and increasing their capacity to provide accommodations. This is especially true with disabilities that affect the functionality of the brain such as, learning disabilities, head injuries, Alzheimer's, and psychological disabilities.

There are many misconceptions related to the importance of support, services, and assistance for people with learning disabilities. This lack of awareness is reflected in institutional policies and procedures which impact the participation of individuals with disabilities in society as well as the type and quality of services and support provided by institutions to individuals with disabilities (French, 1996).

Statement of Purpose

This study will explore how professionals in the helping profession with learning disabilities describe the services they require to successfully engage in the full range of activities for daily life, the extent to which they experience the services they have described as available to them, and the extent to which the services available are congruent with the needs they described. Further, this study will examine the extent to which professionals in helping professions who have learning disabilities are able to

describe support, service, and assistance that is available to people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living.

The work of Linton (1998) on Disability Studies provides part of the theoretical foundation for this examination of the requirements for daily living for people with learning disabilities. “A disability studies perspective adds a critical dimension to thinking about issues such as autonomy, competence, wholeness, independence/dependence, health, physical appearance, aesthetics, community, and notions of progress and perfection–issues that pervade every aspect of the civic and pedagogic culture” (p. 118). Linton’s work suggests “the social, political, and cultural analyses undertaken by disability studies form a prism through which one can gain a broader understanding of society and human experience, and the significance of human variation” (p.117). This perspective provides a libratory framework from which to examine the provision of support, services, and assistance for people with learning disabilities.

Understanding Learning Disabilities

To provide a context for this study, it is important to present a basic understanding of the specific mechanisms that contribute to the naming and analysis of manifestations of learning disabilities. To appropriately provide services that support people with learning disabilities with their daily living requirements, it is useful to understand certain basic functions of the brain. First, there are different types of learning disabilities. Second, learning disabilities manifest themselves in particular ways in specific environments. Neurodevelopment functioning is a crucial mechanism for learning. (Levine, 2002) According to Levine, the brain functions on many complex and

interactive levels. These interactive levels are bound within a vast communication system. In Levine's construct, brain functions allow humans to enact four types of orders, Executive Functioning, Associative Processing, Cognitive Processing, and Fine Motor Coordination.

Table 1: Levine's Order of Brain Processes (2002)

Executive Functioning	Brain's ability to create order from cognitive thought processes. Cognitive thought processes are transformed into physical or intellectual tasks.
Associative Processing	Routine processes that are spontaneous, instinctive, and unconscious in humans. Automatic behaviors occur when the mind's intent and the body's repetitive training come together around routine tasks. Multitasking with automatic/trained responses. Involves little new learning and uses the already established neurological pathways.
Cognitive Processing	The brain creates new neurological pathways and combines them with already established pathways. The processing of known and unknown information routinely involves the creation of new neural pathways. Brain-based tasks such as attention, perception, learning and memory are examples of Cognitive Processing.
Fine Motor	Performed with associative processing For individuals with learning disabilities integration of physical and mental tasks is once again not automatic. Fine motor coordination requires individuals with learning disabilities to use far more concentration as well as expenditure of physical and mental energy.

As can be seen from table 1, most people accomplish routine tasks with associative processing. Brain functions, which are dominated by learning disabilities

must use cognitive processing that controls attention, perception, learning, and memory. The misfiring of the neurotransmitters interrupts the associative processing and cognitive processing must then take over. This is the process that causes people with disabilities to exert exponentially greater amounts of time and energy to accomplish the routine tasks of daily living. This expenditure of time and energy takes an enormous toll on the mind and the body of the person with learning disabilities.

Fine motor coordination is another function that is performed with associative processing for individuals with learning disabilities; the integration of physical and mental tasks is once again not automatic for people with learning disabilities, but highly cognitive. Fine motor coordination requires individuals with learning disabilities to use far more concentration, as well as greater expenditures of physical, and mental energy. In the classroom, children with learning disabilities must follow directions, pick up a pencil, or drink their milk without spilling it on themselves or others. The learning disabled child exerts enormous cognitive energy to accomplish these tasks while their non-learning disabled counter part accomplishes these tasks on automatic while having a conversation. Historically, able-bodied people who perform daily living activities automatically assumed that people with learning disabilities who cannot perform the same task in the same way are responsible for securing their own support, services, and assistance.

Since Samuel Kirk (1972) defined the term “Learning Disabilities”, educational institutions have focused on providing support, services, and assistances for children with learning disabilities. These services, however, focused on educational access. They did not include interventions that encompassed the full range of daily living tasks that are required in a variety of environments.

Furthermore, educational institutions continued to perpetuate its inequitable treatment of students with learning disabilities in several ways. Many students were often placed in separate classrooms for a number of hours at a time. Others were placed in separate classrooms for the whole day. Some students were placed in separate schools all together. Students who were placed in separate classrooms fell below and stayed below grade level. This type of "equal education" was geared at a slower pace and was remedial in nature. This remedial education caused many students to fall even further behind their able-bodied peers (Fleming and Kroese, 1990). Poor performance was blamed on the child's disability, or the child's inability, rather than the institutions teaching ability.

Plessey vs. Ferguson (National Archives and ABC-CLIO, 2002, Retrieved December 27, 2004, from http://www.ourdocuments.gov), the U.S. supreme Court decision that legitimized separate but equal accommodations for different populations in public facilities was over turned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 in the Brown vs. The Board of Education Supreme Court decision (Retrieved December 27, 2004, from http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html National center.org). That ruling outlawed "separate but equal" and stated that "separate was inherently unequal". In order to eliminate unequal education a theoretical approach to universal instructional design coupled with accommodations for people with learning disabilities as articulated in disability studies would help to provide a basis for creating equity in education for students with learning disabilities. In many places children with learning disabilities are placed in separate classrooms, floors, buildings and institutions. Keeping children with learning disabilities separate from their peers is an approach that perpetuates educational inequity and continues undermining a culture of people.

Having the responsibility for providing diagnostic testing fall under the province of educational institutions contributes to the fractured approach to servicing students with learning disabilities. Further disservice for the student is compounded by the fact that concern of educational institutions are for the child with learning disabilities remain limited to academic issues which are those factors most immediately in the institutions realm of expertise. This type of limited assessment does not encompass a full environmental inventory of needs and thus did not provide a holistic perspective of the needs of children with learning disabilities.

Secondly, testing results from the educational institution equate individual abilities to grade levels. This is a dangerous practice because it places the focus of the person' disability on their academic ability and not on the physical. Thus, a person's strengths and weaknesses are distorted and cause great confusion within the educational institution. . The assessment does not provide a map of what the person could accomplish when appropriate accommodations are incorporated in their daily life.

Finally, since the responsibility of the testing for learning disabilities are placed on the educational institutions, most health insurance companies will not provide the needed coverage for individuals. Paradoxically, many parents of children with learning disabilities are unaware of how to utilize a holistic perspective in their efforts to secure appropriate services for their learning disabled child. The lack of awareness from parents adds to the complexity of providing appropriate services to the child with learning disabilities. In most cases, parents of children with learning disabilities entered into this new world of learning disabilities with no one to depend on for assistance except for the expertise of the professionals representing the educational institution. In many cases the

manifestations of the learning disabilities are not explained to the individuals or their families. Parents were provided little to no information on how learning disabilities affected their child physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. As a result, people with learning disabilities do not have the metacognitive understanding of their abilities.

This lack of clarity from educational institution may cause individuals and families to be unaware of the global requirement for support, services, and assistance. Furthermore, the child learned about their disability based on their inabilities. These negative messages become part of the manifestations of the disability. Literature shows that these negative messages caused poor self-concepts, anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorders (Huntington and Bender, 1993).

A healthier approach would be to provide support, services, and assistance from a disability studies perspective. This approach helps people to think critically, about the overarching needs of people with disabilities in all areas of life (Linton, 1998). This would allow those with learning disabilities to be examined on an individual basis. Learning disabilities manifested differently in each individual, requiring service providers to be particularly sensitive to the global requirements. Another difficulty is the mistreatment of individuals with learning disabilities. There are many contributing factors that lead to mistreatment, such as lack of awareness by many able-bodied policy makers, of the conceptual frameworks in the field of disability studies. This is evident in the present policies that do not accurately reflect the global requirements of support, services, and assistance required by individuals with learning disabilities (Ashe & Pisegna, 1994). This could be considered one of the largest contributing factors to the

lack of assistance for people with learning disabilities. Additionally, institutions do not always fully uphold the laws proposed by policy makers. For example, some institutions interpret the ADA strictly and others more loosely. These limitations contribute to the mismanagement of people with disabilities (Lichtenstein, 1993).

Background of the Problem

People with learning disabilities are in need of programs and services designed to assist them in their daily functions of life. Most people with learning disabilities only receive support, services, and assistance when they are in an educational institution. Greenbaum, Graham, and Scales (1996) reported that even those individuals who were successful in their employment still reported that their learning disabilities affected their everyday lives. Successful individuals often feared to disclose their learning disabilities to their employer for fear of negative responses. This was in spite of the fact that their disabilities had an adverse effect on their work.

Telander (1994) revealed that adults with learning disabilities had more difficulties in all areas of performance. She found that support, services, and assistance were only available in educational institutions and nothing more. Positive effects of support, services, and assistance that is evident, for instance in schools, are not generally available in social situations. The emotional impact of the lack of support, services, and assistance for people with learning disabilities often leads to difficulties with anxiety and humiliation (Liechtenstein, 1993).

Tomblin (1999) worked with children with learning disabilities for eight years. She found a great impact on students with learning disabilities who did not get the appropriate educational or vocational training. Her study showed that the lack of

appropriate training generally led to inadequate employment. In fact, once out of the educational system, many individuals with learning disabilities are often unemployed and many became juvenile offenders.

Edgar (1995) found that students with learning disabilities tended to go to vocational schools or other programs that provided certificates rather than a college preparatory degree. His study documented a higher rate of single parent females on welfare who had learning disabilities in comparison to able-bodied females. The results further indicated that educators do not know very much about providing people with learning disabilities appropriate information about services outside the educational setting. The quality of life for people with learning disabilities is frequently poor due to the lack of services available to them.

These life conditions are further complicated by a serious lack of access to information about the types of services available to people with learning disabilities. Professionals as well as the disabled themselves have little understanding of how to provide access and implement these required services. Due to the lack of information regarding support, services, and assistance, this gap continues to grow. Ashe and Pisegna (1994) showed that adult literacy students are often found to have low self-esteem. The students blamed themselves for not being able to read and this had a negative effect on their self-image.

Huntington and Bender (1993) reviewed five variables of emotional well being of adolescents with learning disabilities. They were self-concept, attribution, anxiety, depression, and suicide. They found conclusive evidence that children with learning disabilities were at high risk for serious personality and mental health problems. These

students exhibited higher anxiety levels and had more frequent and serious bouts of depression. Suicide rates were much higher than those of adolescents without disabilities.

Levine and Nourse (1998) concluded that with all the advancements in information and technology, many opportunities for youth with learning disabilities were still inaccessible. Their study further revealed that acquiring a post-secondary degree did not guarantee employment for people with disabilities. People with learning disabilities were further hampered by pressure from professionals to fit into the able-bodied world. Support, services, and assistance are generally designed to cause the least amount of disruption to the establishment. As a result, the struggle for people with learning disabilities remained unmanageable and extremely difficult.

There is no state or federal programs to address the support, services, and assistance required for daily living for people with learning disabilities. Such programs and services are necessary in order for people with learning disabilities to accomplish their day-to-day living tasks. The quality of life for people with learning disabilities is highly impacted by this lack of services. (Roper, 1995)

Many institutions contribute to this struggle. The courts, for example do not provide accessible services; parents are unaware of how to accommodate their children in the household. Medical practitioners, judges, and lawyers have a tendency to make judgments or give important instructions that people with learning disabilities are required to follow and they just do not understand. Serious consequences could be levied against a person with learning disabilities for not understanding the steps they were supposed to take. In this instance the authority figure misunderstood the abilities of the individual with learning disabilities. Few institutions accommodate adults with learning

disabilities. People with learning disabilities would benefit from support, services, and assistance through agencies designed to provide appropriate and reasonable accommodations for their daily living needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which professionals in helping professions who have learning disabilities are able to describe support, service, and assistance that is available to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living. Further, this study will examine how helping professionals with learning disabilities articulate the services they require to successfully engage in the full range of activities for daily life, the extent to which they experience these articulated services as available to them, and the extent to which the services available are congruent with their articulated needs.

Specifically, this study will address the following four questions:

1. To what extent are Professionals in the Helping Professions (PHP) with learning disabilities able to name the support, services, and assistance that exist to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?
2. What type of support, services, and assistance would PHP with learning disabilities choose for themselves to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?
3. How do PHP with learning disabilities describe the support, service, and assistance that are available to them?

4. To what extent are the available support, services, and assistance congruent with requirements articulated by PHP with learning disabilities?

Significance of the Study

The current research on access to support, services, and assistance for people with learning disabilities shows a lack of appropriate services. As a result, people with learning disabilities struggle with managing daily life activities. The research demonstrates that there is a lack of insight into the needs of people with learning disabilities, a lack of a humanistic approach to meeting the needs of people with learning disabilities and over-all neglect and mismanagement of services for people with learning disabilities. This study is significant because it may provide a deeper understanding of the manifestations of learning disabilities, the overall need for support, services, and assistance for people with learning disabilities, and expose the consequences of the lack of available and appropriate services for people with learning disabilities from an all encompassing perspective. It may provide professionals with an understanding of the multiplicity of needs of people with learning disabilities.

The results of this research can inform the development of approaches to assessment for people with learning disabilities and it can inform the development of a systemic universally integrated approach to offering services for people with learning disabilities. In addition, this research can inform policies regulating the development and delivery of support, service and assistance for people with learning disabilities

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study the following terms are defined: Physical Disabilities, Mental Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, Daily Living Activities, Environmental Inventory and Disability Studies:

Physical disabilities or mental impairments, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act Title II 28 C.F.R. cc. 35.104 are:

> A physical or mental impairment to mean: (A) any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin and endocrine; or (B) any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.

Specific learning disabilities are a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin, which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or non-verbal abilities.

> Specific Learning Disabilities exists as a distinct handicapping condition in the presence of average to superior intelligence, adequate sensory and motor systems, and adequate learning opportunities. The condition varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and/or daily living activities (Hallahan & Kauffman 1988 p. 106)

Daily living activities are those behaviors and routines that enable humans to function and participate in their own lives in the course of a day. Daily living activities have several categories; physical tasks, psychological tasks, business tasks, and social tasks. Each of these categories requires an unspecified amount of physical and mental processes. Daily living activities are significant for people with learning disabilities because these are behaviors that people without disabilities consider unconscious, automatic, and normal, and which they perform without conscious thought or advance

planning. A few examples of daily living activities are washing the face, preparing a meal, eating a meal, cleaning up after a meal, going to the bathroom. Able-bodied people take these tasks for granted. People with disabilities must develop long range plans in order to perform these tasks. This long range planning is very detailed and must occur in order for the person with a disability to engage in daily living activities. This same level of planning must be done for a person with a learning disability; the difference between the two is that a person with a learning disability is planning from a cognitive perspective rather than a physical perspective.

Environmental inventories take into account that the person with a learning disability lives in and creates the accommodations based on the environment in which the individual lives. The environment for a child living in a household with several siblings and one parent would be different than the environment of a child in an institution. The accommodations for each child must be based on an inventory of what is actually in the environment in which the child resides as well as the needs of that particular child this is one element of assessment from a disability studies perspective.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study may not describe all of the services that are in fact available, since it will be limited to the services that helping professionals with learning disabilities are actually able to describe. The reporting of this study is of a particular group of people (PHPs) and may not be the experience of others with learning disabilities. The age of the participants in my study are wide ranging preventing any age-based correlations.

Summary

This chapter provided the background for the study; a statement of the problem and it described the study questions. It further went on to discuss the significance of the study, an explanation of relevant terms and a brief statement of the limitations of this study. The following chapters of this work are organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a review of the related research literature. Chapter 3 details the methodology for the study. Chapter 4 presents the profiles of the participants' daily life activities. Chapter 5 provides my analysis of the themes and subcategories generated from the interviews. Chapter 6 presents my analysis of the study findings in relationship to the research questions guiding this study. In addition, it describes where the study findings were consistent, inconsistent or went beyond the literature review. The concluding chapter of this study includes discussion and recommendations for future study considerations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Historical Perspectives

Introduction

> "The social, political, and cultural analyses undertaken by disability studies form a prism through which one can gain a broader understanding of society and human experience, and the significance of human variation" Linton

This chapter will explore the historical perspective of learning disabilities, review research findings that help frame an understanding of variables that impact the quality of life, discuss how our society can work towards change, and explore positive changes in the areas of adult literacy and employment.

Learning disabilities were discovered in the early 1800's when Franz Joseph Gall began to study the similarities between brain injury and mental impairment. Two hundred years have passed since he began his research, yet our culture is still struggling with how to integrate people with learning disabilities into the mainstream culture (Hallahan, D. & Mercer, C., 2000).

At the same time Gall was conducting his research Europeans were studying the effects of brain-injury in soldiers (Hallahan, D. & Mercer, C., 2000). By observing the injured soldiers they were able to theorize about the effects of a brain injury and mental impairment. Researchers examined how specific parts of the brain controlled the functions of speech and language.

In the 1920's the United States became interested in the work that European scientists were exploring. Researchers in the United States began examining language

and reading disabilities, attention disabilities, perceptual, and perceptual motor disabilities (Hallahan, D. & Mercer, C., 2000).

In 1957, American schools needed to produce scientists and technicians so that the US could remain ahead, internationally, in technological development. Recommendations for reforming American education included toughening elementary reading instruction (Trace, 1961). The creation of uniform standards for promotion, gradation and testing students for the mastery of those standards through regular and nation-wide examination systems became prevalent (Bestor, 1958). As part of the Famous Educator's Plan, students were grouped by ability. The bright students, who could move more quickly through school and then go on to college and professional careers, were separated from the slower students who were placed into unskilled or semiskilled labor tracks. Finally, the most intellectually capable teachers were assigned to the top groups of students (Rickover, 1959 & Sleeter, 1986).

Between 1960 and 1975, learning disabilities were conceptualized as a specific type of disability. The federal government began discussing learning disabilities and both parents and professionals wanted the needs of children with learning disabilities to be addressed. From these early beginnings came many of the professional organizations that provide services for children with learning disabilities today (Hallahan, D. & Mercer, C., 2000).

During the 1980's educational systems began to adopt programs for students with learning disabilities. The National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, and the National Advisory Committee on the Handicapped voiced many concerns regarding manifestations of learning disabilities. Ref debates regarding the symptoms,

how symptoms expressed themselves in individuals, and the manifestation of learning disabilities led to the development of definitions of learning disabilities agreed to by professionals in educational systems. Unlike other types of disabilities such as blindness, where the results are specifically lack of sight, there are many types of learning disabilities. It became clear that the varied manifestations of learning disabilities affected multiple areas in the neurological system such as central auditory processing, visual perception, gross motor, fine motor, speech and language, long-term and short-term memory, organization, attention, and concentration. Different combinations of these manifestations express themselves differently in people with learning disabilities and that leads to different types of needs and or accommodations (National Association of Learning Disabilities, 1968).

Forty-three years after the United States took interest in learning disabilities; the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (1995) published its first definition of learning disabilities in 1963. This group believes that learning disabilities are the result of minimal brain dysfunction, brain injury, dyslexia, developmental aphasia or perceptual handicaps.

In 1968, the National Advisory Committee on the Handicapped defined individuals with learning disabilities as: “Children with special learning disabilities who exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written languages which manifest in listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions, referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. They do not include learning problems, which are due primarily

to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, mental retardation, emotional disturbances, or environmental disadvantage" (The National Advisory Committee on the Handicapped, 1968).

In 1975, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which is now the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) was enacted. This law provided funding for states to establish school programs for children with disabilities from birth to age 21. It also established the right for a free and appropriate public school education in the least restrictive environment. This law used terminology put forth by the National Advisory Committee on the Handicapped and in addition developed the explanation of the term "specific learning disabilities" as "children who had a disability in one or more of the basic psychological processes" (Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990).

The term "specific learning disabilities" does not include children who have the inability to process language due to other disabilities such as developmental delay, deafness or hard of hearing, blindness, psychological disabilities, or mobility impairment. This definition further explained that children deprived because of their environment or targeted by discrimination because of their ethnic backgrounds were identified as not having "specific learning disabilities" (Kirk & Gallagher, 1983).

Environmental deprivation and cultural deprivation were included in the last two definitions and are the reason many ethnically diverse and poor children were not diagnosed as learning disabled. The discussion of cultural deprivation is based on the foundational belief held by our society that there is an intricate web of social values and

biases which tacitly impact the course of education for children of ethnic diversity in an educational system that should be equal to all.

According to Kirk (1972), a child is culturally or environmentally deprived when they grow-up in an environment characterized by the possibility of malnourishment, a lack opportunities to be fully educated or physical deprivation that can lead children to lag behind in the school system. This deprivation rather than a neurological disorder would in keep the child from educational success. Many children of color grew up in these poor environments where poverty rather disability interfered with opportunity to go to school. Others were taught in segregated schools that did not have the same types of resources as the white schools. Thus, the issues were not that they could not learn to read and write but that the children did not have the opportunity to learn to read and write.

The educational system presented a false belief to its constituents that it provided a free, appropriate, and equal education for all. However, the Supreme Court held that separate facilities are unequal by nature of their institutional structure and therefore unconstitutional. "A unanimous court stated that racial separation, no matter how equal the facilities, branded minority children as inferior, thus hindering their development." (Kozol, 2005)

This the Supreme Court upheld the argument that "separate but equal facilities" as established by the Plessey v. Ferguson ruling of 1896 constitutionally established a double standard in our country. This doctrine of separate but equal created a double jeopardy for children of ethnic diversity. The argument was that cultural deprivation and environmental deprivation were relevant terms to identify students of ethnic diversity who did not have the same advantages as white children. These children however, were

not to be determined to be a person with a learning disability. Many educational institutions continued to classify students of ethnic diversity as mildly mentally retarded, (Kauffman, & Hallahan, 1995, 1988 & Ferri, & Connor, 2005).

According to (Sleeter, 1986) in the late 1960s and early 1970s people of color began to pressure schools to reject the concept that cultural deprivation was a reason to classify students of color as mildly mentally retarded and white children as learning disabled. The purpose of these efforts was to pressure the educational systems to break down the forced segregation by disability. Students of color were classified as mentally retarded and white children were classified as learning disabled. The results of this pressure caused educational institutions to reclassify many students who were classified as retarded, slow, or culturally deprived as learning disabled.

By 1972 the number of children color had rapidly increased in classes for students with learning disabilities. By 1974, these same children were overrepresented in special education classes. (Sleeter, 1986 Ferri & Connor, 2005). . The National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) definition was created in 1981. This committee was composed of a variety of professionals from many different disability organizations. NJCLD believes their definition is more expansive than the federal definitions given the diverse backgrounds of the consultants used to create this definition. The (NJCLD) felt their definition contained distinct characteristics omitted by the federal government. The NJCLD tried to be inclusive of adults in comparison to other definitions, which only included children. They avoided controversial phrases such as “basic psychological processes” in order to be clear and not to confuse the definition with individuals who have psychological conditions.

NJCLD did not include spelling as a condition, but rather assumed that spelling was included in a written language disability. They avoided mentioning conditions such as minimal brain dysfunction or perceptual handicaps. The National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (Hammill, Leigh, McNutt & Larsen, 1981) believed that these labels were confusing and controversial. Finally, their definition stated that learning disabilities could occur with other disabilities as well.

In 1984 the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities created a definition of learning disabilities that highlighted or explained the scope of learning disabilities beyond the academic arena. This definition also clarifies that learning disabilities are neurological in origin and that learning disabilities affect an individual's quality of life. Learning disabilities affect people's self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and/or daily living activities (Hallahan & Kauffman 1988, Huntington & Bender 1993, Smith 1994, Davis & Lombardi 1996).

These definitions represent the beginning of historical changes that would impact the quality of life for people with learning disabilities. This expanded definition of learning disability attempted to articulate the reality, complexity, and severity of learning disabilities and their manifestations. Learning disabilities are neurological in origin; they affect people's ability to interpret what they see and hear and thus the ability to process information (Spreen, 1988). Learning disabilities impinge on people's ability to read, write, speak, compute math, and hinders socialization skills (Sitlington, 1996, & Greenbaum, Graham, and Scales, 1996). The manifestations show up as specific disabilities with spoken and written language, coordination; fine motor and gross motor,

central auditory processing, self-control, attention, concentration, the ability to store long-term and short-term memory, and to process or produce information.

As of September 25, 2008, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was amended, further expanding the basic definition of disability. The significant change is the expansion of protection for people with disabilities. The new regulation better defines the term "substantially limits" and expands the definition of "major life activities." So for example, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working are now recognized as a major life activity. Also added to the law are major bodily functions.

The amended ADA further states that conditions that are episodic or in remission may be labeled as disabilities when the active impairment can substantially limit a major life activity. The amendment serves to broaden the definition of disability so that more types of disability are recognized including learning disabilities. .

Quality of Life

Awareness and the availability of appropriate information, knowledgeable service provider's, appropriate services, specific accommodations, and availability of resources affect quality of life for people with disabilities (Fleming & Kroese 1990, French 1996, Silver, Strehorn & Bourke, 1997, Krupp, 1994 & Andersen, 1994). These challenges are present in all avenues of life for people with learning disabilities and continue throughout a persons' lifetime. This review of literature reveals that the attainment of life goals for people with learning disabilities is often compromised when appropriate support is not available.

Subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness are terms that are used interchangeably in describing peoples' quality of life. Huntington & Bender (1993)

reported “An individual’s quality of life consists of many characteristics: satisfaction, joy, happiness, calmness, and reassurance. Other influences on quality of life include dissatisfaction, unhappiness, sorrow, depression, nervousness, anxiety and anger (Huntington & Bender, 1993). The cognitive effects of how people analyze their own happiness or sadness are included in their quality of life.

The Quality of Life questionnaire measures how individuals decide whether their goals, needs, wishes and aspirations have been achieved. Quality of life factors include health and well-being, economic and social status, job satisfaction, independence, access to housing, education and a social life. An individual’s ability to attain their chosen goals equals success (Davis & Lombardi, 1996). The more status an individual achieves the higher or more positive their quality of life. Individuals unable to obtain these goals will have a lower or more limited quality of life (Reiff, Ginsberg & Gerber, 1995 & Davis & Lombardi, 1996).

There are, however, problems with the quality of life data. The qualitative data gathered by researchers studying children and adults with learning disabilities have created many misclassifications. The legitimacy of the current research and the use of questionnaires for research may not be valid. Antaki and Rapley (1996) discussed the validity of the quality of life questionnaires and how psychological assessment research is influenced by distortions. These subtle changes or distortions could change the outcome of the assessments. In other words, distorting the questions and distortions brought about by interviewers interpretations lead to invalid results. Invalid assessment leads to invalid conclusions.

People with disabilities have an on going struggle trying to maintain their independence while attending to their daily needs. According to Vasey (1996) the matters of financial constraints; accommodations vs. a requirement for independence; and a necessity for support vs. privacy are major challenges that need to be considered. The fact that independence and privacy are often in conflict with people with disabilities is well documented (Maine State Department of Human Service, 1997).

People with disabilities experience obstacles in many areas of their lives. These arenas are unique to each individual depending on the type of disability. For people with mobility impairments, quality of life can rest on the ability to live and move independently (Vasey, 1996).

For individuals with learning disabilities, quality of life is often measured by a person's ability to complete educational goals, maintain good friendships, obtain a meaningful job and have a roof over their heads i.e. personal success (Telander, 1994).

Achievement Standards

Achievement for people with learning disabilities is far below the standards of what society deems average. Educational institutions continue to perpetuate false beliefs about the range of achievement people with learning disabilities can accomplish (Kauffman, 2005). Standards fall far short of the true abilities of people with learning disabilities, thus creating, from the very beginning, sub-standard qualities of life in comparison to able-bodied peers (Davis & Lombardi, 1996).

Multidimensional Attributes

Along with trying to maintain independence, complete educational goals and obtain meaningful employment those with learning disabilities also have to deal with the

multidemensions of oppression. Society has been socialized with their own attitudes and beliefs about people with learning disabilities. This is coupled with the diversity within the group of people with learning disabilities; coming from different types of homes, ethnically diverse backgrounds, different class and religious backgrounds, and the oppressive issue our society has towards women, transgendered, gay, lesbian, and bisexuals. These biases affect the type of services, support and assistance in education, the quality of life and the type of social integration available to people with disabilities.

Individuals with learning disabilities develop attitudes and behaviors about who they are through the internalization of particular attitudes and behaviors which are cultivated by family and friends, professionals such as teachers, nurses, and doctor's, educational systems and health care systems; the availability of housing, and legal obstacles or supports they encounter. This is further complicated by the attitudes that society has about people with learning disabilities and how

> Negative cultural assumptions about disability continue to have a negative influence on the education of children with disabilities. The pervasiveness of ableist assumptions in the education of these children not only reinforce prevailing prejudices against disability but may very well contribute to low levels of educational attainment and employment (2002, Hehir)

With a medical diagnosis the doctor makes the diagnosis, and the family is informed of the diagnosis. The decision on how to accommodate a child with a medical disability in school is then put into place. This entire process is a new experience for the entire family. In the case of students with learning disabilities, the school decides that the child is to become a member of an oppressed group (the disabled), the school discovers the symptoms of the learning disability, provides the testing and the family must agree with the results. Once this agreement between the school and the family is legalized the

family members' lives will be changed forever. The experience for the child is often separate from any experiences other family members may have had.

> Ableist assumptions become dysfunctional when the educational and developmental services provided to disabled children focus inordinately on the characteristic of their disability to the exclusion of all else, when changing disability becomes the overriding focus of service providers and at time parents (Heirh, 2002)

The educational institutions are established, organized, and have the authority to determine how they are to treat and provide services for students with learning disabilities. The educational institution, and its systemic process, manage and implement the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that should be followed each day by teachers and other professionals. The teachers and the professionals believe they are justified in oppressing students with learning disabilities because their attitudes and behaviors are based on their interpretation of the law and how their educational institution will follow the rules of that law. These policies affect students with learning disabilities on an interpersonal, intrapersonal and daily-lived experience.

A child coming from a single parent home has a very different life experience than peers who come from a two-parent home. Assistance with specific needs may not be addressed in the same way. For example, single parent may not have access to resources in case of emergencies, a place for children to go after school, and trusted individual to watch children. According to Cigno & Burke's (1997) single mothers struggle and often have little to no support from their partners; they are isolated; they lacked transportation; and they have fears for the future for themselves and their children. The demands of being a single parent are stressful enough. The extra anxiety of providing the appropriate

care for a child with learning disabilities is a weight that should be taken into consideration by professionals.

Students of color recognize their differences. At a young age they do not understand that their color, ethnic background or disability will be experienced as a problem until an incident is experienced that they perceives to be related to their particular social identity. Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur (1999) & Kalyanpur & Harry (2004) reported that the parents of students of color are often disenfranchised because many decisions about their children are made by educational professionals with no input from parents. Some of these families lack awareness about the multilayered process in which many of the decisions are made regarding their children's future. When professionals believe that parents lack the skills to understand the process, the professionals may choose not to include the parents in the process, or they don't make it possible for parents to participate. For example, not providing translators for those families where English is a second language, not providing materials in other languages, and or scheduling meeting times when parents are unable to attend. These types of behaviors by the educational institutions suggest that families of students of color are diminished by the school practices around race and learning disabilities.

People who have learning disabilities and are people of color are placed in double jeopardy. The multi-dimensional levels of oppression are systematized at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. The interrelationship between power and control is unique for people with disabilities. Most people of color grow up in homes that support their ethnicity. This support comes from family, friends, and religious institutions, which are pivotal in every day life and in the every day struggles people face

(Summers & Jones, 2004, Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999). The structural organization of oppression in educational institutions, for people of color, may be a common experience for both family and child. On the other hand, a child with a disability there family members of a child with a disability may not have disabilities and thus the understanding of the experience of oppression may be missing.

Double jeopardy is a significant disadvantage for women with learning disabilities. The success rates of males in comparison to females are considerable. Males, whether disabled or not tend to get jobs and earn comparable salaries to their able-bodied peers (Telander, 1994, & Edgar, 1995). The results for females with learning disabilities showed more discrepancies. They had twice as many children, a higher rate of single parent households, and more were on welfare in comparison to able-bodied females (Edgar, 1995).

People with learning disabilities are more likely to go to vocational schools and programs that provide certificates in comparison to their able-bodied peers who earn college degrees (Telander, 1994, Edgar, 1995).

Understanding Ethnic Diversity

There is a large power gap between the professionals and the person with a learning disability (Summer & Jones, 2004, Kalyanpur & Harry 2004). The importance of the power differential that exists between families and the professionals in the educational system is a major factor for people with learning disabilities. When the professionals are white and the families of children with disabilities are people of color, this imbalance is further complicated by the lack of understanding by professionals of how to meet the needs of people of color.

There are other power differentials even greater between professionals and the families of color. These include different cultural ideals, religious beliefs, and beliefs about how to raise their children. Ethnically diverse populations represent a multi-layered human experience and sometimes, professional staff are lacking in the ability to work as a team with the family to assist the student.

Many of the stereotypes that some teachers and other professionals hold regarding the status of a single parent create other barriers to accommodations for a child. Another level of discrimination is that some professionals are apprehensive and are anxious about understanding different religious and ethnic values (Summers & Jones, 2004; Reid & Valle, Harry, Rueda, and Kalyanpur 1999; Cingo & Burke 1997)

Discrimination and Educational Institution

State laws supported acts of discrimination against people of color for hundreds of years. The south created laws and statutes that required racial separation in social relationships, private residential areas and public facilities. Separate schools were not equally equipped with books, teachers and other professionals, and materials. Students of color were legally compelled to attend segregated schools, and segregated schools were judged equal to the white schools (Aldred, 1990; Ferri & Connor, 2005). In 1954, Brown v Board of Education Supreme Court decision opened the doors to students of color and four year later the tracking system was institutionalized throughout the nation (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Persell, 2000& 2006). The upper tracks were disproportionately students from white middles class backgrounds, and the lower tracks were disproportionately represented by students of and poor social class backgrounds (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Race and class, even after they were integrated into the mainstream classroom, divided

many children (Gouldner, 1971). Children's IQ's were based upon their economic background how they looked, smelled, and/or dressed (Gouldner, 1971).

Children have always been held responsible for their own failure. In the early 1960's, children who were unable to keep up with the pace and the new standards of academic excellence were categorized into five different groups: slow learners, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, culturally deprived, and learning disabled (Sleeter, 1986 Ferri & Connor, 2005).

The overrepresentation of students of color in special education classes is a manifestation of being disenfranchised. Students are segregated based on race and disability and students of color are still placed in classes for students with "mildly retardation. Students who are white, however, are placed in classes for students with learning disabilities (Connor 2006).

There is a link between students with learning disabilities and students with significant cognitive delays. This difference is distinctive; people with learning disabilities are measured with average to above average intelligence while students with cognitive delays do not. Many students with learning disabilities are misclassified as individuals with significant cognitive delays, especially students of (Sleeter, 1986). When people with learning disabilities are tested the results are presented in the measurement of particular grade levels. An individual may be 30 years old and have a 6th grade reading level, 2nd grade working memory and so forth. This is the only disability that uses this type of system for diagnosis. A correlation would be an individual who cannot hear is not give a diagnosis based on what age level. This further creates biases and confusion as to the true abilities of the person with a learning disability. As of 2009, many of the same

biases still exist on all levels of people with learning disabilities whose perceived inabilities are used as the yardstick by which they should be measured.

These measurements add to the barriers in the educational institutions that interfere with success for students of color. Societal stereotypes are that people of color are lazy as well as unintelligent. These stereotypes significantly affect the quality of life for people of color with disabilities. Studies show that students of color with disabilities quality of life is considerably lower then their peers who are white and have learning disabilities. Ref There is a considerable difference between the two groups within the area of employment, recreation, and leisure activities. All students with learning disabilities scored lower in the areas of self-concept and self-esteem as compared with their able-bodied peers (Huntington & Bender 1993).

Finally, those students who received services for being learning disabled scored higher than those who received services for being mildly mentally retarded as reported by (Connor 2006; Harry & Kulpyner, 2004). Some professionals continue to misdiagnose students and in particular, students from ethnically diverse backgrounds as MMR rather than as LD. Further, many students of color with no disability are misdiagnosed as learning disabled (LD), educable retarded (ED), and trainable mentally retarded (TMR) (Renfroe, 1998).

Individual Self-Image

People with learning disabilities are influenced on many levels by the attitudes and behaviors of the professionals they depend on for services (Maine State Department of Human Services 1997, & Krupp, 1994). The emotional well being of people with learning disabilities can be both positive and negative depending on each individual's

growth and development and attitudes towards change/self transformation (Smith 1994 Huntington and Bender 1993).

Socially, some students with learning disabilities see themselves as rejects, people that other students do not want to be seen with for fear they may be labeled also. These poor self-images lead to poor choices and students with learning disabilities have a higher incidence of criminal behavior. It is difficult for students with learning disabilities to have friends or to find a partner because of these labels (Smith, 1994 & Lichtenstein, 1993, Connor, 2006).

Some regular education students have negative attitudes toward their peers in special education (Connor, 2006). They internalize the stereotypical terminology sometimes used to refer to students in special education; for example, they maybe called retards, speds, mental, and stupid, to name a few. Professionals in the schools may reinforce many of these labels. Students of color do recognize that learning disabilities separate them from the rest of their peers (Connor, 2006 & Lichtenstein, 1993).

Students in special education often give up; they stop caring, they tell jokes, they fool around, and throw things in the classroom. When a student with a learning disability is placed in a special education classroom, and separate from the rest of their peers, they have no other way to believe that they are the same; they only see themselves as different. Special education means one thing to most people, that these students are different; they are slow, they need slower classes, remedial classes, and they don’t have to do any of their work, because it doesn’t count (Huntington & Bender, 1993 & Smith 1994). These negative self-images are the largest barriers for people with learning disabilities, and particularly when they are internalized.

Some students with learning disabilities make poor choices for friends. In many cases students with learning disabilities are trying to prove their worthiness through bad behavior, which leads to negative consequences (Sitlington, 1996). Students with learning disabilities often experience disappointment with places of employment and have considerably fewer goals for further education or training.

Many students with learning disabilities have not learned coping mechanisms on how to deal with negative self-images. Some able-bodied teachers, students, and other members of the school engage in constant teasing, embarrassment, and negative experiences, and consequently promote these negative self-images for people with learning disabilities (Smith, 1994). These issues contribute to people with learning disabilities having a poor self-image (Smith, 1994 & Connor, 2006).

There is very little to no support for people with learning disabilities in our culture. Unlike other types of disabilities individualized services outside educational institutions are non-existent. Teenagers with learning disabilities exhibit elevated levels of anxiety, depression and suicide (Huntington & Bender, 1993, Telander, 1994, & Smith, 1994).

Positive Self Image

People with learning disabilities that have accepted and understand their learning disability have often been very successful. The use of methodologies that analyze the positive attributes of people with learning disabilities, along with analyzing people with positive identity development and how they reached each stage, is useful in teaching people with learning disabilities (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg & Herman 2002; Smith, 2004; Academy for Educational Development, 1995).

Some students with learning disabilities have difficulty with negative self-images. Research on how to help students with learning disabilities overcome the negative images reveals several key factors (Ashe & Pisegna, 1994).

The learning disabled need to see themselves as their own change agent and believe that they are the experts on their own disability. Smith (1994) suggests that people with learning disabilities need to learn to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses; know what accommodations they need; invent their own strategies and be able to ask for help when they needed it. It is important for families and professionals to help people with learning disabilities see themselves in a positive way instead of seeing themselves as victims of fate.

Social Construction

Social construction is the barriers that society has created that create unnecessary obstructions to equality and equal access for people with disabilities. For example, books in print are a social construction that keeps people who are blind from having access to the text. Kalyanpur & Harry, (2004) discussed the social construction of learning disabilities and how the relationship between parents and the school has created broader barriers for families. The educational institutions do not assist families in learning how to accommodate their children. Nor do the medical establishments. Unlike other types of disabilities usually a medical institution will assist families with the needs of their children. On the other hand, learning disabilities are diagnosed and “treated” in the educational institution. Parents are told what the schools are going to do to accommodate the child and usually the parents agree because they are not clear on the issues or the needs of their child or on alternatives available. In some cases, disability is created where

there are no real etiological discrepancies. Accommodations for people with disabilities are a major financial factor in educational systems. Some schools need people with disabilities to increase funding while others need less people with disabilities because they do not have enough funding. This has caused special education services to become a sociopolitical enterprise (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2004).

Educational institutions/teachers blame students for their own failure rather than examining the overall appropriateness of the program and the services they provide (Kauffman, 2005). Educational institutions have failed to include the needs of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds and this exclusion has resulted in inaccurate labeling of students (Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999 & Harry & Kalyanpur, 2004).

Testing

As long as the educational system continues to test students to determine their status, the educational institution will continue to maintain unfair practices. (Kauffman, 2005). Diagnoses of learning disabilities are slanted and show vast differences between institutions across particular states. This division is further complicated when the diagnosis is disproportionally between students who are white and students of color as well as students who are poor and working class.

These divisions are exacerbated by devices such as the “No Child Left Behind Act” where testing decides who needs assistance and who does not. Reports show that testing creates one group on the top and the other on the bottom. The students on the bottom will always fall behind and remain separate from those who are on top (Kauffman, 2005).

The tests compare students with disabilities to able-bodied students. The able bodied students have the advantage of their abilities in comparison to people with learning disabilities who are always up against their own disabilities (Kauffman, 2006). If the results of the studies showed the difference between students with disabilities that receive accommodations in comparison to students who do not receive accommodations, professionals would have valid results to work with and could create valid programs.

Reasonable Accommodations

Many professionals express concern regarding providing students with learning disabilities with the appropriate accommodations because they believe the accommodation creates an unfair advantage for students with learning disabilities over able-bodied students. This perception is inaccurate because there are clear diagnosed learning barriers for people with disabilities that able-bodied people do not face. If the studies observed students with learning disabilities that receive special education and students with learning disabilities who do not receive special education the results would lead us in the right direction. However, to compare students who are able bodied to students with learning disabilities and try to close the gap between the two is unreasonable and sets the students and the teacher up for failure (Kauffman, 2006, Kalyanpur & Harry 2004).

Higher Education

Data shows a significant lack of respect for people with learning disabilities in higher education. In a study by Silver, Strehorn and Bourke (1997) results indicated that faculty and administrators have been known to discourage students with learning disabilities from pursuing their major and career choice based on their learning disability.

The negative attitudes that the faculty and administrators demonstrated were based on their negative beliefs about the disabled and their abilities. This is further exacerbated if the student is female or a person of color.

Many untrained professionals' work for institutions that are federally mandated to provide appropriate services to people with disabilities. The impact of a professional's attitudes and behaviors, along with methodologies that professionals can use to assist people with disabilities have a significant impact on the quality of educational experience available to students with disabilities.

In higher education, there is a lack of accommodations for people with learning disabilities in every arena. The Maine State Department of Human Services (1997) reported that the experiences, attitudes and feelings of people with learning disabilities indicated they need greater financial stability and better self-concepts. Furthermore, some professionals had limited capacity as listeners and had negative attitudes about people with disabilities that affected the quality of services they provided.

Health Professionals

Health professionals tended to be a major hindrance to people with disabilities if they had negative attitudes about disabilities. Deficiencies resulting from lack of training have a negative impact on students with learning disabilities. Teachers, psychologists, nurses, principals, speech pathologists and other professionals that diagnose learning disabilities need more professional development programs that create a greater understanding of learning disabilities and how to work with people with learning disabilities (Withers, 1996, French, 1996, & Renfroe, 1998). Research indicates that it is important for the professional to understand the needs of the consumer.

Self-Help

People with learning disabilities need therapy for the same reasons as able-bodied people. The therapeutical experience can be very different for people with learning disabilities due to a number of barriers to services (Withers, 1996). The most prominent barrier to getting this service is the lack of therapists who have any background in disability theory or any information on how to work with individuals who have disabilities. Professionals working with people with disabilities need to have a clear understanding of what the individuals' needs are, and how to address those needs.

Daily Living

When considering the daily living needs of people with learning disabilities there are several roles that should be addressed. There are specific functions people must perform to survive independently. In maintaining a home, an individual must select appropriate living arrangements, pay living expenses, prepare meals, and conduct basic cleaning and maintenance activities. Appropriate community involvement may consist of watching TV, going to church, going to the movies, and participating in sports activities (Sitlington, 1996, Banfalvy, 1996).

Working Towards Change

The educational institutions have begun to work towards change by creating methodologies that support students with learning disabilities. They also provide teachers with best practice models to enable teachers to help students with learning disabilities succeed in school (Reiff, Ginsberg & Gerber 1995; Andersen, 1994). These models were designed to help the teacher encourage students to understand their strengths and weakness. This also ensured that the teaching focus was on the student's strengths and

not their deficits. The goal was to promote positive attitudes and behaviors towards people with learning disabilities.

Health care professionals need training that prepares them to work with the person, not the disability (French, 1996, Withers, 1996). Disability equity training is essential for all professionals that work with people with learning disabilities. They also needed training that supports them to change their attitudes and behaviors toward people with disabilities (French, 1996). Students with learning disabilities would also benefit from assistance when transitioning into the adult world, and should be provided with support to promote positive life-goals they can reach.

Positive Changes

Programs that assist students in making valid choices for their life after high school are critical (Hutchinson, 1995*)*. Students with learning disabilities require a clear plan so that they can continue to be successful as they transition from each level of schooling to the next. These transitions take place from elementary, to middle school, from middle school to high school, from high school to work or college. The ability to achieve competence for adults with learning disabilities will help to create a positive transition into the adult world. Attention should be paid to personal, academic, vocational and social needs.

It is also important for professionals to work interdependently and collaboratively within diverse families. Ethnic values and norms of individual families need to be considered when services are developed. The emphasis on multiethnic perspectives needs to be included. The standard procedures that were derived from a

mono-cultural perspective need to be revised by professionals when working with diverse families. These paradigms continually overlook people of color with learning disabilities.

Many students of color are treated as disabled with little thought given to their ethnicity. The specific needs of people of color and learning disabilities needs to be incorporated in the decision-making process. Different frameworks need to be taken into consideration. When working interdependently and collaboratively with families, consideration needs to be given to varying ethnic views. Finally, professionals need to learn about multiple ethnic norms and social values (Connors, 2006; Harry & Kulpurner 1999)

It is important for special education teachers, career counselors, and classroom teachers to work together as a team and develop appropriate strategies for students with learning disabilities while they are attending school (Hutchinson, 1995). It is critical to assist students in making appropriate career choices each step of the way from elementary through high school. Students with learning disabilities require transitional services and career counseling.

Adult Literacy Programs

Adult literacy programs were designed for adults as another chance for learning. Even with the best efforts many clients of literacy programs were having difficulty achieving literacy. These difficulties are often found in clients who are believed to have learning disabilities. The Academy for Educational Development (1995), created an assessment process to solve this problem. The National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Centers decided to assess the individuals prior to literacy training. The assessment tools aided the screeners in how to observe, ask questions, and research

information about the clients suspected to have learning disabilities. Once it was determined that the individual might have a learning disability, the following areas were assessed: reading, math, verbal skills, auditory, vision, social and behavioral skills.

It is essential that, along with accessing literacy skills diagnostic assessment tools and educational services all must ensure daily living requirements are addressed. The curriculum for adults who require remedial and basic skill instruction should also reflect daily skills requirements (Sitlington, 1996). These skills would include basic money management, organization, cooking and measurements, and childcare to name a few.

The literacy programs had to take into consideration how to create a space in which adult learners could develop self-confidence in their own abilities, which would help to increase self-esteem. Literacy programs had to create an atmosphere that enabled the adult learner to feel comfortable and helped them to build self-esteem. In order for adults to succeed in the literacy program they had to work on giving up the negative compensatory skills that they had developed as a means of protecting themselves from embarrassment in their earlier years.

Ashe and Pisegna (1994) found that low self-esteem is common among many adult literacy students because the anger and frustration they have as a result of blaming themselves for their reading difficulties might have a negative effect on their self-image. Literacy providers need to show they care and understand their students when students become angry or frustrated. It is important for educators to teach students about their learning differences so they can advocate for themselves through their lives. In order to create better quality of life literacy providers need to help students become aware of how they learn best. They need to help students assess their strengths and weaknesses, find

accommodations for their learning needs, and help students to begin self-advocacy. It is then that people with learning disabilities will have the tools they need to succeed in society and have a better quality of life (Andersen, 1994, Krupp, 1994).

Employment

Many adults with learning disabilities are underemployed. Adjustments and accommodations can be made for adults with learning disabilities that support applying for jobs and maintaining jobs. Adults with learning disabilities have more difficulties in all areas of performance such as personal, emotional, academic, and vocational and employment.

In their study on post secondary employment options Levine & Nourse found that even acquiring a post-secondary degree did not guarantee employment for people with learning disabilities. A high percentage of adults with learning disabilities have not found viable employment. Banfalvy, (1996) found that for some people with learning disabilities school success and success in the labor market did not ensure successful social development. The lack of appropriate vocational training generally leads to inadequate employment and the inability to live independently. Many of these adults still live with their parents.

Adults with learning disabilities can function at very high levels. However, accommodations must go beyond the areas of academia and into every day life. This will provide people with learning disabilities equal opportunities in employment and daily living. Unfortunately, the positive effects of accommodations are not as clearly seen in social situations (Telander, 1994, & Tomblin, 1999).

Making a Living

There are many adults with learning disabilities who have completed high school and higher education. They are currently in the workforce. They are successful in the workforce and have adapted to the demands of adulthood. They are holding either blue-collar or white-collar jobs and are socially active and happy. Although these adults with learning disabilities are very successful they still are affected on a daily bases by their learning disabilities. Many of them do not disclose their learning disabilities to their employer because they are afraid their employer would believe their learning disabilities would have an adverse effect on their work. The main concern for employees with learning disabilities regarding disclosure is that their employer or their colleagues might discriminate against them in the workplace. Some people with learning disabilities might be averse to disclosing their disability to their employer but may feel comfortable to disclose their situation to co-workers (Silver, Strehorn & Bourke, 1997).

Ultimately, there is still a need to educate employers about the needs of people with learning disabilities so they will not discriminate against them. Employees with learning disabilities need to feel comfortable disclosing their disabilities in an attempt to gain appropriate accommodations. Professionals need to understand the influence that family, faculty, administrators, employer's service providers, and those who provide career development support have on people with disabilities. They also need to have a clear understanding of the requirements of people with learning disabilities (Silver, Strehorn & Bourke, 1997, Greenbaum, Graham, & Scales, 1996).

Conclusion

More than half of all the students eligible to be classified with a disability have learning disabilities. Throughout the lifetime of a person with a disability, discrimination continues to be experienced daily. The effects of people's attitudes and behaviors and institutional malpractice, result in feelings of futility among many people with disabilities.

Institutionalized oppression is a major hindrance to success for people with disabilities. The services that were established to assist them have often caused their downfall. Special education, transitional services, career and other services have not followed the guidelines as set forth by the law. The structure has obstructed the growth, progress, independence, self-esteem and ability of individuals with disabilities. Given this, people with disabilities have been left disempowered and disenfranchised.

Bias against people with disabilities is so widespread that it is very difficult to dismantle. Some people with disabilities are succeeding and are working in many institutional settings. There are also more people in the political arena that are working toward changing the attitude, behaviors and institutionalized services that constitute barriers for people with disabilities. However, the issue of disability oppression is so old and yet so new to society that there are extensive changes that need to be implemented before people with disabilities will be able to reach their full potential and experience success on all levels.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter will describe the methodology employed in this study. This chapter also describes the rationale for this research methodology as well as for the selected population for this study. The data gathering procedures will be described along with procedures for analyzing and presenting the research data. A brief portrait of the researcher is provided, along with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which professionals in helping professions who have learning disabilities were able to describe support, service, and assistance that are available to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living. Further, this study examined how helping professionals with learning disabilities articulate the services they require to successfully engage in the full range of activities for daily life, the extent to which they experience these articulated services as available to them, and the extent to which the services available are congruent with their articulated needs.

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study to examine the individual life experiences of PHP with learning disabilities. Rossman and Rallis (1998) describe three approaches to qualitative research: ethnology, case studies and phenomenological studies. Quoting Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), Marshall and Rossman (1999) provide breakdown of the three approaches. “Those focusing on individual lived experience…, those focusing on society and culture…, and those with an interest in

language and communication…" (p.3). After reviewing these approaches, phenomenological in-depth interviewing was chosen as the methodology for gathering data for this study of a small number of PHP with learning disabilities and how they articulate their needs for accommodation. (Rossman & Rallis, 1998) describe the goal of phenomenological research as to "seek to understand the lived experience of a small number of people" (p.68).

A phenomenological methodology was selected because, as stated by (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), the primary goal was to encapsulate the full meaning of the participant's experiences as shared in their own words. A phenomenological methodology was appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to "understand the meaning that participants attribute to those actions – their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds; the researcher, therefore, needs to understand the deeper perspectives captured through face-to-face interaction" (p.57). (Rudestam & Newton, 2001) also discussed the importance of the researcher in understanding the life experience of the participant. Thus, when describing that experience it is important for the researcher to remain as free as possible from the theoretical or social constructs.

The research tradition of phenomenology enabled the researcher to not only examine the life experience of PHPs with learning disabilities, but also to understand the meaning that they make of that experience. It enabled the development of an understanding of their description of their life experience as free as possible from theoretical or social constructs. This facet of phenomenological inquiry offered a research method that facilitate the collection of data and development of an analysis based on the lived experiences of professionals in helping professions with learning disabilities.

According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), phenomenological inquiry is useful for the researcher who is interested in “What has this person experienced? How does this person understand his or her experiences”? (p.68) From a critical perspective, the researcher is interested in “What do the stories people construct about their lives mean? How does the articulation of those stories empower them”? (p.68)

This was important for this study for several reasons. First there is little research examining these questions, “What is the lived experience of PHPs with learning disabilities”? What is the description of lived experiences from professionals in helping of professions that have learning disabilities? This lack of information can lead to inaccurate, misinterpreted, and unrealistic expectations of people with learning disabilities. This research aims to provide additional resource to people with learning disabilities, parents, educators, employers, community members, and researchers that will enable a more effective response to the needs of this population. The participants in this study have a precious story to reveal about their life’s journey.

Second, phenomenological inquiry offered the participants the chance to have their stories authenticated through their own voices. Third, through phenomenological inquiry, the study subjects become co-researcher and co-designers of the study through the process of interviewing (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

The data made available through this research provides a record of the experiences of professionals in helping professions with learning disabilities, which can open a pathway for people with learning disabilities to become more visible with their needs and requirements in their own words and from their own perspective.

Hidden populations such as people with learning disabilities in the work force typically remain silent and stay in secret. By presenting the stories of PHP with learning disabilities, this research explodes the myth that people with learning disabilities cannot become professionals. It may provide other people with learning disabilities the role models that are needed for their own success. It may provide teachers and parents with the information that people with learning disabilities can succeed if given the proper accommodations.

Phenomenological Based Interviewing

According to Seidman (1998), the foundation of in-depth interviewing is the "interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.3). Seidman (1998) further discusses in-depth interviewing as a way for the researcher to understand the attitudes of the participants, thus giving context to their behaviors and actions. When participants describe a behavior, the researcher can then put that behavior into context thus, creating an understanding of the participant's actions from the information gained through the interview (Seidman, 1998). This methodology enabled the participants, as co-directors of the research, to reveal new questions from their stories of their daily living activities.

Questions Guiding this Research

The study examined the awareness professionals in the helping professions with learning disabilities have about available services and accommodations. While the phenomenological methodology allows participants to direct the study based on their telling of their own stories, four primary questions provided the framework and guiding direction for this study.

1. To what extent are Professionals in the Helping Professions (PHP) with learning disabilities able to name the support, services, and assistance that exist to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?
2. What type of support, services, and assistance would PHP with learning disabilities choose for themselves to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?
3. How do PHP with learning disabilities describe the support, service, and assistance that are available to them?
4. To what extent are the available support, services, and assistance congruent with requirements articulated by PHP with learning disabilities?

These questions were used as the foundation "to help uncover the participant's meaning or perspective but otherwise respects how the participants frames and structures responses" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.3). This approach is important in maintaining consistency with the phenomenological methodology of this study.

Participants in for this Study

Ten PHPs with LDs formed the population for this study. The researcher used a purposeful sampling method. The method was selected so that the researcher can gain meaningful awareness of the experience of a range of PHPs with learning disabilities. A primary assumption of this study was that PHPs with learning disabilities have a greater understanding than the average populations of what it means to live daily with learning disabilities while also functioning in the professional world. A second assumption was that this group would have a greater capacity to describe those experiences as well as

services that are available to them. PHPs may also have experiences of failures and successes in assisting other individuals with learning disabilities to be successful. In addition, this study explored the capacity of these subjects in helping themselves as people with learning disabilities. The data provided the researcher with information regarding the participants' ability to describe how they think and how they learn, to articulate their leaning process, and to describe the type of support, services and assistance they need to meet their daily needs.

Participation in this study was voluntary. People were contacted who work in disability services in selected institutions of higher education in the northeast, as well as others in the helping professions including teachers, social workers, customer services, ministers and others. These contacts were asked to identify professionals with learning disabilities who might be contacted for this study. A request for interviews was sent to PHPs with learning disabilities. The request for participation included a request demographic data. From this data, I selected a sample of ten participants reflecting gender and race/ethnic diversity.

Data Gathering Procedures

Once the study sample was identified, a schedule of interviews was constructed. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and asked to sign a consent form. The consent form described the purpose of the study and the procedures for the interviews. A confidentiality clause informed participants that their names would not be used in the written reports. Participants were informed that the tapes of the interviews would be held confidential and would only be heard by a third party transcriber of the tapes. A clause informing participants of their rights to withdraw from the study at any

time was included. Interviewing took place in a comfortable and confidential environment. The interviews were conducted during three 60 to 90 minute interviews with each participant. Each session was taped and field notes were taken to document information. The researcher used demographic questions along with open-ended questions to gather data from the participants. The researcher documented observations of the physical and emotional behaviors of the participants. At the end of each interview the researcher reviewed upcoming dates, times, and place of next interview.

Sharing Interview Data

Quoting Heron (1981), Seidman states that at the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language. To understand human behavior means to understand the use of language (Seidman, 1998, p.2). He further states that, "Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (Seidman, 1998. p. 2). Phenomenological inquiry, in the final analysis, is about people making sense of their own stories, or recording her/his-stories. It acknowledges the significance of the individual stories without demeaning the opportunity for community and collaboration.

Working from this basic assumption, participant profiles were created from the interview data converting the narratives into stories that enabled "sense making" of the data in a structured way. In the construction of these profiles, Seidman's (1998) guidelines were followed on the importance of using the first-person voice of the participants to construct profiles to report the narratives of their daily living experiences. Seidman (1998) also suggested that a researcher consider these questions at this stage in sharing the data.

1. What are the connective threads among the experiences of participants and how does the researcher understand and explain these connections?
2. What does the researcher understand about the participants' experience that they did not understand before she/he began the interview?
3. How have the researcher's interviews been consistent, inconsistent or gone beyond the review of the literature.

These questions served as a guide for the data sharing process of the study. From these profiles, I identified prominent themes within each profile and connected similar themes among the profiles. Emerging themes were selected and organized in a manner that allowed referencing to the existing literature. New findings that emerged from the profiles are also reported

Data Analysis

The researcher began the data analysis by becoming familiar with the data. To do this, I immersed myself in the data through reading the narratives several times and then constructed the profiles. The next step was to find similar topics, and organize them into categories. The researcher then coded the data by finding the themes among the categories. Each of the themes are discussed in chapter 4 and referenced to their similarity or dissimilarity to the reported literature in chapter 5. Discrepancies from literature are described along with any emergent themes not found in the literature. The analysis of the data presents the results, conclusions and meanings developed from the analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Limitations of the Study

The very select and specific populations limit this study. This study focused on the stories of People in the Helping Professions with learning disabilities. This research is therefore not inclusive of those individuals with learning disabilities who are not professionals. It does not include, for instance, professionals working with people with learning disabilities but who are not disabled. It does not give voice to those who may have created effective strategies that are working for them but who do not have the opportunity to give voice to that experience.

This study sample is limited to a small geographical area in the northeast. People living in a different geographical area might have a radically different experience and consequently, a different story to tell. The lack of global services, support, and assistance for people with learning disabilities may limit the discussion or the ability of people to discuss the type of support, services, and assistance they require or prefer.

Seidman describes in detail strategies that can be taken by the researcher to manage the role of the researcher in the research process. This researcher is a PHP with learning disabilities who is female and a person of color. Thus provisions to address issues of social identity and the interview relationship were important to make. As researcher, it was important for me to remain aware that any opinions or reactions to data during interviews had the potential to sway the interview. It was also important for me as researcher to remain aware of the occasions when my own story had the potential to insert itself in to the research process of the stories of the participants and to take steps to insure that all reactions remain outside the interviews and the analysis of the data.

The researcher has a high interest in the information that participants may provide. The ability to facilitate and support participants to tell their stories without becoming involved in their stories, to allow the participants to provide the direction for the stories without attempting to set the direction and to hear participant stories without comment or analysis was critical.

Personal Biography

The researcher is a member of the professional community of human service providers. She is also a person with a learning disability. She has worked with people with disabilities since the age of fourteen. As an adult, the researcher has worked extensively in the areas of African American Studies, Human Services, Black Feminist Movement, Women Studies, Organizational Development, Special Education, Disability Studies and Social Justice Education,

Significance of Study and Limitations of Existing Research

This research is important because the existing research fails to provide valid data that gives in-depth information regarding the daily life experiences of PHPs with learning disabilities. The results of the researcher's literature review showed that the quality of life questionnaires and the qualitative approaches utilized in most available research on the lives of people with disabilities did not reveal the individual roadblocks that people with learning disabilities face. Antaki and Rapley (1996) had major concerns about the validity of the quality of life questionnaires and psychological assessment used in such research. Their concerns described distortions of the questions and misrepresentations of the true answers by interviewers leading to invalid results. Thus the authors concluded that invalid assessment leads to invalid conclusions.

The literature review revealed that many people with learning disabilities were unsuccessful. Others were ridden with anxiety, had low self-concepts, and were prone to depression and suicide. The available research is further limited by the lack of solutions, understanding of double jeopardy, and the need for cultural understanding of people with learning disabilities.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology, the rationale for the research, and the use of purposeful samplings to choose the populations from which the data was to be collected. This chapter provides a description of the data gathering procedures utilized in this study and the procedures that were used for data analysis. Finally, an outline of the limitations of the research and a personal biography of the researcher was presented.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS PROFILES

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which professionals in helping professions who have learning disabilities were able to describe support, service, and assistance that were available to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living. Further, this study examined how helping professionals with learning disabilities articulated the services they required to successfully engage in the full range of activities for daily life, the extent to which they experienced these articulated services as available to them, and the extent to which the services available were congruent with their articulated needs.

(Rossman & Rallis, 1998) describe the goal of phenomenological research as to "seek to understand the lived experience of a small number of people" (p.68). Selecting passages from the interviews to create the individual profiles of the participants is a complicated process. The difficult is in ensuring each participant's voice was heard and their experiences understood from their perspective The profiles also provide an in-depth look at how some people with learning disabilities perform their daily living tasks while also functioning in the professional world and how they learn, to articulate their leaning process, and to describe the type of support, services and assistance they need to meet their daily needs. Each individual represent a range of learning disabilities and cultural diversity.

The profiles are arranged as the person told their life story they consist of a brief introduction of the individual, their experiences in elementary school, high school, college if the individual went to college and employment. For some the discussion also

led to descriptions of themselves as helpers, daily living and self-accommodations. If a participant does not discuss this topic, then this subheading will not be included in their profile. The purpose of this chapter is to establish an understanding of the thematic analysis detailed in Chapter 5.

Table 2: Participants Profiles

Participants	Gender	Disability	Age	Race/Ethnic	Family	Occupation
Aster	F	LD	48	W	M	Therapist
Caira	F	LD	48	AA	M+4	Service Delivery
Denver	F	LD/Epilepsy	42	W	S	Sped Teacher
Jackson	M	LD	19	W	S	Landscape
Kansas	F	LD	67	W	D+2	Teacher
Nebraska	F	LD/ADD	32	A	S/L	Administrator
Savannah	F	LD	52	AA	P/L	Teacher/Minister
Virginia	F	LD	42	AA	S/L	Group Home
Willow	F	LD/ADD/HOH	50	L	M+2	Teacher
Wood	M	LD	60	AA	M+2	Minister

Note Disability: LD=Learning Disability, ADD= Attention Deficit Disorder, HOH=Hard of Hearing. Ethnicity: W=White, AA=African-American, A=Asian, L=Latina. Family: M = Married, S= Single, D=Divorced, P=Partnered. Number of children +2- +4

Aster

I grew up in a working class family. I pursued a doctorate in education and I am a therapist through my own private practice. I am very passionate about working with at risk teenagers and people with disabilities. I become really popular based on my personality…I'm a survivalist so I knew I had to be successful. People liked me, teachers liked me, and they really did. I developed parts of my personality that were nice. My brain works differently. I don't fit into the norm. … It was audio processing. I had no idea what that is. I still barely know what it is. There was a reason why I couldn't write, a reason why I couldn't … hold information in a certain way. I had a confirmation that I can't write and it was bittersweet.

I didn’t know I had a learning disability until I came to college in 1984. I came in 84 and I was in my Masters program and I couldn’t write and that’s what I needed being in a Masters program in Education and I felt like I had to quit because I felt so stupid that I had no idea how to really process information so that was in 1984 at the age of 26. That was the starting point for me. When I looked back I just thought I was stupid. I know lots of people who feel this way.

My background is working class so my dad was an electrician and my mom was a housewife and you know there is no family history of academia. My brother had writing problems. My dad had to be dyslexic or something because he would spell my name wrong. My sister was the only one that really did well in school. It was just this thing in the house that we were dumb dumbness versus that we were learning disabled. My parents weren’t aware, there was no support.

Elementary School

I have vivid memories of cheating in Catholic school, in elementary school spelling words and Catholic school that is a really hard thing to do. The price was really hard. … If I asked my mother how to spell something she would say, “Look it up in the dictionary. So you’re talking to someone with audio processing learning disability, which I don’t completely understand myself, but I know it centers on my ability to process data. So you have a mother at home saying look in the dictionary. I’m not doing well in school. I’m your” C” student feeling kind of stupid and I have an older brother who is mentally retarded so I already have in the family this disability thing I didn’t completely understand I knew something is wrong with him. I’m feeling like we are a family of retarded disability people. Or I was a retarded person versus something might be wrong

and somebody might help. I was in Catholic school for 8 years and there was no talk about that.

[The teachers always said] you're not trying hard enough; you're a cheater because you're a bad girl. You know it's nothing about learning style or education or maybe I needed something different. [I started to feel stupid] I would imagine fourth and fifth grade. By the time seventh and eighth grade came around I felt really dumb because you really have to read the diagrams of the sentence structure. I am sure it affected my self-esteem and my self-confidence. I know I felt bad in school learning to be ashamed of myself because something was wrong with me. I have a vivid memory of feeling that. I didn't feel good about myself. I never felt smart, capable; feeling of retardedness [sic] if that was a word.

High School

In high school it was much harder and I didn't give up, but I never did well. I passed Geometry. Those were coping skills and they knew I was good, but they knew I wasn't smart in the traditional way. I got things done. I mean I'm a very motivated person, but I'm not somebody who has these good habits. I think the teachers there were strict and I couldn't dazzle them with my personality. I probably had a horrible time because they didn't pick up I had a learning disability. I was caught about being dumb, lazy or preoccupied or things that put me in a different box instead of the intellect one. I got to say I don't' think I did well in any subjects. I don't know how I got through ever.

I was social. I can get things done that need to get done for people. I was on student council, you can pull out the yearbook and there it is. I ran the sock hop. I organized the spring dance; I ran the school with my best friends, the three of us, the

three musketeers. In those four years we rocked! Academically no, they are both honor roll students smart as whips.

College

The community college had a degree in community service, so I went to college. It was mostly about community service. I got into Theater. I got hooked into the theater department so costumes were a course, set management; I did lighting, human service kind of courses. It really fit. It was amazing there was a program like that for a person like me. It was called community service something and I got associates in it. You know I was very resourceful. When I was in college they did a renaissance fair and I was the mistress of the renaissance fair. I cooked for 250 people. They are not going to fail me, they are going to respect that I pulled off the biggest news blip in the college. I wasn't smoking dope or cutting class, but I was organizing the big renaissance community fair, sewing costumes from that, and cooking for 250 people, and expediting serving. There was a moment there I thought I would go into culinary school.

After my associates I applied to the University of South Florida. I applied to the program of Interdisciplinary Studies, which focused on Women Studies, Men Studies, Criminology, and Sociology. I took courses in all of those classes and I worked full time and went to school at night. They were paper classes, men studies, women studies; you know sociology, social work classes. They were marginal writing skills. I could relate to those classes and have conversations. Somewhere along the line somebody put me in one of those remedial writing classes. Somewhere along the way I had to take one of those classes, I just was put in a cubicle. Someone must have picked up something along the line.

I was working by this point so my success was really high at what I was doing, so my work life was really pretty high I think because of the concepts I was studying. I'm working at Planned Parenthood or a runaway shelter, which were the two jobs I had in the south. I found that I could study. In those kinds of classes I had no hard time. I had a hard time in making a relevant point. Like I knew it felt right and I could feel it and being articulate about it was difficult. Nothing came out on the paper like theoretical pedagogy.

I would hang out with really smart people and that was a survival technique. I learned by listening, even though I have audio processing. I don't have the ability to write. I'm in a study group right now. I have the paperwork to read, but I can't retain any of it. I got A's in Women Studies and Social Work. Those courses were easy for me. It was about social change. You know I'm twenty-one years old. It took me 4 more years going part time. I didn't graduate with my BA until I was 26 years. It took me from 1976 until 84. It took a long time to get an Associates degree and I had only traveled for one year. I applied to graduate school. I had been working with Planned Parenthood for four years and I had this youth group. I was taking workshops in North Carolina. [a faculty member told me] I should go to Graduate School. Never in a million years would I know what I was going to do. I had a professor say I belonged getting a masters degree and belonged in Psychological Education. I was mentored into going to graduate school and one of the kids father wrote my application to come to graduate school. He interviewed me on my questions and he wrote my whole application and then I sat there and said there is no way I can get out of here and this guy Tom said I will write it for you. Tom believed in me and gave me a way out. I got accepted in an education program to get my Masters Degree.

I had to write these theoretical papers and I remember sobbing. I couldn't do it and I remembered thinking what is wrong with me. I don't know how to do it and here I am full time. It was time for me to produce. I got remarks back saying rewrite and what does this mean. Someone just said why don't you get tested and I got tested and shockingly I actually didn't think they would find anything, but I was willing to do it because I have had problems. I couldn't write, I did all the tests, the hearing, the IQ, the whole thing they do… which took quite a bit of time I got the report back. It was audio processing. I had no idea what that is. I still barely know what it is. I guess that I had something going on. Which was an amazing really interesting that something was wrong. There was a reason why I couldn't write, a reason why I couldn't you know hold information in a certain way and it was like a coming out party. I'm sure there was relief, sadness, there is something broken about me, but I was relieved to know that I wasn't stupid, and then after that I had to then figure out how to write.

[I came to understand that] people with disabilities can continue their education because a turning point could have been to quit. I was in the throws of writing my Masters [Degree]. I needed help with finishing writing my papers, I had my comprehensives to do. What I did was I went to the English department and got a woman who was getting her doctorate in English and she sat next to me and we would talk about the paper. I would talk, she would say write it down and we did that for maybe 6 hours a week. You need a partner. I needed that kind of accommodation. She was fabulous. She tried to teach me which was really hard; she was an English professor she was trying to teach me at the same time. I would talk; she would help organize my thoughts. I handwrote my comps and then I would go home and type it into the computer and reread

it and reread it. Go back to her and she would pull more out of me. I could do the groundwork, but I couldn't write by myself. I had to have help. I paid out of pocket; I don't even know how I wound up in the English department. I'm a problem solver. I problem solved to get there and she took me through probably a couple of years until she finished her Doctorate and then I had to go find other people, which she referred me to someone else in the English department. I had very good affordable people. I was already working three teaching assistant jobs. One or two of my teaching assistantships paid for my writing tutorial and I had to get maybe four people over five years, but the best part of it was the discipline.

I met two hours three times a week. It was in my book, like going to a class. I got all my things [assignments] done. The discipline of it [you] would write by yourself and [I] can't write. I had a nine o' clock time slot until eleven three days a week. I went to their house, we would work on the paper, every other day in between I would gather the information, read the books, I would put what I needed and I'd finish.

[The assistance] had to be people who could understand the level of stupidness and dependency I felt. I felt really bad about myself. They had a lot of compassion. I cried many times. I think I had a way of doing things and I had no support. They were kind, capable, they were writers more than people who understood disabilities so they could see the writing process where I was suffering, but they were also very compassionate people and they knew that I was articulate. They would always say, "Write it down, write it down." They would do the whole writing organization piece to it. They would sometimes give me bigger and better words because things needed to be more academic and I didn't have that kind of vocabulary. I gathered words; I kept a

notebook of bigger words I didn’t know, pedagogy, things I learned in academia, words I needed to write in academia. I kept a notebook that would help me have good word recall. That was a problem. So I had a list of words. Words I didn’t know how to spell for sure.

Employment

I knew I couldn't be a professor, why I did a doctorate is beyond me sometimes. A doctorate on some level is really [what is required to] become a professor or work in an institute of higher education where they value that. I was a counselor before and so I had the training experience. I was lost when I got done. I had all this education, all these skills but no idea how I was going to apply for a job and now I was aware that I was a disabled person. It really was difficult. It was good, but bad. I tried to apply for this job and I freaked out. I did some adjunct teaching courses that I could teach, so I did faculty related stuff and I started my own private practice as a therapist.

Self as Helper

I accommodate my clients all the time. I literally help them accomplish some of their goals and that is not my role as a therapist as much as it is as a coach. I've added this whole action step as a coach, coaching people. I can see that stuff very concrete, real survival skills stuff. I find that people don't survive; they just keep in their circle whatever disability, whether emotional, psychological, or spiritual. People need help, hands on help, they do! They need a lot of compassion and not a lot of judgment for what is quote unquote broken. They need help. The other way I accommodate my clients is I come out to them all the time. In the role of therapist client relationship is this wall. This like you're the patient, I'm the doctor. I have a doctorate. I self disclose all the time. So

that person is no better than I and I no better [than] that person we are all here as human beings. I have suffered and I can see you are. Lets' figure it out; let me help you be successful. I had a program called Courage to Succeed, because its really helping them to succeed which can mean me making a freaking phone call [for them], sometimes its opening their business, its all over the place. I tell people I am on their team. Things that I say to my clients, this is in general about my work style. They are here because they need help. I am their therapist as well as their coach and it's really about helping them know that they have a partner.

They may need the type of accommodations where steps need to be broken down and as the coach I need to sit next to them and help them take the steps as many times as they need it until they are able to integrate that. It takes a long time. We are blowing smoke up our ass to think people can learn it quickly and easily. Even my skills I mean I deal with people's basic lives [and they] are a mess. Homes that are full of severe clutter people are just suffering because of the lack of help.

There is something going on with people's health, both physical, and spiritual. I know there are traditional disabilities, but there are also those disabilities that effect people's lives where they can't function on some of the basic levels. I hold them to their success. I look at emotions, food and nutrition and what's getting in their way. I look at possible disabilities, psychological, physical and I combine it all and then I help them take steps for their success. Sometimes its spoon feeding people and they pay me for it. It is a miracle. They get the best of me now. You know? I am 48 years old. I think my clients feel cared for by me. They are not just clients, they have access to my cell phone,

they can call at any hour and leave a message, and you know they usually know where I'm at. I am very relational with these people. I guide them through their process.

Caira

Caira I was born in the second largest city in Massachusetts's two parents one brother one sister I am the younger of the two. My mother and father both worked we are a working class family if you go by classes. Both of my parents worked very hard. My father had three jobs most of my life that I can remember and we lived in a home. My parents were very conservative and I would say strict. My mother was more the disciplinarian and my father the provider. My mother and father weren't really involved in our school activities.

Elementary School

I started school in the city school system. I went to an elementary school that was not far from our home so did my brother and sister we used to all walk to school together and we used to go to different grades. Back then elementary school, kindergarten that was fun. It was exciting to go to school then, to be around other people. In third grade I went to school in a rural area about 45 minutes from my home as part of the METCO program. I went to Center school, an elementary school. It was different because all my friends were here in the city and you know you get on this big yellow bus; a tobacco bus is what they called it. It took me forty-five minutes to an hour for me to get to school on the bus and it was interesting because no one at the school looked like me.

People used to ask me about my ponytails and how did I get my hair that way and I didn't understand those questions. I was like what do you mean how did I get my hair that kind of way? Their hair was different than mine so the conversation was always

about why I look the way I looked. I guess they were not used to seeing people of color. So then in fourth grade when I was going to the school because I was being bused there the work that I was getting in my class seemed as though it was more difficult, but I thought it was because I was being bused to that school. I tried to make believe I didn't hear the questions or I would make believe I forgot my book, or something. I would always have an excuse because I didn't understand the work. I didn't know what they were talking about. I would always do something to take the attention off me. It was like because I was being bused to the schools I had to know everything and I didn't and nothing was identified then as having any problems with anything in terms of understanding or learning differently. I remember what they had was called remedial reading, math and the only class I did well in was science.

I was awarded a Science award by General Electric for a science project that I had done. It was just creating a meteorite. I made it and you could talk, explain what it was about and explain what a meteorite was and back then it helped me a lot. It gave me more confidence because I won an award out of a lot of people in the school. So I knew that I could do the work, but when it came to math and English and things that weren't hands on and you had to read, and remember, and write I didn't do well. Through all of school I didn't do well. Now I know because I have challenges, but at the time I had to pretend that everything was okay.

High School

High School became more detrimental to me in the future because that's how I would deal with it. Either the teacher would answer me to my understanding or I just wouldn't go to class or you know I would do the best I could. In Spanish I really liked my

teacher, I liked English and I liked biology so I would try really hard to do it if the teachers would work with me. I had teachers that wouldn't give me explanations or say its written there just read the paper so I wouldn't go to their class and consequently I would fail. Of course then I never knew there was a name for my um-learning differences. I just thought this is how I was. I thought for a long time because I was being bused from the city to the suburbs. I thought this is how people in the suburbs were and how people in the city] were. I thought the suburbs people were real smart. I remember times I had work other people in my family had in college and I had the same thing. I thought they are really ahead. It's not that I am any less smart, they are more ahead. I just knew I had challenges and would come up with different ways to deal with it, which included having fun in my classroom, um or just not going.

I as a child write a paper and turn it in and then I would get it back like that and I'm getting an F on something I was proud of and spent three hours on. I'm not coming back to that class. I'm calling the teacher names. The teacher is not taking you aside and telling you quietly they got you what is this? It may not have been the best way, I may not have made the best choices and I went through other avenues you know experimental avenues, but that's what I did. I think it was the grace of God that got me out of HS. I don't know how I got out of HS but I did and graduated with my class.

I had a very bad attendance record. I was put in internal suspension for being absent. They put you "in school detention for being absent and give you work to do. I was in there every week for skipping so much class. My parents never said anything. I don't know if they contact your parents or not.

Initially I felt bad. I felt like I had let down everyone in my family because I was thinking I'm not getting this and everyone else is. I didn't want to say I'm dumb. I felt my self-esteem. I didn't have that everyday I thought someone was going to find out that I'm faking this; they are going to make me go in front of the room. I always had that fear because of this my self-esteem was not very strong. I also became the class clown, a lot of the things I would say when I would be answering a question and being very serious everybody would laugh and at first I would be embarrassed and then I would laugh along with them. It was fun and a way to communicate and be accepted, so being like a class clown you know that became another way for me to get around what was really happening [regarding] me not knowing an answer. If I answered something completely wrong the class would laugh and then I would laugh, too. It would be like Caira, that's really funny. I didn't think of it at the time as being picked on I just thought it was funny and people were talking to me and it was one of the things that developed throughout school, high school, even in grade school that developed more and I could make people laugh with answers that I was answering because I thought it was the correct answer or the way I was reading or what. That became a mechanism I used.

There weren't very many people that looked like me at the school so; you know the part where they are calling you names, racial names that in addition to being put in certain classes. People would say you are in the dumb class. There were people that I knew in those classes, too so I didn't care because there are a lot of people in that class. I can't remember what it was called and it wasn't remedial it was something else, but it wasn't that I didn't care until the time that I got into the ninth grade. I knew that if I spoke in my class I would be okay.

When it came to writing it down on paper I would have challenges and it was never brought to my attention that maybe I was learning different than other students. I was put in remedial classes and even in those I was still learning the same way everyone else was so it was the same. Remedial didn't make a difference. For the most part my Math, English were remedial, I had a really good Social Studies teacher where he allowed me to pick four topics and do term papers on them. I picked four topics that were history, social studies and he allowed me to write on them and that is what I did for that term. I was failing I got F's like the whole year, you know reading and understanding was difficult for me. I don't know if he recognized that I had challenges interpreting and writing and reading and he did allow me to do that and that was good. This allowed me to graduate because I needed x amount of credits and this did it.

I didn't take school as serious. I heard people go to college but then I also heard that I didn't have to worry about college because college isn't for everyone. I figured I was one of those people college wasn't for because it was never pushed to me in school. Then I wanted to do childcare. I remember getting books from people who did that and reading those and thought I can do this and that was it. I did attempt to go to college but when I got in I had to take all these courses. I didn't want to take math, reading, or English. I didn't want to take that and I had to and I was just like I'm not going to go then. Then I took classes through continuing education on the topics I wanted. It wasn't until later on that I realized I needed these subjects. I understand what pre requisites are. Early on I couldn't pronounce the word so it wasn't important to me to know what it meant. I thought they could stay over there and I'm going to take these classes over here. That is pretty much where that went.

Employment

Working with a disability back then? I don't think I was aware or it didn’t affect me, until I got into more technical jobs. In the bank when it came to counting money that's how I pretty much lost my job because I couldn't keep up with the money and I wasn't stealing it. I was giving people back change. I went to Washington DC and started working at a mailing company I really enjoyed working with the public .I would train new employees how to work in the program called Counter Intelligence. My job is clear cut there are no gray areas, it is very precise that is what I liked about my job.

As employers they need to be made aware they may have employees that may learn different than the norm. They need to have different accommodations set up. They need to look into learning disability and how it affects employees. At work I had to take tests I couldn't pass. I knew my job, but when it came to the test I couldn't pass them. They did away with the tests five years ago. I don't know why but I'm glad they did. I did the best I could and had ways of passing them. I had people in places that allowed me to pass them. This was stressful to me in the job I knew my job inside and out, but test time was stressful. I didn't know if I would lose my job or not get a merit raise because I couldn't pass the test. I did get around it. Awareness of parents, employees, people in general need to be made aware there are people that learn differently. Not only to be sensitive, but to educate them about accommodations.

Daily Living

I never thought of myself as a person with a disability. I never knew why my life was the way it was. That used to always keep me down. It kept me from stepping out and now I understand that this is how I am and that’s how I think. Now I know how to

prepare myself for different situations. I think people don’t understand how I think. I have questions and I sometimes wonder where you draw the line. I was trying to ask that question and nobody understood what I was saying. At what point do you verbalize it in a way to make people understand what I mean to say. My husband tells me all the time I didn't say that and I'm like that's what you meant or I might say something like I don't know, but we do have a hard time communicating.

I'm happy that I'm okay, there is nothing wrong with me, I learn differently, and I can live a normal life and everything is good. I understand who I am which is the biggest thing, why I learn the way I learn, and I understand I can still achieve. I accept the facts and its not hard. I’ve been with myself all my life. Understanding is a good revelation and I don't know what else to say here.

As a parent what I'm getting at is this whole thing has helped me be a better parent. I'm checking my children's work everyday. I'm talking to the school everyday. They won’t get lost in the system like I did. If I think words are spelled wrong I go to the dictionary right away? When my children write a paper I read it. I say you may want to rewrite this. I go through it.

To summarize I think it’s great now there are systems in effect in colleges there are offices and tests are untimed and there are accommodations that I can use that will help me. I was at the tail end and I wanted to prove I could do this. I really wanted to see, but I think it’s good. We have come a long way.

I feel it’s a matter of educating the public number one what services are out there and how to go about using them. I wouldn't mind being an advocate for something like that. I talk with a lot of people. I can identify some things in people I have. I can direct

them to Mass Health. I mean Mass Rehab. It's about education about what is out here. The government has systems set up for us and a lot of people don't know that they need to find out about it so they can get the use of it. I get the accommodations I need, know where to go to get them and it gives me peace there and it’s not a bad thing. It’s been helpful and understanding my specific learning differences. It has been helpful to know what I can do to make life easier with working, driving. I still have challenges with that. GPS is one of the things I'm going to get. Directions I get lost going home unless you give me landmarks I can't get there. The support is out there and not be ashamed of whom you are and it’s okay to have differences.

Denver

My family makeup included my mother and father and I am one of six children. I’m in the middle. I have a brother and sister that are older and a brother and two sisters that are younger. I grew up, ten minutes south of Boston; I lived there my entire life. My family is from there. I went to school in the public schools system. Some of my siblings went to Catholic school. I went to public school because of special education programs were better or more available then in the Catholic schools. I went to a private kindergarten in a small neighborhood school. It has six room’s one classroom for each grade and sixteen children for each class. I liked it. It was fun. When I was in first grade the kids in the neighborhood walked to school. I would walk to school and go home for lunch and go back. It wasn’t a bad school. We did have to get bused to another school for a gym class.

Elementary School

When I was young I had a learning disability and then when I was two or three they found out I had epilepsy. I was treated for that and I was doing well and they stopped medication. I went to public school because my older brother also had a learning disability. My parents had started my brother in private Catholic school and my mother ended up switching him over from public school because of the learning disability and the special services the public school had. I went to public school because my mother was a teacher and she kind of picked up early on the learning disabilities. She must have noticed the learning disability based on my abilities in kindergarten. So in first grade reading was the hardest thing and that was discovered right away. In second grade I started special education and I had a reading specialist that would come in and I would work one on one with her three days a week she was excellent. That was the best teacher I ever had in all my career of school. She really taught me how to read. I was in second grade when I first started seeing her. I saw her for three years and then I was doing well in school. The school decided in fourth grade they would see what I could do on my own so they took the reading specialist away in fourth grade I didn't have any tutoring at all, no reading help. I felt they had gotten me up to where I needed to be and that I was doing well. Then in 4th grade fell back behind. I went back to the program in the fifth grade because I think they decided I wasn't doing very well.

I didn't feel bad about going to see the reading specialist because I actually enjoyed going because I could learn. The teacher was excellent I learned a lot from her. There were other kids, who went to see her a lot of them were my friends. It wasn't like a big deal. There were five other kids in the class that went to see her also. No one ever

made fun of us. I never remember being made fun of or anything like that because a lot of real popular kids went to her. I'm not saying that I wasn't, but some of the popular guys would go to her, too. No one would ever say anything about it. Maybe they did behind my back. Who knows?

My mother could say one thing and it was never a fight for her to get testing for me. My mother could ask for testing at any point in time and they would just do it! I can remember my mother doing that during fourth grade when she wasn't sure I was doing as well and she requested tests and wanted to see what kind of progress I was making. I do remember doing that and never a problem they always went along with it. Middle school was different though. Once I left elementary school it was all down hill though. It was horrible. I had terrible teachers and looking back it's not their fault, there were so many kids in the classroom. I went to this big middle school.

If they had taken me in middle school and said this is what your strengths and weaknesses are, this is what the model looks like, this is how you are going to have to learn to study in order to be successful, if you are going to read anything you should get your books on tape or go and get this computer software. The software didn't exist then, but books on tape did. It hinders my ability to do things quickly like writing things or that kind of thing. If I have to write a report I have to bring it home to do. It takes me longer. Cause you know my school isn't set up with the software I need. No more little school town house. It was big middle school. It had resource room style, a lot of drug dealers, all the kids are having a really hard time.

I didn't like it. I wanted nothing to do with it. You never got any one on one attention; you were with six or seven kids who were a complete mess. I was doing well in

school. I did really well in middle school like I was getting solid A's. Going down there kids are cutting class, you are not there to learn anything, the kids would give the teachers a hard time it was awful and because I was quiet and did my work it was easy for the teachers, they could throw a book at me and just walk away from me and just have to deal with the other kids. The teachers would say to me, "Here do this." They would throw a book at me and I would be like I don't read. I was like what? That's why I'm here. So I just sit there and pretend to answer questions. As long as I was quiet I didn't matter if I did what they wanted.

I hated those teachers because of that. I really was resentful. I wanted out of there. I used to come home and complain to my father about it all time. I want out of that class. My mother could never believe what I was telling her. She said it couldn't be that bad and I was like it is. Waste of my time. The teachers loved to set up this thing that is on the wall and they put the words up and scan a story. It was like a projector. It would do a fast story. Project a story on the wall and you would only see certain words and the thing would be so fast that you would read the first sentence and then just sit there for twenty minutes while the story is going on. You had already lost the story in the first sentence. It was supposed to help increase your reading speed or something like that but you could never keep up with it.

You'd read the first sentence and be like, "Duh." The teachers did that a lot. I really think it was a way to keep the kids quiet. There was a classroom full of kids who didn't have the same reading rate. You would get question number one correct and all the other ones would be wrong. Then I had to fight, fight, fight. I fought with my parents almost every day to get out of that class. I finally got out in 8th grade. It took me two

years. They got sick of listening to me. They couldn't figure it out because its not like it was affecting my class work, they were just sick of listening to me.

My parents and the school let me out of special education for the 8th grade. The other problem being in the special education classes were that you had to take a reading test in middle school, no one does that, they take Spanish or French or whatever. You had to go to reading class and go to the resource room. I used to call it the retard room and plus it was down the hallway and you couldn't sneak into that place which is what you would try to do, sneak in and out. It was the only thing down the hallway and you couldn't just walk down the hall and drop in there if you walked down that hallway that is where you are going. You know? It was a dead end. In middle school people never said anything to me, but you always would hear that person is in the retard room whatever. No one ever said anything discouraging to me.

Then Title One started, the reading program and guess who gets dragged into that? Oh my God! I was livid! That's exactly what we were the guinea pigs. That's how we felt. We were all saying it too. My friend Abby said it, too. I said I am not taking this class! I am not staying in this class. I can remember this was even worse than the resource room. This was a class of 30 kids with 2 teachers and they were going to try to do reading with 30 kids who couldn't read. Two teachers and thirty kids' all reading at a different level what kind of odds could you give a teacher?

High School

Why should I have to put up with that? I shouldn't. That place was a zoo drugs everywhere bad, bad place. I didn't want to go there. I wanted to go to private school. My mother said I think we should stay with the public school in case you need any kind of

support you can get it. My brother was there; my sister was there, so I went there. Because I was in resource room and getting all A's and because I had resource room on my records they automatically put me in the lower classes. I was in all the higher classes in middle school and they are like we saw this on your record so we are going to put you in the lowest level. So I was back with the drug dealers. You couldn't go into a class where kids weren't throwing chairs. It was a total waste of time ridiculous! I didn't do well in high school. I skipped school all the time. I had a job. I used to work days and my mother didn't know that. I used to skip school and I would write my own note for my absences I missed 50% of my classes.

I had a job. I signed myself out. I wrote Denver Colorado won't be here today. You know you skip school and they say do you have your late note and I would be like I have it here somewhere. Here it is. My mother never wrote a note in high school. I just signed everything from the day I walked in. I just thought it was easier that way if I was going to be skipping, out sick or something I would need to put my own John Hancock on there so it would never look like I handed in a forged note. You know? So from the very beginning even if it were legitimate I would re-write the note my mother would write so it was in my penmanship. I wrote everybody's notes who asked me. I was like Yeah sure. I wrote them all!

I should have charged. Yeah. I would have made millions! Yeah. That will be $5 thank you! I wasn't in resource room in high school but they wanted to put me in it, but I was never there. I just went to high school enough to get by and every once in a while you go home and get the mail before my mother can see it. Once in a while a letter would slip through about my attendance at school and I would be in big trouble. What do you

mean you have missed 50 percent of your classes? You had to have a certain amount to get out. I had enough credits to get out in my junior year.

The one thing I wished was that my parents had shared my testing results and what the test meant. I just always thought oh I can't read well. I didn't realize I was really intelligent. Had I known that I would have felt better in myself at elementary school? Mine was the opposite. I had 135 in performance and then my reading was like 110 or something like that. It was a huge issue, gap in my languages. Had I known that even the 110 is fine. I would have perceived the disability differently had I known that.

College

I wanted to get out of there and go to college. My father was like you aren't going to college. I had enough credits to get out of my junior year I wanted to get out of there and go to college. My father was like you are not going to college what was even worse was that I was tracked I was getting A's but that did not make any difference surprisingly. This is what happens when you skip four years of high school you have difficulty getting into college. I never thought I couldn't do college work. I knew I could do it. You know what I mean? I was looking forward to someplace I could learn something finally. After that first year in high school I was like forget it, I'm not even going to try here anymore, I'm just going to sit here and go to college and get there. There was no sense in going to different classes and being put at a different level. People in high school already had their mind made up what I was going to be.

What annoyed me was they marked it on your SAT that you had nontraditional testing so already the colleges know you have a disability going in because they look at it and say Oh this wasn't taken in the traditional setting. I had no fun. That is all I did,

which wasn't bad when I was at Northeastern cause I was living in the city and pretty much just waking up and working doing my thing, none of my friends were really around. If I didn't go out I didn't know things were going on. When I went to a state college and things were happening all around me and I couldn't go to them because you can't read and it takes a long time studying it's annoying. People would go to class and take the weekend off and not study and its like wow. I am like you are kidding me.

I graduated from college and went to Boston College for grad school I got my degree in special education because they had special program for handicapped people that was good it was easy very easy. I was discouraged not to go into physical therapy the professor said I would never make it. I should have never listen to him what was nice about him is he was good even with the people who couldn't write he taught me how to write. I was having a hard time with the readings. In college I spent every waking hour studying because it took me so long to read. I had to read a book in college. You couldn't just sit in class and listen anymore and get everything because you had to study the book as well, but I couldn't read. I still couldn't read when I was in college. I was like every waking moment it took me. All I did was study I did fine but it was a lot of work and it was tiring very tiring.

It was very hard to write I would look up every word I would say what another word you would sample it down to something you could spell to save time other wise you'd be looking in the dictionary every two seconds. If you wrote a poor sentence you couldn't rewrite the whole sentence you'd have to retype the whole page and then with the computer that is when I really started to get help. Technology helped me as learning disabled computers and accommodations made it lot easier. [While at BC] The only

women [professor] there picked up on [my learning disability]. Most of the tests were multiple choices, but when you have to handwrite an essay. She said I should have told her and she would have given me an oral exam. I met a number of people at [college] that really assisted me in my learning style. Having one there and learned about my style of learning and all the things I can do to accommodate myself. It helped me out a lot with reading I got books on tape and I could do my readings on time. I would have had some time to enjoy myself instead of spending every waking minute struggling to get myself through all the work that needs to get done. I came back to school to get my Ph.D. because my health was so poor I couldn't work anymore and needed something valuable to do with my time. I never wanted to use my learning disability as an excuse I didn't want to look foolish I was so sick I couldn't hold up a book never mind read it.

Employment

I became director of [a program for people with disabilities in higher education] no one knew I had a disability listening to people talk about people with disabilities. The hardest part is like having people give their opinion about people with disabilities and they don't have it. I mean if you are a person of color and someone is racist they are not going to come out and talk disparagingly about people of color because it's not socially accepted and they would probably get fired. To sit in a meeting where Deans and other people holding prominent positions talk about people with disabilities didn't like it. It is easy for people not to make fun of people of color. If they look across the table and see a white person they are going to watch themselves even if they are making snide comments. It's so unexplainable hard to put into words.

In Boston I worked with kids with disabilities and people are accepted for who they are the positive thing they have to contribute are valued. I think that is key. Well I have an idea why the school doesn't do things properly and I don't mean spending more money. I will say that up front. Right now the city spends an enormous amount of money not providing services for students, throwing up roadblocks for parents and there are people who that is their job, they were hired for that and get paid extra money for. These people have no conscience. I don't understand a lot of people in special education who rise up in the ranks who have no interest in providing special education services for students, who have no interests in making sure parents of these students achieve any kind of legal rights. They have no interest in the progress of these students and that totally baffles me. Why would someone go into a field like this and not want to help. I think they feel they are getting paid extra money to throw up the roadblocks. I know that is why they are there. They have been told that is why they are there and they have no qualms about doing it.

I do provide services for the students and the families and it doesn't cost anymore than the people who are not providing it. You know? It's the same amount. There is a difference and parents know it because they all request to come to your school. There are parents who are trying to get their kids out of the system and want them in private school, private placement, move the kids year after year and they come into my program and settle. No they have to educate them anyway. The same amounts are spent. So what is the difference? It is the approach. Don't give them anymore. Throw up the roadblocks! Make it hard for the parents. We are not throwing up roadblocks and will educate your kid the way it is supposed to, we all have the same philosophy and work with you as a team. It is

getting to this point in Special Education that we aren’t spending anymore than the people throwing up the roadblocks.

The [people at the] top of Public Schools they don't have disabilities and have no idea what it's like to even live with one. Yet they are in charge of disability services, Special Education. I just think that's crazy. I don't think and I'm not saying they can't be good educators, I just think it’s a totally different perspective when somebody with a disability is running a program. I feel so much more comfortable walking into a disability service office that has people with disabilities working there. I'm more confident in their abilities to get what I need done. If I walk in a door and there are all these people walking around who don't have disabilities, I am like how can disability service office offer me a person with a disability any accommodations, any insight, support for me if they have no idea what it is like to have a disability.

Universal Design everybody in the classroom would be learning the same things in a different manner. This is what I do in my classrooms. I have some kids that are doing this one way and another kid working on the same activity but doing it in a different way. Everybody is working on the same topic. Do a cooperative education model. We have special Ed teachers working together in the same classroom. Kids aren't getting pulled out. Obviously there are times when kids need to get a little individualized attention, but you know what? You can teach kids all that stuff in the regular classroom at the same time you're teaching the other regular ed kids the same thing. You don't think it would be beneficial for the regular ed kids to know their learning style? Why wouldn't it be beneficial to find this kid in a regular setting and they are an auditory learner. Wow. It would be helpful for them to know about books on tape. They could just listen to stuff.

That is how they learn, they love it that way. I'm not saying don't ever teach a kid to read but I'm saying if they have spare time and they know they can get books on tape this is a good method. They can listen to Sports Illustrated or whatever. It doesn't matter. I don't know. Unless you are going to give somebody one on one instruction don't take them out of class and throw them in a room full of you know 15 kids throwing chairs. That is a waste of time for the student and the teacher. How do you think the teacher felt living in that zoo?

If we had to move forward, every other ism is light years ahead of us. The only reason there was a movement when the whole disability thing came on it was a few parents suing people to get their kids into school and it was jumping on the tails of people of color. They are using all the laws put together by a real movement, civil rights movement and it was a few parents who wanted their kids in school. We have never been a movement; for one thing we are too disabled to organize. Because we are disabled we can’t get out of our own ways never mind produce a movement. We move one direction and that is backwards. We could never get everybody in one place. How can you get all wheelchair users to march on Washington? We deigned have enough wheelchair vans. People would be surprised if all disability people came out on one day. People would be shocked to know how many people with disabilities are out there. They come into a program like this and say I didn't know there were this many kids. Like I said people sit right beside people with disabilities and deny even know it and there they are making snide comments about them, prominent people, chancellors, deans sitting in meetings with you, me, people with disabilities that they can’t see. I can’t go through one day without something coming up, not being able to spell a word or do something, without a reminder like that. A million too many. It's true. You can’t

go through the day. Even when you sit down to write a little message? How do you spell that word? Oh you better change it to another one. It's annoying. [As a person with learning disabilities you] just need to toughen up. Life is going to be hell. That is all there is to it. I'm serious. What can you do? There is nothing. I suppose you can help with self-esteem more than anything else. You know? You can't change it. It is what it is. Right?

Jackson

I was born in up state New York Plattsburgh. When I was about three we first move to Ludlow Massachusetts the reason was my father couldn't find any work in New York so he came down here and worked for a little while. While I lived with my mother in New York my father would come up for the weekends. It eventually became too much [we moved to Massachusetts]

Elementary School

I started going to school I always struggled with school. In the beginning they really didn't catch any problems with me until they really didn't find out exactly what was wrong. They really thought something was wrong with me although I was in special education classes. I got more one-on-one attention and some tutoring when I was young but pretty much struggle in school the entire time until I was in middle school. I finally got tested and they figured out there was some learning disability. Then they found out me being in a regular classroom was okay. But I needed some special help for reading and stuff like that. So they ended up sticking me in a normal classroom with a person for like history and stuff like that. And someone there to try and write notes and try and help me with it. Then we would leave early and when class was done I have one less block than everybody else did and [the helper] would go over some stuff with me to try and get

it down on paper and get it ready so I can go home and do my homework. My mother tried to help me with some of my homework and read some of the stuff I could not read we did a lot together. I always had less [homework] not always, but most of the time I would do some in school or I would do what I could by myself. They would tell me what I can't do to bring it in and we would use that period of time to do something. I would bring it into class or I would have an extra day and then drop it off if I had a hard time with it. School was always a struggle you had the aspect of not just school but you had the aspect of life.

[Life] being hard because you can't read as good you know? Looking at a menu to order food or going out with friends reading the description of a movie. When your younger directions to a video games all that stuff that other people could do that I couldn't do. Your different you know a lot of friends at a younger age I had some but as me being kept separate from the classroom all the time it made it hard. I spent more time with adults during a normal day than I did with teacher. I should say instead of with students. I still had to go into special ed classes in English and stuff like that and it was really just not being enough. Then they decided to have a tutor come in and try some new ways of teaching me how to read. One of them was Story-Grammar-Marker, which, is made by this woman. I can't remember her name she's very nice. I actually met the woman who made Story-Grammar-Marker, which, was very cool. Basically they came up with these maps and kids read this story you could take down ideas. You would have different ones like comparing/contrast or a basic character map.

You know these certain areas of what [the main character] did listed all-out and basically if you want to write a paragraph you would have everything laid out. Kind alike

these have more of her handwritten paper the aspect that you would work with so I started that out in middle school. I had tutoring for one class and she tried a couple of other things with me there is this other program called benchmark. Basically, I would describe the program they come up with these common words. I want to say they are called this a lot and basically every week you bring in the new part of those words. You add a couple of more to remember like cat is C.A.T. okay say you want to remember cat. Say you wanted to spell hat you would take out the c and put h okay so they had tons of words that was the same idea and basically they want you to try and come up with those words.

I would work with a number of them we would go over them we would start off with five than ten than a hundred. I don't know some you would remember and some you would do things like rhyming to help you remember all kinds of strategies that would work. Then you would get a group of spelling words and almost have a spelling bee those words would feature what those words were and you could use those to write the words so they already thought out a program. That they had basically just repeated if you come up with this you can remember how to spell that. You could come up with this so basically there were many ways to help you remember. You tried other things like reading a sentence go back to it using a contrasting sentence. All the stuff is starting to work and then I started getting better my reading level at this point was still pretty low extremely low maybe first grade level at the middle school. Which is not ideal but it just wasn't enough and I don't know if it was the school didn't want to provide any more tutoring or if they really don't know why I didn't get more than one class a day in tutoring maybe that was all they could give me.

Eventually my mom found out about a couple of schools one was the Curtis Blake Day school and they did the exact same things that this tutoring was doing all in the same day in all of our classes every day. All day long she read up about it she heard things about it great things that kids are going in there and they would come out reading where they're supposed to be. It was a smaller school so it was better. When you talk about a public school East Longmeadow is a small town but you still talking about hundreds of kids. You talk about 25 to 30 kids in the classroom and Curtis Blake was supposed to be 10 kids to classroom. You would have two teachers to take kids. You would read with somebody one-on-one every day so there was a lot more attention and they specialized with kids with learning disabilities. It took my mother a long time to get East Longmeadow to pay for me to go to Curtis Blake. To allow me to go it took just about couple years. I finally got in and they just did the same thing over and over again.

They had stuff for speech like how to pronounce words. I forgot the name of the program. I think it's called Blank Awareness. Don't ask me how that’s spelled. What they would do is they would take essays you know and they do all that and you would know how to pronounce everything to help you with reading words you know. I'd have that class for an entire period. I'd have Benchmark for another period Story-Grammar-Marker for entire period. Or you could do Story-Grammar-Marker all day long because his classes were so interchangeable. It's good because before I would just get one period of everything so you would get five to 10 minutes of something. It just wasn't enough this way you would get an hour each day and every teacher was specially trained to do these things. They would work together with each other [the teacher] would say maybe you

could open this book and work with this with Jackson. [With the extra help] it made it easier for [me] to be able to do this in class.

You know you don't get report cards like ABC I had report cards that were 45 pages long. A review of each class with a scale from one to four on your entire class within this period semester or whatever he got four for the entire class is broken down into the different things you do in class. Reading I got this writing maps paragraphs so broken more so the parents could see and they could also see that I need more help in this. [The teachers] try helping you with it. They had normal classes' science math classes you had to have but they had these other specialty classes. What was nice was in social studies and science they would bring these tools into the classroom to help you with these classes. You know so pretty much every teacher there hadn't aspect of how these things worked even if they weren't specializing in Benchmark or Story-Grammar-Marker. But they did know how it pretty much work they were all trained on how to use it. So they can bring it into social studies and science. In the other classroom it wasn't so much that you would use it in the classroom and it wasn't part of the classroom setting. [I would] have to try and use it myself. I get lost in the class compared to being behind [in a class] and they help you [catch up] with it. It was just better all around. Imagine a kid in a regular school staying in a regular classroom even though you have your game with you they ask you to read or write a paragraph and you can only read at a first grade level. You can't do it you can read a couple of words but that's pretty much it. When I was in middle school I just sat there and they would not ask me to read. It was also a little weird with kids you know. Again I spent more time with teachers then kids so it made it a little bit harder for everything in middle school along with recess and all that stuff it was just

harder. But when I went to Curtis Blake and I read everybody had the same problem. We were all at different levels but they would break it up. Say whatever grade you are in say six grade level some people might be in six, some people might be an eight, but in that class it just depended on what you're reading level was whatever they put together. They did not have little kids with big kids but they would have kids of different grades together but their ages might be two or three years apart. You know pretty much everybody that was there. When they started they couldn't read or do anything else either that's why they were there so it was easier.

But, it was very weird going there and starting out because you're leaving to a private school any friends that you did have that you work so hard to keep you separated from during the day. So then you know you go there and you don't know what to really expect. School for a day and a half and you decide if you like it at that point. I don't know if I said I didn't like it. If that would have made a difference because it was pretty late so I had to go [to the school] anyway which was pretty much the best thing that had happened to me.

Basically, you go the first couple of days and they would ask you to read right in front of a classroom of your peers. So it was a weird concept so if you can imagine how nervous a person can be even though there are not 25 people in a classroom but there are still six to 10 people. I will say it's different you know you don't know any of those six to 10 people at least if you are in the public school I went through school with those people so they kind of knew me. They knew I had a reading problem. But now you're just starting off fresh kids were from all over its not like they were from my hometown East Longmeadow, Connecticut, Massachusetts. New Hampshire or Vermont you know that

was also a neat thing to these kids who come so far just to come to this one school. They would take three hour bus rides just to get to school in the morning their parents would drive 2 1/2 hours just to get them to school. Some parents would stay there all day because the ride was a long and then just bring them home when the days over. You know why you got a drive six hours then turn around and go back three hours the school days not that long anyways some of the parents I remember helped out at the school volunteered. They were there in the parking lot anyways and getting bored so they might as well help out with the school.

It was neat, I don't know how many teachers there were back at my school my fiancé's mother works there. This is how I met her. I'm not trying to brag but everybody loves me there because I was grateful for everything they did for me. Everybody was so nice and you get to be much closer to them you know like you work with people every day one-on-one. Hell and I was there for five years so there's a lot of your time so you feel like you know everybody and everybody most definitely knows you. It's not like I was a troublemaker but you know everybody knows you it's a good comfortable feeling. So eventually I started getting better at reading and stuff.

I was struggling with my mother she wanted to take me out of the school earlier than the school recommended for some reason I don't really remember the whole story. They wanted to send me to a school called White Oak in Westfield. That program wouldn't have been the best thing I was still a little low on some stuff. But they though it would be okay, it’s not a public school it's a private school. Actually they don't do anything the same. They don’t use the same kind of tools. They are geared toward small classrooms and stuff like that and one-on-one but it would have been a big difference. I

finally convinced my mother for me to stay a little longer another year until the eighth grade.

What happened in the eighth grade they actually decided to keep me one more year the problem is that school is not a high school. I got ninth-grade credits they got special permission to allow me to get most of my ninth-grade credits I didn't stay the whole year because I had to start looking for schools to go to for high school. This was challenging because by then we did not live in East Longmeadow anymore we lived in Springfield. Public schools in Springfield are even bigger than East Longmeadow limited to where I wanted to by then.

I had an interest in computers because I have extremely bad handwriting. The only way anyone could ever read what I was trying to say would be to type it out even if it was spelt wrong. By the time I reached seven and eighth grade they had spell check on the computers. When I first went to public schools they didn't have spell check but at least they could read my in writing. My handwriting has gotten a lot better but it still it's really bad. My father has really bad handwriting and my mother doesn't have very good handwriting either but I can type I learned how to basic type which I don't do enough anymore. I almost hunt for letters.

I started with an interest [in computers] my parents didn't have a lot of money when I was growing up. I didn't have a computer at home. I should have one for school because the school wanted it. Eventually someone gave me a computer. It didn't work well it worked every now and then. So eventually I started learning how to repair it on my own. Not by reading books because all the books I finally did find were too hard to read.

Little things I could fix on it and I got more and more interested. You know so that I had a teacher her husband was a little bit better at computers and he would fix it when I couldn't fix it. I started to get into it more and more and eventually a computer would break at school and I would fix it. Then for some reason a teacher or student would remember that and then the next time something would break they would all say you should ask Jackson Jones because he fixed this last time.

Than I would get stuck trying to fix that problem seeing these things for the first time and never really knowing I got better as time went on. I don't know but that's really when my interest came in. I didn't really have any adaptive software at that time because school really didn't have money for it. As you know it's very expensive and it being private school adaptive software really wasn't that big back then it's not like I'm old but were talking years and years ago. It just wasn't like it is now basically typing and stuff like that. I came up with the idea of taking the Story-Grammar-Markers which kids are using every day and my problem with it was that I would write on it and not be able to read what I wrote because my handwriting was so bad. My teachers couldn't read [my handwriting] so that made it hard. To have to slow down and write is slow as I could and it would set me back a little bit it wasn't the biggest deal but it sure was a struggle to write.

I'd rather type on the computer so I came up with the idea this is when I met the lady who develop Story-Grammar-Marker which I believe [she] works for AIC I don't know if she still does but she did back then she had a patent on it. She came up with the whole idea we got the pages printed and everything like that people use it all over the world. Now it is a standard on the Internet which is neat because of effort started using it.

Hardly anybody was using it, it was just like in the Western Mass area so I came up with the idea to try and make these things on the computer. I didn't know how I was going to do it at the same time it was Christmas time.

I got a computer for Christmas so it wasn't the best it wasn't the middle but it was newer it was better than what I had. What I had wouldn't even do what I needed for school. so I got this computer and it was a huge deal for me to get something like that I got it and then basically I did some work for somebody I'd kept on saving money and I got a scanner scanners were expensive back then. They were slow they so we spent a couple hundred dollars on this basic scanner so can I could scan on the computer. Now these maps were paper I could figure out how to get them on the computer. It was easy to scan it but once you get it on the computer you can write on it over trial and error in many hours of hours of time trying to figure it out.

[The scanner] would allow you to do different things with it play with it and make it so you could type on it so after I did one to try to figure it out. I did two or three others there are quite a few maps. I'd like to say 20 or something may be more. I saved it brought it into my teacher basically we looked over at and she thought it was a great idea. We couldn't believe that I did it. She was going to bring it to the person who made story-grammar-marker and basically all we are asking was could I take these maps and scan them. Then use them to make it easy for me everyday and also can other kids use them to? She didn't care she thought it was a good idea.

Go ahead and do it so I did it. It took me forever because scanning was so slow. The computer was so slow it took me a long time to do it. Come to find out the school paid me for it after it was all done. The teacher that I gave it to was Ms. Ana basically

when I was all done she asked me, “how many hours do you think you spent on this?” I am like I did sort of keep track so I would know, because I thought I could do it faster in the future.

I don't remember how long it was maybe a hundred hours spent actually on the computer. This was after I found out how to do it after all the trial and error. So the school narrowed it down to 50 hours I got paid for 50 hours. I don't remember how much I started using the Story-Grammar-Markers teacher started saying how cool it was. I started handing in my work and they started saying how beneficial this would be for other students. Then they start asking me to put it on my computer. Eventually it started being on all the computers in the school, which wasn't much at the time it was probably 15 computers.

High School

I got to graduate I go to high school. I’m here with these kids who are bigger than me and all this stuff it wasn’t quite what we thought it was. My mother doesn’t remember them saying it was a school for kids who have been in trouble and also had these learning disabilities. I did not like it at first at all. These kids were, acting badly in class, they wouldn’t do their work, they would tell the teacher to shut up. The worst thing you would see was someone throwing a chair or something like that. These were things you would never imagine would happen that were happening there you know? I’d be doing all my work, and I would be worried that, the teacher would say, why aren’t you doing what Jackson’s doing rather than throwing chairs from a desk or getting mad at me. So luckily that didn’t happen. I just did what I had to do and that was it. So I go through my classes and I did my work very little interactions between the kids, the students.

I got to go over to see Michael and Adam to do computers. I just got better at computers there and eventually people realized I could fix computers there too so I started to do some stuff like that. Then Adam started taking me out of the classroom to go to other programs that were own by the school to fix computers. That year [I started working at] Second Chance Computer Outlet to sell new computers which will be built and it will be students that will be building them or me there's another person called Tony that would help out.

Employment

[Then I started working at a disabilities office and I do adaptive software here and I also did repairs for all kinds of people students and staff that have disabilities which could range from people being deaf to people being blind or just having a learning disability like myself. We use all different types of software and hardware to try to make either so they can do everything they need to do just like everybody else for their job or for school which is the same exact thing that I did when I was going to school. When I first started they had 10 computers now I want to say we're up around 35 computers 30 might be a better number right around there. So that has just gotten bigger, gotten more staff, gotten more computers more printers we can handle more students. I do more with students now then I did before when I first started with it. It's been a great learning experience. I do, basically I'd say adaptive software. A recommendation is made that this person needs dragon and I'll say ok well what exactly is the person's need. I'll make sure that that is the right diagnosis or if it's wrong I'll just adapt something else. Then basically I'll go and I'll see if the student has money to pay for it or if it's something that the University here has to try.

[I] work on and then I get everything together I see what the person needs what they do have what they don't have. I go see [my boss] to see exactly where I'm supposed to go with it and we purchase stuff, or they purchase stuff. Then I work on it and I get it set up to their computer so it will work for them. Then I get the actual student or staff [and teach them] how to use that piece of software or hardware so they can do what they need to do. Sometimes it takes many pieces of software or many pieces of hardware. Sometimes I can say [a person] may only need Dragon Naturally Speaking or, I can say they only need to read and write and I could go over and get them situated money wise. I can go over give them a lesson and work with them for like two hours and we'd be pretty much done. Besides more issues that would come up in the future or it could be something like Dragon Naturally Speaking, or Kurkweil, or Jaws for instance. It can take time to put it into the machine get it adapted to work for the person. It can also take hours, and hours, and hours of time to get that person to be able to use that piece of software.

I like flowers and trees and stuff like that, but I'm more into plants and trees and shrubs and stuff like that. I don't know if it's because I'm a guy. But I have started more recently having a respect for flowers I'd like to learn a little bit more about them. And I have looked into going to school for it I have thought about it. With landscaping it depends, it varies from year to year, it depends on how many people I can get to work and how many people stay. I always have one full time person but I've had times where I've had two full time and two part time people that have worked for me. And then I have me too. We do a decent amount of work, for the size of it. The area that I own the

company in there's a crazy amount of landscapers in that area. Like papers that we advertise in there's like 30 of us and there are people that advertise too.

There are a lot of houses a lot of people, and a lot of busy people. So they don't have the time to maintain their stuff. Or they just can't do these jobs that we can. We do regular lawn maintenance, we do fertilizing applications, which we don't do a lot of that. Every year we do more of it eventually we want to do a lot of it. We just don't have the time. Then we do a lot of mulch a lot of plantings we do residential, except this year we're doing quite a bit of commercial, childcare units, [several] building. I take care of four Friendly's we also do snow plowing several corporations. I do estimates, I do the work, I manage the workers, I deal with the money aspect of it I pretty much do all the day-to-day.

I did an apprenticeship for 5 years with somebody that I started working with and eventually she just grew out of it and it wasn't quite right for her and she wanted to go back to school and stuff like that. So she offered it to me and basically I bought customers and didn't take anything else, I didn't take machines or anything like that I just wanted to be on my own. I couldn't really afford it at that time she had all brand new stuff and it was all very expensive more than what I could handle at that time.

I do computers and there I do landscaping. Which is two totally different worlds. There's not much that is the same even though I do use adaptive software for landscaping. I get a phone call from someone; you know we advertise all over the place I get a phone call I have to write down the name, an address. And then I have to go to the house and talk to the person and they tell me exactly what their issues are and then I explain to them what we can do to fix that issue. Or they tell us exactly what they want and I tell them, ok, I

can do it or can't do it. And basically I have to sit down and look at all the materials I need and I need to write up a quote form and I need to prices and then I need to present that back to them. So there's quite a bit of paperwork involved into it. More than I ever thought there would be. That's the only thing that actually bothers me about it is the amount of paperwork. But I actually have overcome a lot of it since when I started. I use dragon for it at home. I have a laptop that's in my trunk and basically I write all my estimates on there. Another issue I have is that besides being a person with a learning disability, I have extremely bad motoring skills with writing. I still think I should have got a little more OT for my hands and stuff like that everyday. So I have a hard time writing. I can write but then people have a hard time understanding my writing. So I have programs on the computer and I can type it all in there and basically they can read it. I have a spell check for it and then I can use Dragon. Dragon can put it in there for me. I have a couple laptops I can even print it out in my truck and then I just hand them the printed sheet. Or lots of times if it's a big enough job I get a week to be able to put a quote in to them.

Kansas

I am 67 years old born in Europe to a middle class family mother, father and an older sister. I grew up with a nanny that was my mother's best friend. During the war women and children had to leave the city the train was so cramped that people hung out the window to pee. We lived with relatives for the next three years and that really became the society of women. My father was joined the resistance and disappeared for a year. We didn't know where he was and then my grandmother joined us and she was bombed out of Berlin later and lived until the end of her life with us. We had two rooms, a living room and

a bedroom and in the bedroom were two beds and grandma and I slept together and my mother and my sister slept together. There was no flushing toilet and every Friday in the washhouse the water was heated and we bathed in tin. What is important is that I remember I would ask my mom and the nanny why they wouldn't eat with us and they said they had eaten already. I know that they hadn't eaten. I didn't understand as a kid that they hadn't, but now I know that. It was really wartime and it was also a very free time for us kids. For us kids carefree sleeping out, playing outside and there were some books but they were pretty wild years. I spent a lot of time on the phone, we raised our own rabbits and we would cry when the grownups would eat them.

We had more food than many other people because there were farmers next door. I was seven when I saw the first banana. My father returned again from the war in summer of 45 and he moved to Northern Germany where he became the director of a sugar factory, actually a candy factory.

Elementary School

My sister excelled very much in school. She was always the favorite of my father and I was the favorite of my mother. My sister excelled in school and she was called the brains, I couldn’t focus and had a hard time reading. This all registered as me being dumb having no brain.

Making everyone laugh kept them away from me and I excelled in things, which interested me. I could not do math for the life of me. I know I was pretty good in literature. My French was all right, but I really had a hard time. It was a lot of memorizing and knowing it by heart. It was difficult. I had to wear glasses when I was 14. I was always the youngest in the class. I went to home economics. The math teacher

was a miserable person. The math teacher gave me a test [and from] across the room [he] said, "Miss Kansas this is a document of your stupidity." I left the room crying and he had to apologize. My mother and father really supported me in that and gave me a tutor who was a high school teacher in the same school.

Twenty years later I still have nightmares about [the math teacher] The teacher said we should stand up and he said at the end of the year we would not be able to advance on and three of us had to stand up. That is when my mother said this is not what I was going to do. Although they felt I was not a scholar. My father never believed I was good enough even when I brought home a good grade he thought I had changed the grade on my paper and would believe nothing else.

High School

I had wonderful friends. I was very good in athletics; very good dancer. I went to become a medical research assistant and went to the University for helping others. Then I went to this medical school for medical research, a profession that really doesn't exist here [in the U.S.A.] It's kind of like a master in practical sciences. This was a lot of physics, a lot of organic chemistry and we had to learn formulas. I had a very good group of friends and we would study together. There were 80 students in this two-year course. I laid the exam on my father's desk and he calls me downstairs and says you know you got the wrong exam, this is not your piece of paper you must have the wrong one and I said why and he said you could never have notes as good as this. It was devastating. I can't describe it to you. I was totally devastated and he was serious. He really didn't look at the names and he thought it was somebody else certificate.

Employment

I worked and I was offered a job in Physical Chemical Institute before I ever graduated. They hired me before I was ever on the job market. I worked at RETNA for two years. It was a wonderful group of people. We did all the tests for the medical clinic. Dialysis, all these tests that had to be accurate because peoples lives were at stake and there was such... my learning disability gets less active when I feel supported and have people with me this stuff doesn't come up as much. It is so interesting. Then I came to [the United States] and worked for six years at Yale doing medical research.

I came to Yale because my sister and brother in law were teaching at Yale. I did medical research for six years and I did work in Gynecology and anesthesia and laboratories very interesting stuff. I also got involved with after school programs at the University and I really realized I was not interested in people in test tubes. From there I met [my husband].

Then I came to [a small college town] and then [my first son] was born and then I became involved in the health coop. The movement of the 70's again, there was a mixture of practical stuff. I had the two kids. I volunteered in this area as Coop. We started this trucking business, which I founded with other colleagues and a collective. A coop I did that for 12 years. I wanted to learn more and so I left there and got a job and went to grad school. That was a difficult step because all these points of can I do, can I not, do I have a brain, and how does it function.

Daily Living

When I start cleaning up a messy room its messier at the end then at the beginning. When I do household work I will start something, do it and begin with

something else it extremely difficult for me. Where do I put this piece of paper? It could be [filed] in classes. It could be under workshops or it could be in seminars. I stick it there and another day I stick it here. I hired an assistant to help me organize my house and one time my assistant said “Kansas you just started the third thing “. Yeah, I cannot help it. My assistant and I wrote once this goes here, this goes there, this goes here and then I’m fine. If people can break it down for me then I can do it, but I cannot do the breakdown.

I needed a boss who would mentor me and explain things. At work there was stuff always lacking somewhere, it was chaotic. I got through it with sheer determination and great personal sacrifices. There is no doubt in my mind it was a mess. I was like what am I doing here? It was very clear to me that it wasn’t me but as soon as I was clear that it wasn’t me the imposter syndrome would come out, then the disability issues kick in and now you hit bottom but you really hit bottom. It is very clear to me. I know I cannot do something but it doesn’t matter how I feel.

I will have work that needs to get done students waiting for me to supervise them or classes that I have to teach. Other people can get prepared in a half an hour. Yet it will take me a whole day because it takes me a whole day it is nearly impossible for me to do it all the different things that need to be done. You don’t get extra time there is always a deadline. I cannot think in a logical, linear way to develop something it is impossible. I love history, I can understand the linear progression, but that’s a time sequence. It’s not the type of sequence that is in my head that I needed to do my job. I also have a great difficulty with details.

Things can get very confusing for me it's from keeping appointments to keeping track of all the different projects and jobs I need to do. I start one thing and five minutes later I'm at the third thing and I have forgotten what I did the first time. Really keeping track of stuff is not easy for me. I am always at the end stage I have a difficult time doing what needs to be done in order to get there a project complete. It all goes into a black hole. At first it feels like nothing because I'm not aware that I am getting lost and then I am lost, confused and I say oh shit. I feel discouraged, I feel overwhelmed and tired. I walk away from it. There is no doubt about it.

I remember I have had bouts with depression the only way I can get through this is I reach out to spirit. I tell myself that I am more than that, I am connected, that I am of service, and that I have a task to do. Having to break it all down like this makes the task a little more difficult, but this is a learning tool to get through. You really have to have foresight, to be able to understand what you are walking into. It can be totally interesting however; no one really has any idea of what it feels like for people with learning disabilities. It is hard, tiring and difficult and I spend much more time completing projects then most people. This is work, it is personal, and it is social. Everyone tells me if you do this right away, you wouldn't lose all this time. It's true, if I could I would.

As a mother you just have to do it the weight of responsibilities is quite heavy. For me kitchens were easier to focus on because they are quite contained. Everything has a place and a place for everything. I think what makes it easy for me is that in some places I can become overwhelmed and in other place I can overcome. Now that I have developed my spirituality I call and spirit and say I need help here.

I think that learning disabilities really plays into the negative self-fulfilling prophecies. That connection for me is vital although I know it, it still gets me because I can't do A, B or C. It doesn't get me that often. I know I have my spirituality and sometimes it can be lagging and that when the connection is not strong enough. Sometimes I fall off the wagon, but again that is learning to manage it. The meaning of it is that they are always together and as long as I can see myself connected to the next person we are in this together. I think part of what the disability has done to people has isolated me out so I couldn't see the connectedness because there was a wall and I wasn't good enough so how could I really reach out if I can work on this basic belief of mine that I am good enough and I can feel connected—that's the basic lesson of all of this.

It's a spiritual principle of connectedness that is linked with compassion. Connected to being awake. The tools for me to do my spiritual practice and take care of myself and to be awake and also to learn about disabilities, there are other things to learn about. I am very aware---where I send people, what are the support services, so I just don't blah, blah, but I get people in the right direction so I know where they get counseling and get accommodated and I know where they can make a phone call and I can say where do I send this person and that. This is an obligation I have as a teacher and I feel even more committed to it than the LD for myself. So um those are the tools, which I am very committed to. So… The learning disability leads to anxiety, I have anxiety. You never know what you are going to miss. What money you have lost. Or what money will be taken from you because you missed something. It is all this larger circle of life and I am in a cycle. I might be a spec, one does not exclude the other and that you know if learning disability is here it is one part of me. It is not who I am, I am spirit always and I am learning to be

human and deal with this crap, it is like the school of learning. Without the counseling I don’t know when I would have gotten ready.

When I was diagnosed with the cancer I was depressed for a year and a half. I was already in the third stage but I was ready to fight. I wanted to live. I had gone through all these processes in my funk. I came out and I embraced life and whatever was coming as a teaching that is what helped me.

It means it is one more learning tool for me. I think what the interview has done is made it clearer and brought me to a connection with my spiritual path and made it much, um you know put it all together like making a package.

Self as Helper

I think I have an easier time recognizing people with disabilities. It’s like recognizing myself in so many ways. It’s a compassionate thing. All I can do is role model I can’t change anyone. I will ask them privately about their writing and experience and send them to the writing center. I have sent several students to be tested over the last twenty-five years and support them in the testing and the outcome. I see myself as a role model. I see myself living my life as aware and as being in the moment as best I can. If I am really awake and in the moment I notice what is going on. The bottom line is to discern what am I to do here. Sometimes I am not to do anything; sometimes I am to ask a question or to interrupt. That changes because if I just help I could be disrespectful. That is why this is so incredibly important for me to be awake in the world and that is not always that easy. If I rush through the day and go from A to B that doesn't make me very awake. It comes back again to that spiritual discipline. To be awake, to be a learner and to say I can.

I have an interest in working with individual students at my job then working with students in the classroom. Seeing a student eight to ten hours a day helps you to get to know them really well and there were several occasions where I really questioned someone who I felt wasn't doing well and I would say ninety percent of the cases I was right and very helpful and ten percent it was a bad guess. Before I would ask the question I would contemplate that quite a lot and ask for guidance on what to do and in many cases students went for help and got better.

Self-Accommodations

What is it for me now? I can own it now I don't have to identify with it. It is a really freeing experience to be able to own it and not be it. It is one thing and I can laugh and joke about it. I have a LD and I am not it! That is very freeing. I have learned that I have to hire an assistant to help me. Once it is set up it is usually easier to do. This is also a letting go to give in to know that you need help. Once you give in to the help people have helped me. I know I can’t do it myself. Now I hire people to help with the computers, the house, writing and it’s cleaner, and more organized in here. I can’t do it. I cannot see “a” is this and “b” is that. That is clearly a disability.

Once the disability loses it potency it just becomes another learning and I just do it. It doesn’t mean I’m still not afraid or don’t feel inadequate, but I can recognize it as a learning you know and once I get into the despair I know I have to practice my spiritual connection. So I think that is the big learning for me.

Nebraska

My family makeup my mom, my dad and myself it was just the three of us my mother is Korean. I was actually born in Korea; my father is a white man from St Paul,

Minnesota and for a really short while my grandmother was with us. When I was like six until I was like eight. My mom's mom she came and I learned a little bit of Korean. My mom knew I was really smart academically and for me being Korean she really pushed me. I remember coming home with all A's and an A- and she was like good job but next time get a 4.0. I was like where is my praise? The other kids get money. What do I get for all of this? She noticed that I use to like just be into like (several) things all at the same time. I think that used to frustrate her. Why can't you finish a project? Why can't you do this that and the other? I would start something up and then go over here to do something else, the whole process of cleaning my room was an all day project because once I started I found things I had to deal with and you know I had to make something to put things away in. I still feel that way actually. But its my own house now not my mothers. My dad used to say I was an airhead. I used to forget I get triggered when called stupid I get angry, sad and I will cry.

My peer groups, especially after we moved was still a working class neighborhood but it was primarily white and the other neighborhood was poor social working class and when we moved in that neighborhood I would have a friend here and there, but I was growing up in a space where I was like the only person of color. On occasion there were a couple of incidents I don't even remember who they were, these white boys called me a gook or you know I remember one occasion they were acting like they had a machine gun. That was interesting, being that I was one of two Asian kids in the school I didn't physically get picked on. There was one girl that actually picked on my friends more than me but one time challenging her to a fight after school and she never showed up. I was very happy. There were no people of color. I think there are times

when I didn't realize I was a person of color. I did but I didn't. I would go home and my mom was Korean or whatever but it was one of those things interacting on a day-to-day basis out of elementary school where people would tease me around race. In HS people don't do that as much and so I would just forget. I very much so had been raised white because of the spaces I had grown up in. Sometimes I would just forget.

Elementary School

Vague recollections of school then, but I don't remember any of my teachers the only thing I remember going on at school which is a long story is there was a track and field day at the school and the competition, something about running. I remember we had to run X number of laps around this thing and I thought that I was doing really well, could have sworn I won and finished all of my laps ahead of everyone. I feel like I would have known if people were ahead of me that I got done and like yeah for me. I was told I miscounted my laps and had one more lap to go. I wasn't sure if I miscounted them or not. I didn't know. At that point I didn't argue it because I wasn't sure. Wouldn't I know if I were running and people were ahead of me?

I don't remember anything about the [classroom] I think for me it was a little traumatic. I remember when I first got to my new school; they had us at this table and told us put our hands on our desk so you could not count on your desk. I don't know how stupid that is. Apply mild pressure to your fingers without moving them. Yeah I'm like I'm still counting with my fingers and I still don't know my times tables and I don't today. What does that do?

I learned to be very good at getting stuff done. It was more just like my behavior where I was up and about bothering other people and you know maybe at that point was

when I started helping folks. I would be like I'm all done. The teacher was probably figuring out what to do with me and say go help other people instead of walking around bothering them; you have this option or that option. So I definitely remember getting a point to where I was done my class work and not having anything to do. I used to get in trouble, or spoken to a lot because every single time we had parent teacher conferences my mother would come back and say your teachers think your smart but all you do is get out of your chair and talk to people. Every single day all your doing is getting out of your chair and talking to people and they can't have you doing this all the time, its disrupting everyone. The teachers couldn't do anything about it, they were trying to but its not like I wasn't doing my work. I was doing my work and burning through it and then I was bored so I would get up and go talk to people and be running around. I think about that situation, too.

I have dreams, not very often, but occasionally I have dreams of like I am in between classes and go to my locker and can't remember the combination, I can't find my class like really strange dreams because, I know I forgot my combination a couple of different times where I have just went my locker and didn't know how to get into it anymore. I am there turning the thing around and nothing is happening. So that left a mark with me somewhere in my soul that I have this random dream about it every now and again.

I think it is about being in a transition space between um elementary school and middle school and there was a point when all of the politics were given to children to see if they should be in gifted talented programs and I actually always thought that I was one of the smart kids but my teacher totally overlooked me and I didn't take the test, went to

middle school and when I got to middle school they realized I was totally misplaced in the wrong space and ended up pulling me from that and ended up putting me in the honors program at the school. They saw the way that I tested and I always tested really well. I think that is one of the plus sides of ADD. But my middle school teacher made the assumption that you know I wasn't smart because I remember one time spelling Minnesota wrong on a spelling test because I was very sure that I had remembered the way and she fricking confused us by giving us all this extra information and it was just too much to take in. You know? She should have just let me spell Minnesota and leave out all the sota, with the t and not the d and I got it totally wrong. So you know I think about situations like that where being a pretty smart young person and just being overlooked.

I feel like I had really good support as a kid, at least on a family level specifically from my mom. I remember I can see our basement in the house and being down there with my mom. I know our washer and dryer are down there. I think she was doing laundry. I was like remember when I told you about this and started crying and my mom was like what's wrong and I finally told her that I did the hole in the fence and I got caught. She just gave me a hug and was like its okay because I don't know that she said anything at that point, but I think she knew I already beat myself up about it though. I didn't need to be punished in any way shape or form. She just let it be. She was a really big support. I mean more than anything.

I had a bad self esteem growing up I think I also, it seems like it conflicts but I think it can exist at the same time I also thought really highly of myself. Perhaps it was public versus private. I really thought that I was amazing and I didn't understand why the

world wasn't seeing it and when I think of helping people with the Jesus complex thing, that's how I identify it I really just think its a piece of me getting so out of control with myself. I think I'm so much better than folks that I'm going to save them or help them. I remember having to write numbers for extra credit, they are teaching you repetitive math. They would give us a ten by ten grid and for extra credit you could write one, two, three, four, all the way to a hundred and then when you get done you could write a new sheet one hundred and one all the way to like two hundred. Yeah that was our extra credit. I know that was extra credit at a working class school and it was all about you only get the extra credit it you did it correctly and no mistakes and you couldn't go down the page. I would try to go down and do all the ones, all the twos and go back and then fill them in. They wanted you to learn to do the task as assigned, really boring and do it correctly.

My fifth grade teacher the one that thought I didn't need to take the honors test. I really thought she was very supportive, she thought I was a really great student. I started the young astronaut club in our school you know with her help as a teacher so I felt very supported by her until the point I got to middle school and realized she denied me the opportunity to take that test. I didn't understand that at all. I even knew like when those kids had gone to take it and stuff. I didn't understand it at the time but by the time I got to middle school and they were like oh you are in the wrong place you have to go do some creative thing, which is really lucky for me cause had I been stuck in the class where I had to sit for a few days and work shit out I don't think I would have been successful at all because they were reading books and having lectures and when I went to the honors class I remember sitting there the first day and the kids were all over doing different

things and the teacher Mrs. Ennis was like me and this other kid who had similar things happen to him and had been overlooked she was like what we are doing today is you have to go outside and find a flower and you have to give it a name and tell us all about it.

High School

Way more interesting! Which is really shitty and sad for the other kids its not fair to them. But... So yeah and from that point on I was in the honors program so I was getting all of this amazing support, but in the younger years like I don't know I always felt pretty supported by them. The things they would say I could pull out my records and show you how it would say Nebraska talks too much in class and she is not reaching her full potential so around and around and around which is the message I got. I was scoring at the college level at whatever crappy test we had to take by the time I was in 6th grade I think. On some of it, not all of it, which is funny because I can’t even, read a book now. I used to read a lot more. As I got older and older there was no reason to. It was the time when reading transitioned from having fun to studying and I liked having fun but I didn't need to study so I stopped reading. I had a couple of friends. Um, again I was really lucky to get into the honors classes cause everyone in them was as much of a dork as I was. I was sort of the cool kid in that space. Yeah. Its like I was the kid everyone would step to within my realm and so you know school wide it made me almost normal. Almost. I remember I met this girl. We were sitting in alphabetical order I was very interested in getting to know her. Looking back she is probably the first woman I had a crush on. So I was very very interested in getting to know all about her. We became best friends and were friends all through HS and then in turn I became friends with her other best friend

and yeah they were the ones I stole the car with. It wasn't exactly stolen, it belonged to [my friends] family but we took it for a much longer ride than I would be taking my mom's car for. I didn't have friends and then you know like the kids that were in my classes some of us had relationships outside the school. We were pretty much really friendly in those places, it wasn't like in elementary school where you went to school and kids picked on you. If kids picked on me they were outside of my class. So again being really lucky to be in this safe environment with all the other nerds.

Yes. I was the only person of color in my school just about. Strange. Um, I actually went through there one time and counted just to see how many folks of color I could find and I think I found like five. I don't know. In my graduating class there was not a single African American person. A lot of Catholics there I grew up in a very rural area. My graduating class was somewhere in the neighborhood of 650 people and not only was I one of the only people of color a lot of them were blond and German, something very white.

Back in the day the neighbors used to have lots of fireworks at their house, their dad worked for a fireworks company and um we would just make all sorts of really not smart decisions when it came to fireworks. Like nearly blowing my hands off and you know just holding on to M80's and lighting them, dumping the gum powder out of different things, stuff like that. That's also around the time I learned to break into houses. I also thought if I didn't make it in the real world I would become a criminal. It’s still a possibility. I would. All the things I can do break into places, I bet I could learn how to hot wire cars, break into cars, I could steal stuff like mad, and those are all of my talents. I think the problem is excitement. The shoplifting isn't so much excitement.

For me when I was younger I just thought people were so stupid and I could go into a craft store and take something and it would be so easy. I used to make the tiny little beads you give your friend, so I would go to a craft store with a package or two in my hand, walk around and put a package back, just stupid little things like that and I'm thinking how dumb could these people be? But the other stuff like the fireworks, and breaking into things was cleverness, too. It was like wow look how smart I am. Sometimes it was just about like breaking into each other’s houses just to test ourselves. Sometimes I would have to break into my house because I would forget my keys. Finding out glass doors aren't very secure. A lot of times it was just that and sometimes its like once I learned how I would just show off to people. Like wow look at what I can do. Things that are really exciting for example. Like when I got a motorcycle when I was younger. I've had dreams about it since so it is like the reality of when it happened and all these dreams reminiscing about all these exciting things but when I was about twelve or thirteen, maybe sixteen, although I did drive my first car when I was thirteen. My parents never should have taught me to drive then I would just take their car whenever they were gone and drive it around the neighborhood just to show that I could.

As I got older just forgetting things that were really important as you get into HS and then into college I think you start being given more responsibility and more things are being placed on you. Writing down assignments somewhere and it being gone until I got to class and it was due and basically having to learn to really schmooze people because I was constantly missing things, something is due, an appointment or whatever kind of thing.

College

My undergrad I was in women in literature class, the books were books I don't like to read and I remember on one occasion writing a paper by going through a book and finding the missing pieces. Looking at the paragraphs, title of the chapter and then putting that into a paper and my professor I lost a couple of points because I had some spelling mistakes or whatever. I don't proofread anything and but still got a really amazing score, a ninety-eight and I was like this is the most amazing thinking. The professor said he hadn't seen a lot of students pull this kind of stuff out of their readings.

I remember in college actually one of times, it was my last quarter there and for my English class, I can't recall what class it was, for one of my classes I totally like missed our final on a given day. So I missed it. Things like that where things passed me right and left. And then you know I had to have skills to be able to go back and somehow work it out and the professor let me take the final which was great because I needed the class to graduate.

Even into adulthood stuff it’s like blurting stuff out like I remember a couple of different occasions doing that in class. Saying something and then just going into a shell. My little shell. I am in here and hoping nobody heard it. They are going to pretend they didn't hear it and move on. I am to the point now where after being told so many times to do something you start to catch yourself on it. So there are times when I do it and catch myself after the fact.

Employment

I worked in the group home for five years, a series of group homes with this company and then I came here and worked doing training and development through

auxiliary services. We did [staff training] of all of the [departments]. That was good, challenging because with the new staff orientation, with all of the training we did the required training. After that job I started working back in Utah before I came here I went to the summer camp and volunteered there and that was huge for me putting me in the direction of where my career would go I had my undergrad in Psychology. I didn't go into that because my grads were bad and I didn't think I could get into grad school which I am glad I didn't go that way it all works out. I went into Psychology because I wanted to specifically work with adult victims of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.

Right now I'm working with an organization I'm not even sure that its the primary responsibility of the position that I have but I made it my responsibly really to do the three core pieces: to educate, liberate and empower and so in doing that I think it becomes very, very, very important for me to actually be invested in the growth of every young person I work with. When I run the summer programs doing the same thing, really just trying to make a difference in peoples lives. Before I worked with them I worked for a company in a group home. This group home setting for people with developmental disabilities and it’s amazing to me because they always need workers. Nobody wants to do it and for me that was I haven't had a lot of jobs but out of the different things I have done it was one of the most important things I have done Again just going in and supporting folks. You know? Just being someone to chill out with people.

I worked as a behavior specialist with them. I quit that job after two years because and went back to working as staff because I felt like I wasn't helping people. I'm writing these stupid behavior modification plans and the staff that worked there weren't implementing them correctly anyway you know and it was all kinds of load of crap. I

totally forgotten to return a call and I have been trying to get better about checking my voicemail and doing something about it. As I'm saying this I remember I have paper folded up inside of my bag where I wrote down all my voicemails and didn't call people back. I will just do stuff like that. It’s not that important to me. In the moment if things are important and right there I do them and I had to get a shit load of stuff out today before I left work, which is why I was a little late. In the span of working on it way too late, in the span of an hour I put together acceptance packets for ten delegates that are going to my summer camp, got them all posted and in the mail and also returned fifteen calls.

Deadlines, it might be as simple as I am horrible about getting stuff together or job searching. I am unable on some level to do the sorting process to get everything sorted out. I will take one thing back and then find something else. It just gets overwhelming to me and I can’t deal with it anymore. That was the same thing when I was younger, one little thing would stop me. I would be cleaning my room and one time I would clean my room and find a video game and deciding it didn't work so I would get a screwdriver and.....

It takes me a whole day to make my room.... It takes me a whole day to clean anything. The carpets were dirty the other day so I went through the process of getting everything off the floor; spend three and a half hours in this space. I do stuff and become hyper focused like super meticulous, which slows me down. In the space of my room to get it really clean. I think about my room right now and it would take more than a day. I have a pile of stuff I can’t seem to get through.

Daily Living

I have some clothes. You know at this point I have week's worth of laundry; most of my laundry is in the laundry basket not all of it. But what starts to slow me down is I have laundry left over from last time. The whole idea of putting that away stops me. When I do my own laundry my goal is to do it until it's done because if anything remains I'm fucked. I leave the kitchen spotless every time I make a meal, but if there is stuff piled up in there I can't deal with all of it and more shit comes and more. My day is probably someone else hour, but they won't clean the room as well as I want it. Like even and I'm trying to break out of this maybe this is a little obsessive behavior but when I put away the dish washer I get really upset when I get to the silverware, again its like when I load the dishwasher I do it very intentionally and make sure all the plates are together so that when I unload it I can grab all the plates. The silverware doesn't do that. And when I put it away I need all the big forks this way and all of it done carefully and whatever. I have been trying to stop doing that because it takes too long. Like there is no function for it other than it makes me happy. So but yeah and just the thought of at first looking at the silverware I have to get past this moment of just take out all the knives first and then I do them and then I go on to the spoons. There is something about trying to organize stuff. I like to organize thing. I prefer things clean and organized and nice which is why I can't do it, it's too much sometimes just sort of overwhelmed like I just want to give up which sometimes I do. It doesn't necessarily make me physically tired. I will get totally disinterested. If I have that spark where I feel like cleaning stuff I have to go with it because I know it wont last long and when I hit the point that I'm done which is unfortunate because a lot of times what will happen is I blow things up before I clean up.

A lot of times I blow things up and lose interest and everything is extra mess up and I'm screwed. It’s awful. Yeah when I do things I do them to extremes, even to clean the sink takes me a long time because I have to get a SOS pad and really clean it. It’s hard for me to rinse it out and just be done. It takes more time. As far as you know getting tired while cleaning my room I know as a kid um I don't remember much but my mom making comments about why does this take me all day and every time I tell you to clean your room you end up playing with things and I just found there were more interesting things to do.

That little piece of not having the kids interest met is stifling and takes away from a persons feeling. I don't know how many times that happen to someone throughout their lives. There was my mom she was always really good about treating me like you would treat a grownup, like an adult even when I was a baby and smaller I would ask her a lot of questions even when she was doing laundry or something and it would get to the point where I was just asking and asking and asking where she would try sometimes to go back to what she was doing and ignore me. She had been so attentive for so long that I would grab her by the face and be like look at me I'm talking to you!

Even consistency like it’s really unfortunate because as people I don't think we have been taught to listen to other people or been taught to. I like to believe that my behavior is very consistent because it is very open and honest. If you are completely open and honest you are just being yourself and I think your behavior is going to be consistent. That is the thing about disabilities so many people grow up in families where the parents are able bodied and the child has a disability so there is no connection. I even think growing up with LD when you try to have a connection I think the biggest thing for

people with disabilities is they grow up places where they don't have the same type of support. It's real important to have that support system. The reason people treat young people the way they do I believe is because its easier for them, its not about the young people or their best interests its about the best interests for the parents.

I think each of us is genius and I for a little while I was actually wearing this necklace with the little beads and letters on them and it said I'm a fucking genius and people would read it and think that I was really cocky and my response to that was no because we all are and really recognizing and celebrating that. Each of us has genius; we just don't have the space to let that out. You know space to explore that genius and show it to people around us. And so I think that is a piece of it.

I mean for me I feel like I can pick out the things that had to do with disabilities because they are things that trigger me in a very different kind of way. Things around race piss me off and make me fired off. Like what is your problem? Things around gender it is such a big part of my life. Since I was small I remember my mom’s friend being like is that your little boy and she said no it’s my little girl and they are talking in Korean and I would say something back to them in Korean and they would feel all stupid. So it’s just been such a part of my life it doesn't even make a flag go up half mass for me. The things around ability are the things that make me feel sad and the things that can make me feel stupid. One little comment or you know a certain way of being teased will make me come into myself and I can trace that back to stuff around ability. So you know because my dad would say something without any malicious intent for me to hear from someone you are being so dumb it makes me feel horrible.

My dad has issues around ability too though. We talk about this now and I have told him its not okay the things that happened and getting to a point in the conversation where I was able to tell him you do stupid stuff like that, too. My dad is bi polar and schizophrenic and also a fucking space cadet. I mean he has got ADD, a lot of stuff I share. I get a lot of my systematic behavior from him. However you want to name it and so in a way and just hearing stories from him he was just totally repeating behavior he learned from his Dad.

I am terribly optimistic as well. I think optimism is an incredible gift to have. Its funny cause a lot of people think optimism is believing things are always going to be peachy which is not the case but it’s always giving things the benefit of the doubt. Optimism in my personal life translates to the people around me and giving them the benefit of the doubt and having belief in them. So that's a big piece of it. I like to be optimistic and when I tell people that they say they are not a pessimist they are just realists. I'm like no no no, realism is what optimism and pessimism are based on. There is a real event period and hopefully everyone can see that if not you may be a little delusional which is a whole another set of problems, but based on this given reality you either are going to have a response where you have its all about me or you have a response where you are like wow that person is screwed up.

Savannah

I am a 52-year-old African American female, lesbian, in a committed relationship born in an urban city with a mother and father an older brother and a younger sister. As far as I know there is no one with LD in my family that has been diagnosed before me.

There have been since me. As a matter of fact most of my nieces and nephews have LD, but not my brothers and sisters or my mother or father.

Elementary School

I hated every minute of school when I was in school. I was not diagnosed until I was 18. School was pretty hard for me. I was always in the top groups because my mother insisted on it. If there was a language in the third grade I got the language or math or what have you. Then I had to make these things up at summer school because I couldn't catch up with my classmates. I went through school always going to summer school. School was 12 months a year and you got your report card. Whatever you got your D or F in you took it in summer school and it became a way of life up until the 12th grade when um I quit school and decided I had enough. I couldn't read but I could learn because I could speak French and I could memorize things but when it came to writing or reading things I couldn't do it and um you know I had people helping me, I was tutored all the time, my parents helped me, my brothers helped me and my younger sisters, too. I couldn't pass the test unless I took an oral exam I would have had all failing grades in high school.

In 11th grade I got fed up when I turned 16 and decided I had enough. I quit. At 16 you could in [the city] so I did and I came home on that Friday and said I wasn't going back and my mother said okay get a job and I decided that Monday I would go back to school.

In first grade I think that is when I realized there was something different about the way I learned and the teacher didn’t know either. I loved words. I always had to redo my math I would day-dream in math and wasn’t interested. I was able to read in 2nd grade

because the teacher had me echo the words, although the teacher was helpful with the reading she had and attitude around my name. The teacher had me copy the dictionary because she said my name was spelled incorrect. I took a French test passed it and I was to go into a special program however, I was in the lowest track and this track was closed to languages and college courses. By the eighth grade I was on the college track and I could learn French because of my memory. However, I still couldn't read or write.

High School

I did my homework with my older brother who had stayed back. When I was younger I never made excuses I didn't know that I had a learning disability so I didn't use it as an excuse. I feel labeling kids special education gives them excuses. Kids grow into expectations people set for them I went to a school that was predominately white and I always learned that you have to do twice as much to be recognized. I just figured it was all part of the whole syndrome. I never really understood there could be something a miss I graduated from high school functionally illiterate and didn't even know it. I have a problem counting, I can't spell, and I am not going to be able to read what I wrote. I couldn't read [a sewing] pattern but I could figure out how to do it, I could explain anything. It wasn't enough that I was in the GA classes, when I was tested I tested high on the IQ test it was like why didn't you learn. Having the diagnosis was a big relief to know that my brain was just wired different. There is something wrong with me and we can't do anything to fix it.

According to statistics I should not be where I am now I am slower then most people, I will rarely get something done right the first time, I have to work harder, thing aren't easy for me, it can be frustrating, and it makes me angry. I know I think what it

means is that I'm very rarely going to get something the first time. It took me three times to get my drivers license. I always have to do it twice. I have to work hard or I will not be successful something might come easy to somebody else but not easy to me. It’s a fact of life and that can be frustrating. It can make me very angry. If I have an application put in front of me at work to fill out for a child and they say can you fill this out right now? No. Well I need it right now. I can't do it right now and then the frustration in me starts to build.

People see me as extremely organized but don’t know what I go through day by day. Things really bother me I’m so disorganized I can’t find things right in front of me the more I look the more frustrated I get. With writing what really irked me is that I couldn’t find my mistakes. I wouldn’t know when I would leave a word out of sentences and not be able to see it. I would spell words wrong. Simple things and I couldn’t see it and it would drive me up a wall. I would sit there and read the sentences out loud and touch every word, and still get it wrong.

My editor not knowing the struggle I had just gone though would come along and read the sentence to me and say, did you mean to say the dog little on the porch? I would say doesn’t it say the little dog is on the porch. She would say no it says the dog little on the porch. I was like oh that kind of thing. It wasn’t in an annoying way that she did it, it was just the way I received it because I wanted it to be right, to be perfect. Most of the time I feel really frustrated, can’t read a clock. [I am] not usually frustrated but [my temperament] can move to highly frustrated when things get busy or several things are happening at once.

My frustrations probably peak a lot faster than somebody without a disability because I know I have problems reading a calendar. When I am tired I stutter, I can't talk, and I can't read.[My teacher] said its not that you don't read or write it's that you don't do it well, what you write is not standard English. This was the first time I ever heard of that, but I do write in Ebonics, [my writing] was very poor. My teacher said my main issue was spelling. I had no phonics, in the way I learned to read. She helped me see I had the ability to write poetry and taught me about white space and so I felt okay and she helped me apply to colleges.

College

I applied to three [colleges] and got accepted to all three. I chose catholic colleges because I was a person of color I was eligible for good scholarships. The college that gave me the most money was the one I went to. It was far from home and it was the first time I encounter racism the professor was racist. This professor said, "I don't intend to pass any niggers especially women niggers so why would think you would do anything better." Part of me I think I held the faculty responsible. Not because I wasn't learning, it was the way I was seen as a person of color. There were many people that were great support group people would write for me.

I found out there are people who type for a living and all I have to do is pay them. I always worked so I had money. I would pay people to type my papers. I started doing that when I was in college. It started with my brother actually. I would send him stuff, I would dictate to him and he would type it. That got me through the first year of [A college] and when I went to the [E college] I got a roommate that needed money and she typed my papers for me and then when I went to [Orlando] I found a student who needed

money and typed my papers for me and my mother typed them for me when I was at [C college] and [my partner] started typing for me.

Sometimes I would give them a draft, read it to them and I was always present. They couldn't read what I had written. Sometimes I would just dictate straight out. I learned to do outlining. I got involved with the writers project and that was a huge change in my life in terms of the way I wrote and talked. I learned there was a process to doing this. You just don't write the paper you edit it. You know there is a draft one where you can do research, there is outlining, there is da da da. When I started doing that I remember sitting in my study thinking I am just going to write the paper. I had to do a twenty-page paper. I am just going to write and 58 pages later I went I can do this and then I started getting rid of things I didn't need and going through the whole process. I found out I could do all of it myself except for the final editing. That was huge.

I went back to school and got my Master degree as a reading specialist. So I have 2 degrees, I have a K-8 elementary certificate and a K-12 reading certificate. I need to be certified every five years in both of those. So I think what I was feeling is that I was limited to reading and writing and even though I am teaching some math.

Employment

I worked in a bank that was a joke I was the only one who would own my mistakes when [the draw] didn’t balance. I couldn’t keep up with all the different requirements. From then on I worked in places that did not require writing. Worked in a job where PO’S took me twice as long to do I think what that taught me was even if you have a learning disability and you make a lots of goofs and mistakes if you own them people can accept that its when you don’t own it and are not honest that people have

problems with it. It taught me to be forthright. Whenever I worked in the stores I usually take jobs that were on the floor other than cash register. I worked at KMART and they wanted me to be a store supervisor. I found this out because I was one of the only people who had a college degree and qualified. I got a job [in a small town] I was determined to stay here. I found someone to edit my work and my application to the school. Other teachers would correct my letters and my newsletters. I was hired as a curriculum coordinator because I could write curriculum but I always had an editor I started teaching in 1977.

There are many things I wouldn't do. I wouldn't take a principal job, I wouldn't take a secretaries job or work in a kitchen. You know? There's lots of things unless it came down to nothing else I wouldn't do. I think we all have paths we fit best on and when you take the wrong path so to speak, the path that is counter to where your comfort level is then you end up doing nothing. People with learning disabilities get stuck and sometimes they need a push to get unstuck they have to take risks and have practice. I was told I couldn’t be a teacher because I couldn’t read or write should that stop me.

Daily Living

Well, I would say the first thing doing this interview has done is made me aware of the fact of how much my learning disabilities doesn't bring fear in my life. I don't think about it. I just sort of move around and compensate, an example is I can't read a calendar if its not printed up a certain way and the calendar that I have in my classroom I thought there was another week of school and there's not. There are four days left. Not twelve days so now I'm scurrying around to get things done. What I should have done is say to my colleagues like I usually do is let me know when the end is coming. My thinking

when I'm talking is very disorganized. I always thought when I say something its well thought out and its organized and I go from point A to point B, etc. What I'm learning I guess is that I might go from point A to point B but I skipped point A to point one into three, four and when I leave here I go what about this, what about that and this. I realized I do that all the time so that my thinking is not as clear and organized as I thought it was. I think that has come out and the other thing that I think has come out is that I guess I didn't realize how pervasive having a disability is. I think of it as a reading and writing disability. One doesn't have anything to do with it.

After talking about this I go home and realize I'm disconnected here and there and I'm fumbling around here and I have to really stop and think okay regroup get yourself together and go through the whole process again which is exactly what I have to do for writing and reading. You know? Just so I'm not running around the house having to get lunch and iron and make supper and do dishes and take a bath and you know all at the same time rather than I have a very systematic life. I come in the house, I do this and this and I have to stick to that for the most part or nothing gets done. So I realize that also um.

Well or what I do is if I don't follow A to B then C to D then I'm doing ABCDE all at once and you know a good example is when I clean house I usually start in the bedroom okay and then I will do the bathroom upstairs and then my study and the hallway. It makes logical sense to do it that way. But if I go downstairs because the phone rings or something I might clean the downstairs bathroom and forget to go back upstairs and forget to clean the rest of the bedroom which you know I might clean the upstairs bathroom but I might forget my study you know and by Wednesday Dallas will say did you clean such and such and I'm like hmm I think so, but I have no idea. (Laughs)

Something interrupts me that I have to really be conscious and maybe everybody is but I feel like I have to be really conscious of what are you doing, where are you, where did you stop and where do you need to go next.

My relationship is all about communication we had to work through some things and now its about communication and we went to a communication specialist um I think it was the second year we were together and learned how to talk to each other and once we got around that um its something we have to work on all the time and I think it is okay. [My partner] comes from a very different background than I do. She never had to want for anything. She was not abused, never grew up in the city, both parents paid for college, they had a house on the lake.

I have been married to someone who didn't help me at all in any way shape or form I couldn't be with somebody who didn't accept me on that level. There are some things that she does. She can’t hang pictures and I can. She edits my papers. I have to be with somebody who can help its not going away. Whoever you live with has to learn to deal with that. You need to accept the help that they can give you.

Anything that has to do with paper and pencil she checked any cards or emails that I sent. You learn. I have no secrets from my partner because I am not going to send a card to someone that she hasn't read. (Laughs) Keeps me honest, very honest! For years and years I bounced my checkbooks. I realized there are people in the bank; let’s call customer service. Lets find out what they do. One of the things they will do is balance your checkbook for you. If you go in and say I am learning disabled I cant work with numbers can you help me they are more than willing for free if you go to the right bank.

So I took advantage of those services for years and then I got to the point about five years ago where I said I should be able to do this and then I got this thing called a calculator.

I did banking on line, which was an absolute disaster because you still transpose numbers. A year ago I decided if I only pay bills once a month I am only entering numbers once a month and don't do it when you're tired. You have less opportunity to make a mistake. It worked! I didn't bounce anything. (Laughs) and when I used to get in trouble with the bank before, not get in trouble because they were very nice, Savannah you bounced another check the guy would sit there with his legal pad and we would sit and go through every single entry and find the ones that were transposed, the subtraction errors or the addition ones, pages and pages of we have to go back. We have to find a hundred dollars where it should have been written one thousand two hundred dollars. (Laughs)

Right now my tax lady is very very ill. She hasn't done my taxes for two and a half years, which is okay because I don't owe anything. I'm in the process now of trying to find another tax person and this was my Girl Scout leader when I was in 8th grade. I have known her all those years and I really trust her and um the whole idea of having to disclose this information to somebody new and have them fill in the blanks with things I forgot to fill in she will say Savannah didn't you buy such and such and I will say oh yeah I have to retrain someone, it must be like that for someone who is in a relationship with someone they can trust the person.

Self as Helper

Always finding somebody you can train and trust. It’s a scary situation. I will probably go with the one [my partner] goes with because she is probably going to have to

check my taxes now, before I could give them to Mary and know that it would be done right .Its not a comfortable situation. The minister part has been okay because most of the writing you do is for yourself. Occasionally more often than I expected people will ask for a sermon and what I will say is I will have it ready for you in a week. I will come home and have [my partner] edit it and mail it off or email it to them. I was at a funeral last week and I wrote it up on the computer and sent a copy to the person. It is on my desk waiting to be edited.

I hated every single minute of it, right out of seminary but I loved to learn and I know I can and I want to make that love of learning transfer to somebody else. You know and whether you have difficulties or not if you love to learn and I think every person does there is a way around it so you can.

Whatever I did to help my self I took back to the classroom Kids will always have to be taken care of I make accommodations in the classroom so kids don’t have to leave Give directions several different ways I make the classroom designed to be able to work with many different levels so they all can work together in reading, math and writing. I created strategies for spelling I tell my first graders to believe you can. Believe you can do it. Never say I don’t know how to read anymore. Help kids talk about thing they can’t talk about. Grading puts people in boxes. Being left behind the greatest weeding out process. Give the kids their scores so they know how to improve so the kids can be next to other kids and feel equal. You have to figure out what you need to understand what you read. Being in education you can always spot the kids that are LD I teach mostly strategies because that's what it is. All right? I will tell them you will have to do this because your eyes are not trained. Get your finger in there, you need to take your finger

out because when you read with your finger you're not fluent okay but always giving them a reason. They need to understand why. When you understand why it’s empowering to the person and the brain to make those connections and that's what you want to do.

You want to go to a different situation. Oh yes I know a little bit here and transfer that knowledge to this. If they don't know they cant make those connections. The other thing I also tell my kids and I start young with this is um you don't have to be an expert at reading and writing. You need to be able to sign your paycheck. (Laughs) Your paycheck may be the only thing you ever write from here on out once you get out of school and you know they are looking at you. If you are working in a store or something or a gas station what are you going to write? There are many places where the computer does it all for you. You can be a manager at McDonalds pulling in an okay paycheck and never have to write a word, you just have to be able to sign a paycheck you know.

Self-Accommodations

You need to figure out your learning style, whatever that is. Once you become aware of that you can make those adjustments. I tell people right out not to put a book in front of me and expect me to read and most people respect that. I am at the point now where some of that is nervousness. I am at the point where I can volunteer to read cold and if I can’t I keep my hand down and somebody else will volunteer. I could say and I don't mind saying no, but um if they ask me to read a scripture on the spot it would be very rare other than in seminary. In the kind of church I go to where you would be asked on the spot like Savannah get up and read.

That is not happening like an African American tradition usually wouldn't happen. You might be asked before the service would you mind reading a scripture today

which would give me enough time to look at it. That happens. When I was in seminary I made sure I participated in African American worship so I could get used to doing that and what I would do is when someone was reading the service I would go to them before hand and say if you are going to call on me could you give me a heads up now. (Laughs) I remember many weeks where I would say that to somebody and they would give me a bible passage a few minutes beforehand and they would look around the room like it was spontaneous and say Savannah would you read such and such and nobody knew the difference. You have to advocate for yourself

He doesn't care if I make a mistake with the names as long as we are doing our best. Lets go with the flow here. But you do practice and even like yesterday, which was children's Sunday, and I had to thank all the parents that helped out and there were a lot of them. I know all the names but I was reading them and I didn't want to forget anybody and I had to process data I collected and make symbols and use phonetics and cause I knew I would be nervous. I wouldn't want to get up there and make an idiot of myself. Um I would have to say most of the time it can be very frustrating. Some people can multitask and can be interrupted and go back to exactly where they were. It is frustrating at times not to be able to and it's frustrating now with cell phones. People will be talking on the cell phone and talking to me and I get like blue faced annoyed. (Laughs) It's like either talk to me or talk on the phone, lets not do this all at once. Partly its because I cant figure out what you're saying. Are you talking to me or talking to them? You know and the whole idea of being able to do that is just annoying. I couldn't do it. Plus I want you to be with me when you're with me. (Laughs) It's rude. So it can be very frustrating. This time of the year at work I have to step back and the year sort of sneaks up on me its kind

of good because I have to step back and I don't get into this crazed mode, which a lot of people I work with do. There are ten things due yesterday and they haven't even got to number one and um I find if I take that step back and look around and get myself ready first I can save myself a lot of frustration and anger, which is good.

The day-to-day things are what really bother me its disorganization. Like today for example um I was entering data on a website for the kids that I work with. I knew I had to enter office data and I tried to get myself all organized. I could only make one trip to the office. Got all the kids I work with set up and what I forgot was the examples. So you know as organized as I was I still had to make another trip to the office and disturb the secretary again and you know come back and get on the website again where it closed me out. Somebody else would have gone down, knew that they had ten kids to do, got the scores, remembered them and come back. No! (Laughs) You know it takes me twenty-five minutes to get the scores and check to make sure I didn't transpose the numbers. So you know that can be a little daunting when you think you have all this time and you don't. But its like this is the way it is. You can let it get to you or you can go with the flow and one of the things. I could have kept going on for hours and obsessed about it and not been able to find it or I could go next door and find out the information. A lot of it is you got to let it go and get over it. I wouldn't work in an environment where people are not helpful. When I worked in the [city] schools they didn't want to hear that. You are a professional, you have been to school, you almost have a Masters degree you should be perfect. I'm sorry. I'm good, but I'm not perfect. You know and my imperfection in terms of disability is minor. (Laughs) You just need to help me out.

I don't think you can overcome a LD. I think you can compensate for it but not overcome it. I'm trying to think of why. When I think of overcoming something I guess I don't think you can overcome oppression either, especially if you are a person of color so I guess I have to go back to that. Um and I don't think you can overcome oppression if you are a person of color because there are two sides to it. One of the things I learned in seminary is that there is the person that is oppressed and the person who has the misunderstanding of it. Somebody has to hold those feet on those shoulders. You know? You are only oppressed when you are holding the feet and um so I think that there's dual control there. With a LD it’s not something that can ever change. You know? We can give in, compromise, we can overcome in the sense that we can make it work for us, but to overcome it is an ideal. I don't think you overcome a LD because its just always going to be there, not something that you can compromise on, not something if I do this and you do this it will disappear, its compensated for but still there.

You are only oppressed when you are holding the feet and so I think that there dual control there. With a LD it’s not something that can ever change. You know? We can give I compromise, we can overcome in the sense that we can make it work for us but to be there not something that you can compromise on, not something if I do this and you do this it will disappear, its compensated for but is still there.

Virginia

My father came over here from Jamaica via London. He was working in a tobacco field and actually he worked in Agawam too but ended up in Long Island. That’s how he met my mother. My mother was working in a wallet factory. His wife had died. So he would work and send money home to his kids in Jamaica. I remember my mother would

say that, when they met they fell in love instantly. He didn't even have a winter coat so she had to by him his first winter coat then they had my sister, and two years later they had me.

So growing up it was just me and my sister growing up basically my mother was the disciplinary, she did everything. She paid all the bills and did all this stuff. My father worked like 24 hours a day he was a workaholic. I was always close to my father and my sister was always close to my mother. So she did all the domestic stuff and I hung out in the yard with my father. So he would come home after doing all that all day at work, and then come home and work in the yard and I would help him pull the weeds up and stuff from the lawn. We would sit down under this tree when we would finish working and sit there and read the paper and do crossword puzzles and those search word things and the jumbles. So, I spent a lot of time with my father reading, he loved to read and so did I. So we would just sit and read together all the time, I was about, probably 14 or 15, my first brother came over to live with us from Jamaica, he was the oldest. So he lived with us, for, I think they all came over for about a year and lived with us until they got their jobs and settled. So one by one the three of them all came over, over the next three years. My mother just treated them like you know, they were members of the family. They were older so, but, as far as my other family, my cousins and stuff, we all lived like right around the corner from each other. We were sort of like the black sheep of the family because my mother married this poor Jamaican guy. So we were the poor ones. We had this little Nova and everyone else had Cadillac's and swimming pools in their yards and stuff and big housing.

Like I said they always stressed the importance of school. But I'm the only one who went to college. My sister didn't want to go to college she went to New York. My street where we grew up was all old white people and then they all died off. I remember growing up we always earned extra money. Then my neighborhood became mostly all black by the time I was in like junior high. I didn't really experience racism that I was aware of and my church was integrated so… Like I said, summer I went to camp, like most of the kids at my camp were from NYC and stuff.

Growing up in Salvation Army Church we had to go to New York every Friday for Friday union at the temple, which is like the big gathering of all the separate churches they met on Fridays, and they had different speakers and stuff. I was part of the New York youth band singers. I was always into plays too. I loved performing I guess. I did all the high school plays and stuff and played in the band and I was always involved in everything because I get bored easily, even now. So, I remember I went to a different activity every single day of the week. I was a part of the key club, the gospel choir, the band, and horticulture club. Whatever I could fit into my schedule I was a part of and then still after school went to the Salvation Army and participated in all that stuff. I was actually studying to become minister, so there was somebody prepping me for that. I did a lot of leadership stuff and did little mini sermons so yeah, just had to keep busy.

Elementary School

I notice that I had difficulty with school until I was probably like in junior high. Before that I was considered a smart kid, because I was in accelerated reading and stuff like that. But once I got to junior high that's when I noticed it was taking me longer to read and to understand things, like to comprehend things. Especially like, math I was

never good at math. I remember staying after school everyday with my math teacher because, whatever he went over in the class just totally went over my head. The only way I could do it is if he was sitting right there with me. So he would help me understand what he was teaching in class and then I was able to do it. They wouldn't let me go down to the regular math class, they made me stay in the accelerated math because I was in accelerated classes for all the other classes. So I remember being very frustrated with that and then staying after school in tears because I just couldn't get it.

As far as reading and stuff, I think I did well. We had those SRA's where there was this big box and you had to read the little passages and answer the questions, so you worked at your own pace. I was good at that, I just went right through to the gold, you know, really quick. So school wasn't really problematic I used to beat up the boys all the time in grade school when they were teasing the girls I would come up to them and beat them up because I was always bigger than them too. I used to always hang out with the boys too and I didn't like hanging out with the girls because they acted too prissy. So I played sports and hanging upside down on the monkey bars and stuff I used to always wear my shorts underneath my dresses. So yeah, I was always outgoing. In my neighborhood they opened up a brand new school basically were all the white kids went.

So there were complaints that all the black kids were still going to the old school which was like a broken down school. So what they did is they did the odd and even sides of the streets. So I was on the even side so I got to go to bay view, to the new school.

I went there for 4th grade, but my best friend Cynthia went to school then, let's see… then they wanted me to play the flute. Because if you were good at reading and

stuff then you didn't need the extra time, so we were aloud to take up an instrument. And I always thought that was wrong because, you know, well of course not until I got older, but that, just because we were good at reading that we were able to play instrument. So they wanted me to play the flute, and I hated it so I switched to trumpet and I was the only girl playing the trumpet. So there was that. I got bored with that and switched over to the baritone and I got bored with that and switched over to the English horn. But I grew up in a Salvation Army church so the English horn was really good for that so I played in the band there. So, I played that all through high school in marching band and concert band and for the church.

I started walking to school. I don't remember too much about 5th and 6th grade. I know 4th grade it was traumatic because I had to leave my favorite teacher. He was just this big Jewish guy and he was just really nice to all of us. For some reason, my 5th and 6th grade is totally blocked out; I don't remember anything in 5th and 6th grade except playing tetherball. I don't even remember any teachers from those grades. I don't know. I was on the gymnastics team, that's pretty terrible that's all I remember.

[In 7th grade] I think, yeah, that's when I started noticing I had to read things over and over again. But I still got all good grades. I just remember having to live in the library. I always would go to the library. But yeah, I think that's when I noticed; it took me longer to even understand things and to write and stuff. I had to take tests I always choked on tests so I was always doing extra credit papers because I was a good writer, but I just could not take test and that became really frustrating for me I would talk to [The teachers] afterwards you know, verbally,

I knew the stuff, but I couldn't do it when I was taking the test. So they would just ask me verbally and then they would have me write little extra credit papers and stuff like that. But still there was nothing mentioned about getting tested or anything like that. I was noticing it was taking me longer to understand stuff, like I had to keep re-reading or my mind would go off while I was reading and then it would just go off on a tangent somewhere and then I'd have to go back and then I'd have to go back and find my place and re-read. I couldn't focus I guess I should say. Not so much in the classroom. I guess a little bit like paying attention when they were writing on the board and my mind would go off so I'd have to go back and hurry up to catch up with the notes and everything. But as far as reading it just took me longer to do my homework.

I had this mean English teacher. She used to always yell at me for fighting. At first I couldn't sit up, so I would sit like that [slouch] in the chair and so she would always yell at me to sit up. Then what helped me concentrate on listening to her was to just doodle. So she would yell at me to stop doodling all the time and told me to pay attention. Then she would try to catch me, you know, like ask me a question thinking that I wasn't paying attention and I didn't know the answer. But I would always know the answer. I do remember that in junior high. I can picture her with that blue hair always yelling me and nobody liked her everyone was afraid of her it was advanced level English class.

I was very involved in the church, Salvation Army church, so you have the junior high which was two doors down from my church. So after school everyday we'd go to the church for the community center. I participated in all of the youth activities, after

school activities there and summer camp during the summer. I went to summer camp every summer from the time I was like 7 until I was 35.

I remember, like I said, I always stand up for the underdog, so even in grade school they were picking on somebody there was this kid I was at bible camp. I was maybe about 10 at bible school, and he had, he was born with a smaller arm. And I remember all the kids were scared of him and they thought that their arm would get small if they touched him and stuff. So yeah, I remember I befriended him and I will tell the kids they had to be nice to him. I don't know. I was always a people person.

High School

So I always volunteered for that. I worked in the kitchen to feed them and stuff. I was in high school when I did all that, I mean I went to summer camp, like I said, from the time I was 7 till I was 33 so… how it helped me in high school? I think it just helped me to be able to just feel comfortable with everybody. To get a long with all different types of people no matter who they were or their socio-economic backgrounds, or disabilities or whatever. I think that comes from my family too, I was always a people helper type of person. I got the example from my family, but they always helped everyone in our neighborhood especially my father he had a big garden so he would feed everybody in the neighborhood like help them set up their gardens. And my mother always babysat practically for free and half the time people couldn't afford to pay her so they just didn't pay her.

Then in high school as well, I tutored people. Which was weird because I had a hard time myself reading but I was able to still tutor people? So I tutored a lot of the athletes and I was involved with gospel choir with my school and sports I played soccer

and ran track. And actually I started our soccer team because we didn't have a women's soccer team. We didn't have a women's track team either I ran on the men's track team or I got an English teacher I gave her a bunch of soccer books and got her to coach us. So then we had a women's soccer team. Just involved in the Key club, just everything I could be involved in. so just something every single day of the week. Not in trouble, exactly. And then we got all the other kids in our neighborhood to join the Salvation Army so we all just hung out together.

I actually doubled up because I got bored, and my sister graduated a year early as well, so it was sorta like the thing to do. So I doubled up, I went to school one summer, and was able to graduate a year early. So after high school, since I got out a year early I worked at Burger King and at the grocery store.

College

I started college in 1980 at Springfield College. I was supposed to go to Holy Cross because my friend from the Salvation Army he was there and I used to go up and visit and so, I was gonna go there, I got accepted and everything. I just couldn't picture myself, you know, the more time I spent there the more I didn't like it. For which I was glad I had the opportunity to do that before I actually started school there. So since I was a jock they were like well, why don't you go to Springfield College it's only 40 minutes away you can still come visit. So I did, last minute, I signed up for Springfield College I loved it, it was the best decision I ever made because it was like a people helpers college, and there were P.E. majors. I did rehabilitation counseling, but I minored in therapeutic medication. I played soccer and I ran track I also D.Jed at the radio station and then I was involved in the international student society. Just like in high school I was

involved in every single thing. I worked on campus, the library, the cafeteria and security and I worked off campus at a group home. I was working like 90 hours a week and going to school the usual.

That's when it finally sunk in but still again didn't really want to think I had a disability because of course now it was different than high school, you had tons of reading to do. So I always handed in all my papers late and tests, it was just so much to do of course in addition to doing all of those other things. I remember it was my freshmen year, most freshmen and sophomores take this class because I was a psych major and I did a double major with psychology. The class you read the chapters in the book and then you meet with your, little psych group coaches, usually after class, and there's a group of like ten people sort of like a T.A. and he just administers the test. I remember it was ten questions, and you had to get 8 out of ten right. But you could take it 100 times until you get it. I remember it was just so traumatic for me because I would just study, study, study, study. I remember one time I was just in tears the first time I took it and I had to take the test like three times before I finally got an A on the test. So that was sort of like an awakening to me I guess concerning test taking. Then as with high school again, with all of my tests I did poorly. But they just let me like in high school, do an extra credit paper. I don't think they had a Disability Services Department. I mean I'm sure they do now. There could've been one, I should say that I didn't get diagnosed until my 4th year into my doctoral work. So I just struggled I graduated form Springfield College with my masters in '87 or '88 one of those years and I started my doctoral work in '96 part time So it was probably like 2000 that I got tested. I did double bachelors I did psych and rehab. I minored in therapeutic rehab and I finished most of my psych degree in London.

I went over there just to hang out with my family for the summer and I was just going to do one semester. So I finished all my course work in psychology there. Then I went straight into my Masters and I did rehab counseling and then I did the Certificate in Advance Graduate Studies.

I remember I had a little incident. I think it was, cause we had to take computers and statistics. Like no one ever takes the computer course and statistics at the same time. I had saved them for last because I didn't want to take it. So I took them both at the same time and I just went crazy I just, uh, I just could not. I mean, you miss one little thing on the computer, one little number and you're off and it messes up the whole thing with your statistics. So I remember I just got so frustrated with that. I think I just had a lot going on between work and stuff. So one night I was doing my stats work and I was getting frustrated. We didn't have computers then. So actually I still had my typewriter and when we worked on campus we could use the word processor. I had my typewriter, I think I was typing a paper or something and I just got so frustrated and I threw my typewriter across the room. I just had this incident where I just started tearing everything apart. I don't want to do this anymore!

I just remember I had like, all of these incompletes and I was trying to finish them all. I told Joe what happened and then he was the one that suggested that, ok we'll just take our time, take your time. But he said in the mean time I want you to see somebody to get counseling, I just got overwhelmed I guess. Yeah, because you know I never talked about things, because I'm usually the one that everybody comes to, to tell me their problems. But now I feel ok when I'm overwhelmed, I feel ok to go and talk to somebody. Of course back then and it's still the same now where people of color don't

like going to talk to people. I am the type of person that doesn't like asking for help period. Yeah, I think just trying to be a super woman and everything just kind of fell on me. But even then I didn't think anything about learning disabilities. Which I think probably made it worse because I probably beat myself up when I was like, oh you should be able to do this.

But I mean, when I went to school in London I did pretty well there. I started doing pretty well but then again, I started working a lot there because all my friends there they were all aristocrats kids or rich Americans. I focused more on working than I did at schooling there. My grades weren't too great there. But I enjoyed the experience. I was involved in every single thing international society or the neighborhood committee. I had to have a social life there. You know, go out every weekend and I dj'ed there for central London radio or for the University of London …again just trying to do a whole bunch of things.

Employment

All through college I worked at an intermediate care facility in the mornings. Twice a week I would go in from 6-9. Then work on campus and go to classes and stuff. Then I worked full time at the residential home with four guys with Down Syndrome and I ended up becoming the program manager there which is really weird because I made more money during my bachelors' degree.

Daily Living

I have so many multiple identities, that it means that I can relate to more people in the helping profession because they can relate to me as well. Since I have all these identities …it's likely or more likely that they are going to be able to relate to me on

more than one level. I just think it's an asset. I think in general color comes first as far as discrimination and then being a woman and as far as the learning disability, I think that comes, I would say closer to the end on just initially because it's hidden, yeah and same with my physical disability that's hidden as well but the more outward being a person of color and a woman. Just because I'm a lesbian that doesn't mean I have the same values or whatever, as another person who is a lesbian. So that's why I think you should learn the general things about the different identities. But then also get to know that person, their own, you know, idiosyncrasies I guess.

In terms of how it played out in my life, well with myself … I feel that, I always have to work-well I know I have to work harder but that I think the combination, like with my parents say I can't be just good enough I have to be better so that has always been my philosophy in life but even more so with the learning disability as well. So I don't know I guess just knowing that I have to work harder that's the only way I can think of how it plays out in my life.

You have to be concerned about failing or proving yourself like always having to prove yourself, so I looked at it like that. Because people have these stereotypes about being a black woman in general and you're qualifications the abilities. So I just think it's a double pressure because first you have to prove, sort of like you're setting an example for black people but then you also have to prove because you're also setting an example for someone with a learning disability that you are capable.

It's just sort of accommodating yourself. [For example] it's the same as my bills … I've learned to just set a date to pay all my bills. Now of course I'm online so that's helpful. But I'd have my bills out and I'd throw it on the seat of my car and it would end

up under the seat of my car before I can get it to the post office and get a stamp and the next thing you know I'm getting a late notice and I'm like wait a minute I've paid that bill, you know, and then I find it under the seat of my car. I have a set date where I pay all the bills so this way I don't have to worry about that. Because I know that's part of my disability where I forget things. So I think just working around it that way, you know, self-accommodating.

Like with all my clocks, well this is since we were kids though, where we keep all of our clocks in our house ten minutes early and same with in my car, because to make sure we aren't late. Even though we know that ten after ten really means ten o'clock just seeing, just visually seeing that its' after the ten o'clock and you're supposed to leave at ten o'clock you rush to make sure that you're there on time. So I do things like that and I have this little recorder thing that when I remember not to like keep it on my dresser, but a lot of times when I'm driving I think of things so I have this little reminder thing, and I just pick it up and talk into it and then play it at the end of the day you know things that pop into my head that I know I need to do.

I know that everybody's different and I know that you have to relate to people in different ways and meet them where they are. Where as just generalizing I have friends who were just like, well most people do this, this way. That would never come out of my mouth and I would never expect a person to do things that way because I know having a learning disability I do things a lot differently than my other friends. Most people do things this way? I hate that phrase because I hear it all the time. That's why I know I would never say it to anyone else. I know how I feel when people say it to me because I do things a lot differently than most of my friends that don't have learning disabilities. I

think that it's important not to expect everybody to be the same. Or expect people to do things the same way. I think having a learning disability it's just natural for me to know that and realize that.

People take advantage [of my lack of memory] I'm just think of what happened last weekend where I was at my friends house and she had some things there that I thought was mine and then she's like you think everything yours. Then she said, you don't even know what you have. Which is true. I don't know what I have at my house because everything is scattered all over and I buy something and forget I bought it. So I think that in a way people can take advantage of that because they're like oh she won't remember anyway. Well, it's something I left there ages ago, it's like I haven't seen mine in a while at my house and of course I got home and looked for it in the spot where I know I would've kept it and it wasn't there so I thought I'd just let it go. But just the fact that she said, oh you don't even know what you have in your house so, it's probably not even yours. I think that people can take advantage, like when you said you were going to give me one hundred dollars knowing that you probably won't remember.

I think just everything, that I've experienced in my life helps me to be patient with people when they say ignorant things. Even with people that I meet in public who work my nerves.

Self as Helper

As far as helping others this has been sort of instilled in me since I was a kid my whole family is like that. My whole family is in the helping profession one-way or the other. Whether it's volunteering with a regular job, being a minister or mentors, you know. So it's just sort of …just part of me. I can't imagine my life without it.

Willow

I grew up on a Caribbean Island with a mother, father and an older sister. My mother was a teacher. I attended an all girl's catholic school that was from grades K-12 the school was all in Spanish and the nuns were very good at helping students have good self esteem. We won awards in all kinds of different areas. Their were your usual honors awards but the nuns also validated individual talent no matter how small it would be the most important thing was the opportunity to be recognized. The nuns fostered doing things for others. The school always made me feel good about myself and had emphasis on being oneself. I look back now and the nuns were mostly loving people, caring and very humbling.

Elementary School

I never knew that I had a disability. My mom would sit down with me to do my homework she would tell me what to study and then come back to see if I had memorized it. When she would come back to check and see how I had done I was unable to perform the task. My mom would give me a second half an hour to study my lesson and then on the third time after I still had not memorized it she would smack me on the head then walk away. I would cry because it was so hard to remember things.

High School

Once I got into the middle school and the upper grades I got good at memorization and realized then that my mother had really helped me in this area at school. I was a "C" average student my sister always a high average student. I used to do volunteer work for them during the summer. I went to college full-time I had to be very disciplined have good study habits, I studied all the time. I did not work. I learned about

the services such as math lab, language lab, counseling which helped me with my assignments I had lots of anxiety and they taught me how to relax and do visualizations. I had a “B” average in college and honors Summa Cum laude in the technical institute.

Daily Living

We moved to Massachusetts in 1985. I become acclimated to this new culture and I was very shocked. It was very shocking in many areas, many ways. I mean the language and everything. I attended ESL classes for adult at night. I had no clue what they were all about. They were all immigrants from all over the world, Russian, German, from Brazil and they were all mature, older people who I learned about their life working in factory so I was the youngest of all of them. I loved to go to those classes at night we had a great time. I wanted to do that because I wanted to feel stronger with my language and I wasn't strong enough and I didn't feel confident to even teach. I don't know anything. I had my degree, but still. I was a little scared. I think with my limited proficiency in terms of my raw communication skills. So that was great, but that teacher was an Italian young woman encouraged me to study for my license in Massachusetts as a bilingual teacher. She was motivation to say you can teach. She would see how I work with the older people in the classroom as we were working in groups. She said you are a natural and why don't you continue and I said I actually taught one year but I was very young. She kept saying you can do it you can be an ESL teacher.

Then I started learning about what ESL was, bilingual education and became more informed so after I graduated from night classes I got a job in digital computers. I worked for three years and then we moved, then I got pregnant with my first child and we felt we needed to buy a home. We couldn't afford anything after a year of commuting I

applied for a teaching job as a bilingual teacher. I got it and I tried again teaching bi-lingual in the middle school. My minority community I was working with the bi-lingual Spanish and the Russian students. That was the big population of student. I got involved in many different ways and it was this natural involvement. I got very much involved in the community and it was really great.

My husband got a job at U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife and he started commuting and did that until the end of the academic year. My mother insisted, you better try to find something in the area. So that's what I did. So I said to my husband I want to work in the middle school in town. I remember just writing a letter to the superintendent, putting out my little profile and saying that I wanted to have an opportunity, if there was anything at the level even a part time job working with ESL students, bi-lingual Spanish speaking students that I wanted to be considered. That's all I did. I wrote one letter. I sent one resume to one place and I think a month later I got a call for an interview and I said but I never applied to any job what interview and they said we have a part time job and I came, interviewed and I got it.

Employment

Well I thought so. I was so hopeful that I could finally focus on curriculum and not so much on the social, emotional pieces of my student's life because I came here with this idea that it's Russell it's surrounded by colleges, um the resources oh my goodness I was in paradise. The resources I had when I was teaching Science I had to bring everything from home. I brought all my stuff to do the labs. It was very practical, home made stuff to do labs. So I thought wow this is great.

Guess what? This honeymoon didn't last long before I knew it that first summer I was kind of chasing students that were running away from home, I was so much involved in their life that I was doing more than two full time jobs. I was a counselor, a social worker, and an outreach worker. It was intense and again, with the minority community here with the Latinos students and the Cambodian families. These are the two populations that really needed the services; little services, support and I found myself already wrapped up in doing above and beyond the call of duty. My mentor who was my director was that way, so that did not help me. I kind of blame her because I kind of followed the footsteps that I knew. It was natural for me, too. I think maybe if I had somebody else as a mentor I wouldn't have done that, end up being the way I am. I wanted to solve everybody's problems.

I am way above the able bodied teachers because I have this wonderful energy reserve that never dries out. Let me say this not that never dries out because it has, lately it's become drier, but I do have the energy and because of my ability to predict things in my head.

Disability

My hearing began affecting me more and more in my ability to communicate with the students and hear them, as my disability got worse. I needed to make more adjustment. I knew I needed to do something about my hearing. The hearing aide was not really producing the kind of assistance I needed to function at the high level. I would miss things, misinterpret them, so I had to undergo an operation one here and one in Boston. My learning disability, my ADHD didn't affect me much until things began getting really evident and chaotic when my school changed from a middle school with a

new principal. So there was a period that I needed to be in the middle school when my science class that I was teaching at the high school was still not finished and I have to have a paraprofessional in the middle school waiting with my students until I got there.

That year can you imagine how many times I lost my car keys', house keys and student work because I have to run back and forth because the times were not good because I was always late for class? The thing is it requires so much of my energy. I was teaching Biology class that I needed to prepare labs so I had to be on my toes all the time because they will have final and midterm exams and labs at the high school. It was hard. So what I did was I began strategies. I had the secretaries from both buildings and they all had copies of my house and car keys. The teachers in the high school, the teacher next door to my classroom that I was teaching had a spare key of my car. So when I had to pack up my things and go and I couldn't find my keys I didn't waste any time looking for them I would just go next door and grab the extra keys and bring it back later. So we survived. It was crazy. That year was really difficult. That's when I began to understand I needed these strategies for many things.

Shifting gears, being able to be flexible, have a lesson plan and go with what the kids need to do and I do it for that moment and say, "Okay, today you put it aside and you deal with the issues." For example something happened today I had my lessons for my oral communications class but the student asked me a question about next year and somebody mentioned something about only eighteen days left of school so I immediately said, "Do you know what that means, guys?" And I'm working with many first timers in the American public school system for the first time. I said do you know what that means eighteen days? I said in a nutshell it's going to bring a lot of tension, stress among

teachers, and the students. I connected what they were learning in health about stress and relaxation meditation so I immediately connected my little thing they brought to the class with what I knew they were doing in health and to be honest with you my beautiful lesson plan took the back seat at that moment because we needed to address what I felt the kids needed to know at that time.

I feel this is really handy in terms of my ADD the way I protect myself now because I have no boundaries and I would feel I have to do it. Knowing how difficult it is for me to do certain things and get organized I've decided and this is why I reinvented myself and it makes me so proud because I'm advocating for myself something that I've never done before. All these years as a grown up adult with all these disabilities I've never done this before, advocated for me. So the strategies that I have come up with are I say well you know what I'm sorry I won't be able to do it. In fact it happened today we had a meeting an administrator wanted us to create this list. My colleague said when do you want this by and she said it would be great if it could be this week. I'm thinking today is Tuesday, Wednesday I'm going with my Latinos club to New York that means its going to be only tomorrow or Friday. I'm looking at her and said this week and she said if you can do it early this week and I said, "How about early next week?" And I would have never in my mind done that before because I would have gone home tonight and not sleep to get this done. I'm learning that I can say I'm very sorry but I just can't do it. I'm teaching people when they give me short notice of commitment I say I need a week in advance if you want me to give you something---today is Tuesday I need a week so by next Tuesday I will be able.

I am good at multitasking on top of multi tasking I can remember making photo copies, making phone calls and correcting papers all at the same time. I am always in high because that will infuse me more, this energy. The difficulty again is the organization piece where I have to do so many things and I get them done because I'd rather sacrifice myself, not eat or sleep than not to fulfill my responsibilities of the paperwork or whatever it is I need to do and bring to the school on a daily basis. So that is the difficulty. The only point in my field that is a challenge is the hearing disabilities being hard of hearing because it really effects my performing in the classroom. When I am in a place where there is a little background noise or the heater is loud and the classroom typical structure is not conducive for a hearing and hard of hearing person like myself. That is what I feel is really a challenge in my profession.

I had trouble with the writing pieces I couldn’t understand how people around me could correct papers in school. I had to correct papers on the weekend and end up going to bed late. Turning out grades for me would take me two nights. There was always a bunch of things I never corrected or returned to the kids. This is how I noticed the deadline and the timing of material. I always gave the students a passing grade or I wouldn’t count it. I would never penalize them.

As a person with a disability you don’t say I gave up all my time to prepare this curriculum and you don't come in and say I spent six months preparing this curriculum or I took my whole winter vacation to get this done. You don't brag about it. No, no, no, no. I discovered the ADHD and the condition in my nerve plate that created a tornado in my mind. My learning disabilities affected me and my hearing began affecting me more and more in my ability to communicate with the students and hear them, as my hearing

disability got worse. I would miss things and misinterpret them so I had to undergo two operations. My learning disability and my ADHD didn’t affect me as much until things began getting really chaotic when the school changed to a middle school with a new principle.

I've been in the middle school for thirteen years and then I applied to [a four year college]. I started mine with the little ones and I took them with me even to classes because we didn't have babysitters or anything and he [husband] was working a lot and traveling a lot so I had to do a lot of the childrearing while going to school and working, but I did it. I went back to college to earn a doctorate degree. I wore a hearing aide in every class. The first doctorial class I came home in tears I couldn’t keep up with the speed of the professor I couldn’t keep up with the conversation my classmates were having. I was unable to keep up with the reading assignments.

On thing I noticed is that people like to speak in tongues and these tongues are words that don’t exist in the dictionary. I would say as far as my disability I did not know how it was affecting me. I knew language was difficult for me. People would start to pay attention to my hearing however after about twenty-five minutes they would forget and the volume would go back to their normal speech.

It is the same at work everybody that works with me knows I'm deaf, knows my hearing aide is not working because I am a joke because sometimes this one teacher I'm very fond of will give me a signal at meetings and it will be about my hearing. In any case what I decided this year. I just learned how to live with missing half of the conversation and I say well you know what if I don't hear it maybe it's not that important, I don't care. I convince myself it's okay to miss something. It is often convenient because

if they call me I keep walking because sometimes I don't want to hear it. So any case going back to the seriousness of the conversation what made me realize that I really need an adaptor, equipment is the fact that I'm with teenagers. I have borrowed equipment on many occasions because of a student needing it. This is when I said wait a minute I have never asked or requested, when I went to monitor this equipment the woman said the only thing we have in the building is being used.

The disability has always been on the back seat. My mother has the same hearing impairment and she never advocated for herself. I think in that time being deaf meant an opening to society. In those times the hearing aide was a humongous box with a long chord so um exaggerated by the apparatus it was not cool to wear this stuff. I remember saying mom change because she would constantly answer the wrong things I have no accommodation at work Nada! That was my next step to be honest with you. That is my next step. I been teaching seventeen years and this year I began advocating for my hearing problem and one of the things that I noticed is that the equipment is very expensive so I went looking for something cheaper so I learned there's a person in my district who dealt with adult disabilities her program really supported my hearing aide. I talked to people and this is the first time I learned there is a person in my district in charge of doing this and I made an appointment. This woman was fascinating. She immediately responded to me. She told me I deserved to be accommodated and she said she would go with me to the principal and would support me. She was a wonderful advocate! Wonderful!

I was in the process of submitting a sabbatical for next year. So I said why don't we wait to see what happens with my proposal and perusing the buying of the equipment

because she said we needed to buy it and start looking at things and see what's out there. She set the price range and this and that. In the mean time I borrow one from the classroom when the student that needs it is not there.

This is very current in my life more now than ever. I think it’s because I'm going through another developmental stage close to turning fifty. Things are changing in my body and therefore I see other things acting up. I have to be more alert to these type of things. I see the responses from the outside world, the feedback that I get from the outside world indicates you got to calm down, Willow, slow down. It’s more about accommodating them to be able to participate more evenly with the rest of the members of my teaching group.

College

What was good about college was I started to get help on how to read and organizing things. It was ironic because I teach these strategies to my students but never used them myself. I see a hypnotherapist who is helping me create strategies for the day. Organizing my mind, focusing techniques, quieting my mind looking at my day and planning it building this into my daily routines I feel I am going in depth to put the pieces into place and the strategies to help me. Because of the ADD I lose it. Again, the problem goes back to my lack of constancy and keeping focused. My colleagues in school showed me strategies like how to use power point, create charts, outlines and how to use the computer.

One of the things with my disability and my hearing problem is also my voice. I suffer with my vocal chords and it has to do with the effort I have to make to talk. "Well, you really need to learn how to use your vocal chords. The effort that you're using is

stressing them to the point that you're hurting them. I have very often laryngitis. Constantly, every year my voice gets really hoarse. Like you can hear me now and it comes with the allergies every season. I don't rest my voice because I'm teaching. I never thought of a disability but that was an impediment. I need to deal with that also because I'm noticing I'm making better efforts. The end of the day I'm so dry at night my throat hurts. I don't let it bother me. It's another issue.

I am constantly monitoring every moment of my life. Daily auto monitoring my life for self-control it is so hard the energy that it takes. I have to watch myself because people can’t cope with me, they can’t deal with me. Sometime I’m too much for them because I’m so passionate, dramatic and I don’t know how to talk without emotion. So everything I say comes out with a thousand feelings.

I started getting therapy and this is when I discovered the ADHD and the condition in my nerve plate that created all these a tornado in my mind.
I'm so aware of it. I don't get into a defensive position. This opportunity of being able to just talk about one thing, to focus the conversation on my disability is not something that happens ever unless someone asks you something with a particular interest. In terms of conversing and talking it happens within the context of the medical field, whether with your doctor, college disability counselor so outside of this context you don't need to talk. This is not a table conversation topic. You don't go to the restaurant to talk to people about your disability. So it’s like in the sense of healing and being therapy it has been a place and space for healing.

I don't question what do you mean control? I just take it as it is because I understand that I can be a little too much and at the beginning in my understanding of self

it was more of I remember saying why do people feel uncomfortable? Are they uncomfortable with me? Am I a threat to them? I am too much for some people, they cannot handle me and I didn't know why. I didn't know it was the emotional piece that I bring into everything, but I think it was also the other side of me that I will always be doing something and most of the time it will come out good. People might feel a little threatened by it and I have experience, not directly but comments that indicated um them feeling uncomfortable because I am too much. You know? My disabilities affect my personal life. Too. I have to put so much energy into controlling my impulsivity. When I am at meetings and people are talking my brain has gone three miles ahead of everybody because they are still talking about the same thing. When people are talking about an event in my head I already have, how to break it down and what the possibilities of what people can do. I have the whole event planned and I'm so ready for the next project. I like to get things done.

My hearing impairment, ADD and my language and my Latino and my Christian upbringing, Make me feeling responsible for the world and carrying everything and I'm glad. I feel great. It is wonderful because one of the things that I've noticed in the helping profession is that I can relate to many of my students that have particular learning disabilities and learning styles because I have experienced almost the same kind of issues and disabilities, for example students with ADD, learning disabilities and other types of disabilities that have trouble in school and issues with abstract thinking for example. I have problems and difficulties abstract thinking so for me to be able to understand this type of thinking I need pictures for example, or I many need to see someone doing

something before I can perform the same task. This all translates into my teaching practice.

I'm going for a hearing implant surgery this summer because I'm so sick and tired of not hearing well with the hearing aide that I have. I'm a little scared. Surgery is surgery. This one is Microsurgery. They implant a metal piece to do work of the hearing device. It is painful. The week after it's packing and when they remove that packing it's very painful. Because it is painful when they remove it I stay for two, three weeks that I cannot drive because my balance is totally off. I cannot bend.

Wood

I was born in New York, twenty-five miles of New York City on the Hudson River. My father came to Ostman to Pastor a church and started Bethany Baptist church he was Pastor for 33, 40 years. I was born in a transitional neighborhood; it was near the prisons so I guess it was like 50/50 black white. Slowly the white neighborhoods sold their houses to black men which was the majority of folks from the church gradually State Street began to go white to black and then we moved to another section of town so probably one of three of four black families on the street and then gradually the street went from white black white.

My mother was a stay home mom until I got into second grade and she went back substitute teaching and then fourth or fifth grade she was full time as a teacher and we were in the same school together. I had good days and bad days. There were times I was in the principal’s office and my mother was coming down the hall because I knew my mom's walk and I had to hide and not be seen as my mother was passing by. She always

worked with special needs kids, the problem kids and if she had been a regular teacher more than likely I would have been in her class.

Elementary School

I am the only child. My parents were married thirteen years before I came along. I was like the baby in the church. They finally had a kid people said, yada, yada, yada. I was the spoiled brat of the church; everybody loved the pastor's son. Of course, I took full advantage of that. So anyway. Went to a school [that] was my neighborhood school and I was able to walk, first kindergarten, first grade near the prison so I was able to walk to school.

I always did a lot of talking. Second grade we moved my parents brought a house and I went to [different] school, two blocks which is closer than the first school. I would come home and watch TV. I would always go home for lunch. That was second grade. Third grade was a brand new school, third, fourth, fifth and sixth. It was exactly a mile there. Therefore, some days the kids and I walked but then when my mother taught there I would get an automatic ride. I would probably ride with her and walk home with the kids, say it was a rainy day and I didn't want to walk and I rode with her.

So they thought I had vision problems so I had several pair of glasses, they thought I wasn't seeing the blackboard correctly. I was always a poor reader. I wasn't in the top kids, I was behind, and I had to go to summer school for reading and all that kind of stuff. Reading was always difficult. I was able to get through. Seventh and eighth was at the junior high school and it was connected to the high school so I also walked there and with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood.

I never liked math. It was difficult so I never got into it. I guess it is because a time element, take time to figure out and analyze things when it’s easier to take time and figure out something else less stressful. I don't want to sit down and analyze this. I never was a math person. Somebody said it was hard I would be like yep. I did every after school program and the kids would be doing math on their fingers and I am like what are you doing I said you got to memorize it. Kids don't want to do that. So they don't know their times tables so it takes them even longer to do a math problem because they don't memorize it.

Spelling I had a difficult time in spelling, still can't spell, but I do everything on the computer so it automatically underlines where it needs to be spelled on the computer so I can see my mistakes. I know I can’t spell so if I'm writing something I know that the word is misspelled. I can proof spell it. I can’t spell a word but I know the word is spelled wrong. I can’t tell you how to spell it but I know if it’s spelled wrong. Social Studies no problem because it’s memorizing stuff like that. Any kind of memorization is I’m fine. It was at some point that I had a stuttering problem and I still do now but I can control it. It had to be kindergarten or first grade; I remembered, I was hit by a car. I was going to the supermarket with my father and I thought that was his car and I ran across the street and this car pulled out they didn't see me and I got hit by a car and I remember after I got hit by the car the stuttering picked up or something or maybe they noticed it more and I took a speech therapy class.

In the speech class I made up a song about a bird in a tree. It was fun. Yeah. Other than that, I can’t remember what else. Penmanship I had no problem because my mother said write large and I would write little and she would tell me to make it larger because

the teacher could read it better and I had this little itty-bitty writing. She said they are going to have difficulty in reading that and I noticed that later on when I got into junior high school and we had to write papers I would always get a good grade because the teacher was able to read my handwriting and it was nice large and legible and that was a plus.

[I had] tons of friends my father being Pastor of the church I have to hang out with all the kids in church. I also had friends who were outside of church, white kids. I had just as many black friends as white friends. Yeah I got a long with everybody.

High School

[In High School] we had core, which was history and English in one room, and then you walked around for the science, gym, music, and art. Two classes were together and that was the morning whatever that class was then the afternoon we changed classes.

I got along with all my teachers. I think there was one black teacher who was our neighbor. All the rest of our teachers were white. There were three black teachers, my mom, Mrs. Calloway and somebody else but I can’t remember. Everybody else was white.

I was always a talker. I always got in trouble in all my classes for talking, that was my main thing so I would get sent to the principals office and high school my seat was always next to the teacher, the first part of that I would be in the back but after that they always changed me next to the teacher so my seat was just lower than hers. Study hall I started out with the black kids and then they said I was being disruptive so they moved me with the white kids and so then they moved me next door to the teachers’ desk, then I'd be disruptive. You know and then finally they said sit where you want to sit and I was

disruptive in study hall and then you had detention and had to stay out of school and then I would lie my way out of staying after school because if I stay out of school my parents would know I was being disruptive and then sometimes I had to write I will not talk in school one hundred times and sign my parents name and they wouldn't know about it until they came to parent teacher conference and all this stuff. They didn't know I had to stay after school and then my parents would lay into me. That would work for a couple of weeks and I would be back to doing what I always did. That was kind of my pattern.

You could get a Regents diploma or a regular diploma. The Regent's diploma was similar to MCATS here that we have now. You had to take this exam so the Regent's diploma was a little step up than the regular diploma. Those kids were in different smaller classes geared toward college. One of my guidance counselors told [me] I wasn't going to college. My parents said I needed to take a class and they geared me in the school towards shop of course my parents went and cleared that up and said no this is what we want him to take he is going to take this. Math I got out of that because my major was business administration and so I um had to take business math and I had taken ninth grade math back then and that touched on algebra a little bit, the next year would be algebra. From there I went to business math and from there I needed two years of math in order to graduate and that was it. So I didn't have to take math. I had some bookkeeping but it wasn't at the algebra level so whatever it was I was able to get through bookkeeping and that's how I got around math.

I had fun in high school I was always a teachers pet in gym. I was like I am not doing this stuff cause the jocks would be there doing push ups and sits up and I did one of each and I thought there has to be a way I can get around this so I was always the gym

teachers pet. I got with the gym teacher and became his assistant somehow or another I got in and so by that way I didn't have to do much. I had my uniform and got dressed but I didn't have to really participate because I was in with the gym teacher. I am more active now in sports than I have been in my entire life. I had no extracurricular activities. I did watch television. Whatever homework I had to do I had to sit down and do that first and then my parents would correct my homework so it was homework, weekends was probably church stuff. I can't think of after school---you walk home and probably play with the kids in the neighborhood and when it was time to go home you did that and went to bed.

I had a job during the summers, but after school no. I came home every day after school there was no teen center. There was no hang out place to go or anything, so yeah you go to school and come home unless I stop at somebody's house along the way. I listen to music forty-fives, yeah. There were some kids at the church who were a little bit older and they had all the 45s and so I knew the latest dances and I would go and hang out with them. They used to baby-sit for me they were older and had all the records and stuff so anytime I wanted to go there I could. There were certain houses I could go to, any kind of organized activities. It was all right. I mean I enjoy HS. Social event you got to hang out with all your friends. You got to dress, hang out with all your friends. Classes were classes. It wasn't one of my important things on my list. School wasn't. I can't think of it being any sort of challenge. I know we got two grades, we got graded in the actual grade and also you got graded in effort so you know I may have gotten a 47 B. Meaning that I wasn't doing good in the test and everything but I always put in good effort so if you failed in one as long as you got a B in effort.

So you got the B in effort because you did your homework and put forth the effort. A lot of my classes because of the other reading I may have had a low-test score but I was always high in the effort department. You know if there were extra projects, I would always do the work. I like the art part of it because you could be creative with it. I would do extra for a project like that. I can’t say anything was that difficult where I really didn't want to go to class. There was nothing where I really hated the class or the teacher or anything like that.

[I was not labeled disabled] I was probably labeled as a talker. I was a person who liked to talk. I was probably labeled more that way than difficult. I was always like a grade behind. I would always go to summer school. Reading was always difficult. My reading level was like say if I was in the 12th grade I would be reading as the 9th or 10th grade student. I always knew that reading was difficult. Sunday school is where you had to read aloud and I would always do something. Like go to the bathroom or you know something distracting so I wouldn't have to read out loud. I can’t remember. I probably just blocked that out. Sunday school I can remember that, but HS. I can't remember. Anything that I don't like I block out. I can’t remember that. I must have blocked all that stuff out.

College

When I got to college I said there had to be some level in which I was able to not only slip but when I got to college they had several of the students were in classes that would give you extra help, they weren't up to standard because you had to come in and take the test in college so many of the kids coming from classrooms in the region

whatever they weren't up to par so the first year they would have to take a class to bring them up to the level of the class.

[I graduated in] 1965 so by the time I got to college there was no way I could keep up with the reading it was impossible. So I didn't even try, basically I would get with somebody who could do the reading and say tell me what you read and based on what they told me I was able to you know. Every class that I took in college was on whatever level I was supposed to be on. Now I had to take the test like everybody else so whatever the test was I passed. So I said you know I was surprised at that with my reading and I thought I was probably going to be in one of these classes.

The first year and a half I was in business administration major and then somehow I talked to some of the kids who were taking accounting and I saw the level of the math and I just knew no way. I said I need to switch over. I went from there to Sociology. One of the things I noticed is that there was a class, a required course in my major and it was one of these classes that were brutal and the kids were taking it two or three times to pass. It was theory and so you had to do one summer in school in order to pass. They said it is impossible to graduate in four years you need to do a summer. I wasn't doing any summer my last year I went to summer school in order to graduate on time. What I found out there is there was a nun who was teaching that particular class. I had to go to school everyday and she would give you a quiz everyday. So I can’t remember what it was maybe I had her before that, anyway I got like an A or something out of her class. I attributed it to the fact that she quizzed you everyday. By her doing that you had to be on top of that information. She would go over it in class and it was all memory. She was feeding it to me and I was getting it everyday. The next day she would come in with the

test. So I would [regurgitate it back at her] I aced the class with no problem. I missed one day of class because somebody died in the family I went to the funeral other than that she told me I got an A. I got a 90. She told me I did well. You know? So I said okay. I said this is the way to learn. People learn in different ways. That is how I got through college.

I got a degree in Sociology and then it was not until my last semester, two semesters in college that I decided that I wanted to go into seminary. My father was a Pastor and I thought it would be good for me to assist him in his work so this would help me in that. This would enable me to help him. I came home, and um my father questioned me and said you need to go to seminary and I am like where and he said I don't know. My father got on the phone and called some of his colleagues and they said Virginia Union without a doubt. Any black pastor in the area had to go to Virginia Union. It was not anything about me applying to a couple of schools. We got in the car and went down and um met the dean and talked to him and did all the transcript stuff.

I graduated in 1969 summer if I had graduated on time I would have been drafted the day after I graduated. My draft date was May 29. And I was 1A. What held me off was I hadn't finished school and needed to go to summer school and by the time I went to the seminary and graduated it was too late. Anyway, September of 1969 I went off to Richmond for seminary a two-year program. Now I understand why it took me three years. I graduated in Dec of 1972. It is funny how everything works out. I was sitting next to the smart kids and someone would read and tell me what it meant so you know that's how I was able to get through. They had a revolt and we didn't have to go to class. One of the requirements was you had to do a term paper in order to graduate and one of there things was you had to do this thesis and I was a junior so by the time I was getting

ready to graduate from seminary there was no paper required so I didn't have to do it. If I had to write that paper oh my god. That would have been oh, that was one reason why everybody in my class went ahead to go their masters or Ph.D. and said come on and go with us. I knew there was no way I would be able to keep up. I wanted to keep up but I knew I couldn't keep up with that reading requirement. Why embarrass myself? Waste of time and money to do all of that? I think I would have been hurt more not being able to graduate rather than sit up there and then, I graduated from seminary and came back home and started looking for a job. This was December of 1972. I went everywhere to find a job and couldn't find one.

Employment

My dad would pick me up and we would try this and he would say why don't you call so and so and so. That was my transportation because my father knew NYC like the back of his hand. So we went everywhere and couldn't find a job. Actually, I did work for this lady in our church. She was a cook in this day care center and her assistant slipped and fell and so she needed someone to work with her and she was one of the meanest ladies in church (as my mother called her) The only people that got along with her were me and my dad. She needed someone to work with her and asked me to come and work with her. I said fine. That gave me some change and I worked with her and at this point, my father was going back and forth and my dad decided to make a switch we moved to Buffalo. I still did not have a job, I looked everywhere, and finding out that you are not getting a job because you are not in a clique. You find out folks are getting jobs because they know someone, here I come with two degrees, I have more education then people into these jobs, and they don't want an outsider coming in to show them up. You know?

I looked into social work, human services, that is what my undergraduate degree was in. There was an opening that came up in the church nursery. I was a teacher's assistant. Nursery school teacher's assistant I had more education than anyone had in there and could probably run the whole daycare program. But I needed a job. My parents were going to give me a car but they wanted me to have enough money to make the monthly payments and pay for my insurance. I couldn't do that until I had a job.

I had a brand new 1974 Firebird right off the showroom floor. It was brown stripped with brown interior. With my $1.90 an hour, I put gas in the car and made the payments and the insurance. I was set. I stayed there I am not sure I stayed at that price. Some lady at the church working in head start was going on maternity leave so she recommended me to take her job while she was on leave doing social work.

I got the job and when it was time for her to come back, she did for two or three weeks and then they rehired me back because she went elsewhere. I did this until I got a job as Associate Director of Counseling Churches in 1982. I was in head start from 75-81 because it was December that I left. I had to write a social service plan but it wasn't as difficult. It didn't hit me until I got here prior to that when I had to do reading in church I tried to do my reading ahead of time so I would be familiar with the words, but even with that ahead of time it was something that I knew I had to do it but couldn't do it and all of that would come at me at once. I wasn't able to do it even though it happened ahead of time. So I knew each time I had to get in front of folks that was one of my downfalls. The Counseling churches, was black and white churches that I went to. This job had me in front of more people. So then, my strategy is I would go late and then all the assignment is done and I don't have to do it. Now I know how to fake things. I got my bible and I

know certain things I don't do. I know I have difficulty and I can get up and do what I have to. I say calm down, take a deep breath, go ahead, and do it.

I will pull out whatever I have to. It wasn't until I went to the center of development when I left the counsel of churches they recommended me to see if I was still where I needed to be or go do something else. Somebody said this if you go to the center and take this test it will narrow down if ministry is the field you need to be in or somewhere else. I knew from the moment she got the job at the counsel of churches I said there was something not right with her, it was like you know and little by little she got rid of all of us that were in this group, basically they were my staff because I was there in a couple of interims and um it was my staff we were like family. I could call upon them for anything and so little by little when she couldn't get rid of me in that position at the counsel of churches and so um I think she was the one that recommended me to go and have this test done. Now, I thank her for it.

Daily Living

You know out of something bad something good can happen and through this test that they were giving me. It was some sort of um-- I had to put something in sequence---a story, a puzzle, something that I had to work with my hands and in that putting it into sequence, she noticed that I made it just the way. If anyone asked me any other questions, I answered them so then he refereed me to and I still never took the test but he refereed me to some place downtown. It was a state organization, I went there, they asked me a few questions, and I went up to the Blake Center. I never took the test to find out what degree of [disability I had] couldn't tell you now. It was either the waiting list was too long. I can’t even remember what it was. I did go to the Blake Center and the lady said

because it was like an hour test. She said based on what um I told her yeah, so one of her questions to me is how is it possible that you have gotten where you have gotten being dyslexic---she said she didn't understand. She said I had gotten through better than most folks who have no issue. I cannot tell you why. I'm black and disabled. Okay? So it’s like wearing that other badge. Its like do I really need to be tested? Not necessarily, but yeah. There are some things that. I'm black and disabled. Okay? So it’s like wearing that other badge. Its like do I really need to be tested? Not necessarily, but yeah.

I found out about the writing and all that stuff made sense. My father would say you are doing things backwards. I was born left-handed and they changed me from that to right handed. I would write right-handed but do everything else with the left. If I am carrying stuff, I do it with this hand. I will use this hand to open doors and stuff like that. Now my kids pick up on it. They say dad you use the wrong hand. It’s the right hand for me. Turn left, turn right. You give me the directions and say this is how I get to my house I am fine. I have no problem with directions. I can get anywhere by just memorizing the directions but if you are in the car with me and say turn left then I have to. I am not able to process like that. I have these bands on my arm. You have to remember this is your right band. I say I am going to take my bands when I go places that say turn right and turn left. Right hand this, left hand that. Turn left! I don't know which hand is what! If you go like this, you can see this hand is L and this hand is R. If you say turn left, it’s gone. Other days I'm fine. Some days it’s hard.

Self-Accommodations

The reading part I have gotten control of that so when I stand in the pulpit on Sunday morning to read it’s not an issue. When the family was on vacation, everybody

had their book and I had mine on tape so I had my book and I would be listening kind of. In 1994 my difficulty here is bible study. I was taking someone home the other night and I said to her how did you know that and she said something told me to call you. She said I knew you were struggling and she told me you could do it, just go ahead and do it. She said you have to have the confidence in yourself. I told her when she called I needed to hear what she was going to say. Sunday I was thankful. I just needed that confidence. It is reading and it takes me longer to prepare.

The sermon thing I got a handle on it. There is um stuff that can help me; you can download things on the computer and things that can consolidate all the reading. I can process it. That is no issue for me now. I know that. I block off Friday as my sermon day. I can get in and type on the computer while I am reading out the book, put things in my head and rearrange it. It helps me to remember what I am doing. The piece of paper is my crutch. If I don't have the paper, I panic. A lot of Sundays, I get up there and don't look at the paper but I know I have it. If I don't have that paper up with me, I will have a fit. I have gotten that. I guess it’s the bible study piece I have been unable to process. It’s almost like a similar process. You know? As I talk to you, it’s the computer piece I am leaving out---once I put this on the computer and type it does help me in processing. I am thinking the sermon gives you a chance to answer your question. Bible study you have to find the answer. I got it on tape, too. So now, I can go there, too. I went and found my tapes and I have it there. I think it also comes with the pronunciation of some of the words. Where in the hell did somebody get this name from? Once I got the sermon thing down it was good. That was one of my difficulties. If I am doing a wedding, I do that. I

can’t read the wedding out the book, but if I take this, type it up, and do it in my own words its better. It’s something about putting it in my own territory.

Everybody has their gift. Some are studious and they have it that way and I have it another way. The books weren't my thing. Another time, another place. I have all the books and if I need... I have a few close pastors and if I am doing something in Psalms, I ask them about a question or whatever. I was somewhere and I was talking about it and I was talking jibber jabber. I tried to explain.

CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANTS' THEMES

I am good at multitasking on top of multi tasking I can remember making photo copies, making phone calls and correcting papers all at the same time. I am always in high because that will infuse me more, this energy. Willow

The purpose of this study was to research and analyze how helping professionals with learning disabilities describe their requirements for daily living, and support, the individual, cultural and institutional barriers, which interfere with meeting those needs, and practices utilized to successfully overcome those barriers. Further, this study was to explore how helping professionals with learning disabilities articulate the services they require to engage in the full range of activities for daily life, the extent to which they experience these articulated services as available to them, and the extent to which the services available are congruent with their expressed needs.

In this chapter, I will present the categories identified in this research using selections from the participants' interviews. I will illustrate how the daily lives of study participants who are helping professionals with learning disabilities have affected in each category. Not every participant discussed every category. The range of selections are intended to allow as many different participants voices to be represented in the document, as possible, as well as to represent the diversity of topics embodied in the emergent categories.

Seven major categories related to the experience of helping professionals with learning disabilities emerged from the analysis of this data. I have labeled the categories as follows: (1) Personal Understandings: My learning disability, (2) Daily living needs: "I lost my car keys again!" (3) Managing disability oppression: Look there's a SPED! (4) Creative strategies: Acceptable Survival Techniques, (5) Institutionally unacceptable

survival techniques: “So I just skipped classes!” (6) Services: Accommodations please! (7) Support: Family, friends, teachers and other professionals, (8) Self-Esteem and (9) Self Reflection. These categories were identified because they appeared to be significant throughout the participants’ stories. Other categories emerged, but were not salient across the various participants.

The following chapter is structured to present each category and where appropriate, subcategories are included which were developed as a result of my analysis of the data. I have chosen selections from the interviews that best illustrate participants’ experiences and that provide examples for the subcategories within each category.

Personal Understandings: My Learning Disability

This section presents data on how the participants describe the types of learning disabilities they have and how it affects their lives. Participants do not always name their disability by using medical terms; instead, they more regularly describe the disability by how it is manifested in their lives. The participant’s explanations do not always reflect understanding of the psychological or professional explanations of their learning disability. It was clear from the data however, that whether diagnosed or not, participants had a clear understanding of how their disability affects them everyday. The descriptions demonstrate how participants recognize, define, and experience their disabilities.

The commonalities across all the participants is that they have learning disabilities and many of them share the same types of learning disabilities. The participants share many similarities regarding their struggles with reading, mathematics, memorization, audio processing, writing and organization. However, I chose to share the participants’ stories about the different types of learning disabilities in order to provide the diversity of

the areas in which people are affected by learning disabilities. Each of the PHPs' experiences are unique as are their individual profiles. The participants have many differences from one another. There are eight females and two males, six people of color and four white people. Six of the participants have other types of disabilities besides learning disabilities.

> Denver: When I was young I had a LD and then when I was two or three they found out I had epilepsy …I had 135 in performance and then my reading was like 110 or something like that. It was a huge issue, gap in my languages.
>
> Aster: My brain works differently. I don't fit into the norm. … It was audio processing. I had no idea what that is. I still barely know what it is. There was a reason why I couldn't write, a reason why I couldn't … hold information in a certain way. I had a confirmation that I can't write and it was bittersweet. It was helpful, but what do I do.

Denver describes the results of her neuropsychological testing in which her verbal IQ including reading was guessed to be 110 while her performance which includes the ability to memorize and organize was 135, locating her in the superior range. Understanding this "huge gap between her verbal and her performance scores" was helpful to Denver in managing the manifestations of her learning disability in her daily life. On the other hand, Aster recognizes that her "brain works differently and knows that it is an issue with audio processing, but states that she still barely knows what it is". She is unable to use the information about her learning disability to manage the manifestations of her disability.

Other participants describe their disability in terms of the challenging experiences that resulted from their learning disability. The following selections illustrate the different types of learning disabilities participants named and the disruptions that type of disability caused.

> Caira: I read the directions and read one line, think about that, read the next line and do it. I'm always re-reading to make sure that I understand it. Well now I know because I had challenges comprehending and expressing what I read in the sequence that the population would learn and communicate in. When it came to writing it down on paper I would have challenges.
>
> Savannah: I could memorize things but when it came to writing or reading things I couldn't do it. I never really understood there could be something amiss. This is just who I am and I had trouble learning. It wasn't enough that I was in the GA class, retarded; I had above average intelligence I had trouble with math, reversals, writing at 18, 19 years old. I didn't always spell my name correctly so it was global.
>
> Jackson: I would write on it and not be able to read what I wrote because my handwriting was so bad my teachers couldn't read it so that made it hard to have to slow down and write it slow. Math Yeah I'm like I'm still counting with my fingers and I still don't know my times tables and I don't today.
>
> Nebraska: I would kind of see it coming. It was usually after a break. I would go home for Christmas holiday and come back and that number (combination)… Yes. I mean the things that made me feel not good were around forgetting stuff.

All of the above scenarios are significant because each of the participants provides an example in their own words how the different types of learning disabilities manifest. Although some of the types are the same the participants discussed them differently. So for example each participant has a learning disability in the area of speech and language Caira discussed her language system input and output in other words language processing (input) and spoken and written language (output) disabilities. She further described how her disability in the area of comprehension, sequential ordering, and thinking affected her daily. Savannah explains a similar language system disability to Caira however; she also described how dyscalculia a math learning disability and dyslexia a learning disability that, severely affects the ability to read and write information without reversing it affected her. Jackson provided details about the affects of his fine motor learning disability, which caused his writing to be illegible. Nebraska

gave clarifying examples of how long-term, short-term memory affected her ability to remember and keep track of important information and items. Similar to the difficulties Cara, Kansas, Savannah and Virginia also have learning disabilities in these areas.

Participants further describe their learning disability and the challenges they have in different venues. Caira, Savannah and Virginia discussed a moment when they came to understand that it was a learning disability that made them approach tasks in the way they did. Savannah, Kansas, Aster and Caira gave similar description of their learning disabilities as systemic issues are very powerful because they provide comprehensive descriptions of how their learning disability affects their entire being and the deeper understanding of how the learning disability is fundamental to their everyday activities. This is significant because it gives the broader perspective that learning disabilities are not just about reading and writing but they influence any function that requires thinking. Savannah powerfully summarizes the deep internal impact of her learning disability.

> Savannah: A LD is internal, systemic. It's something that affects the way that you think. Eat, breathe, walk, talk and not in an external way like color does you know? So whether I'm with blacks, whites, Hispanics, Chinese, whatever I may present a little differently in terms of what I say or how I act but I am always going to be learning the same. …Yeah. I really think it's systemic. It's a wiring, the way your brain is wired in all those things affect you systemically. So I have to make sure I get enough sleep. Like today I stutter and can't talk and um when I'm really tired I can't read print, it's a completely foreign language scrambled all over the page.

While all the participants portray an understanding and acceptance of their learning disability, the manifestations of the learning disability still causes on-going frustrations for most of them. Savannah, Virginia, and Wood provide excellent examples of these frustrations below.

> Savannah: My frustrations probably peak a lot faster than somebody without a disability because I know I have problems reading a calendar. Fact of life makes

> me angry, frustrated…I'm very rarely going to get something the first time. Um, it took me three times to get my drivers license. I always have to do it twice. I have to work hard or I will not be successful….something might come easy to somebody else but not easy to me. It's a fact of life and that can be frustrating. It can make me very angry.
>
> Virginia: (my biggest frustration) I think, probably memory, just being forgetful. I think that's the biggest thing. Because I think that affects me the most in my life. I think that, and organization, so memory and organization those are the two big things for me.
>
> Wood: Some days it's hard. Those are called LD days. Everything is just off! So you got up on this side of the planet today.

Each participant discussed the frustrations they have experienced with the unpredictability and the difficulties they have performing daily tasks. Wood calls our attention to another symptom of learning disabilities that some days can be LD free and others can be really difficult.

All of the participants have persevered in their chosen path. Some; earned college degrees and others secured and hold very successful professions. While they have experienced many trials and tribulations, each participant discussed having moved forward to earn a living and trying to find work that complemented his or her abilities. Each participant described the obstacles they faced in the workplace as a result of the learning disability. The barriers faced by participants were dependent upon the duties and responsibilities of the particular profession.

> Aster: I couldn't write well and who would want me? It was a crisis a professional crisis for me.
>
> Willow: It's very hard. It's so hard. When I'm in faculty meetings and people are looking at one thing or the opposite they need to read all of this to make a comment. It takes me so much longer to read a text so I can do an intellectual comment to the group. I can go either way**….** My brain goes so fast I didn't keep enough time to myself to get deeper into things.

> Kansas: Somebody else can do that in half an hour. This exercise would take me a whole day. It is nearly impossible for me to do it.... I hire someone. People helped me. I can't do it. Now I hire to help me teach the computers as you can see it's more cleaned up here. I can't do it. I cannot see A is this and B is that. That is clearly a disability.

> Nebraska: I don't do well with administrative work. I could do better, but I am not going to pull my hair out about it. I just got to a point where I was like I don't care what she thinks about how well I do or don't do administrative work.

All participants discussed how their learning disabilities affected them in the workplace. Asters description of barriers she faced is one example of how all the participants had to make employment decisions based on the manifestations of their learning disabilities. Aster described she could not apply for particular jobs because of her inability to write. The emotional and physical component is also a hurdle that has to be overcome by all participants. For all participants this can be a major set back because they have many strengths but one manifestation of the learning disability was the factor in Asters case the writing was going to keep her from being hired.

Willow gave another example of the disappointment that participants experience on the job. Each of the participants discussed Willow expression of her frustrations in faculty meeting being unable to read and comprehend documents that were on the agenda of the meeting. She found her inability to participate in the conversation an embarrassment that created feelings of inadequacy. Kansas provided an example of how participants experience the inability to keep up with their work and how much extra time it takes to complete work assignments. Kansas described how her colleagues could complete assignments in a half an hour and for her this was an impossible task without hiring someone to assist her.

Nebraska was the only participant who chose not to do her work as a coping mechanism. This is an example of what many young people chose to do in school and this decision can cause an individual to lose their job or become discipline problems in school systems. Nebraska depicted her take on administrative work. She stated she was not going to do any of it because it was too frustrating to try to do something she was not capable of doing.

Study participants discussed the daily effects of having learning disabilities and the impact on their personal lives. Five of the participants depicted how their learning disabilities had an emotional impact in their personal lives due to misunderstandings with family, friends and colleagues. These same participants expressed the difficulties of managing the consequences of the personal misunderstanding. They further went on to explain how these difficulties are connected to their moods, emotions and energy levels. These experiences are even more significant in interpersonal relationships and for the women many of these emotions are a direct result from the learning disability and not from PMS or other factors which tend to by assumed by others.

> Aster: If I am not getting audio stuff from him (her husband) I can't process so I go after him because I need information…I have to rely on different senses. I think I really have to take that into consideration. I have thought about it in the beginning parts of the relationship, but then you forget because you are who you are, but it might be interesting for me to think about things when we get into our moments. I used to blame it on PMS but that's not happening anymore.

> Willow: It affects my personal life, too. One other thing is I have to put so much energy to control my impulsivity…I need to slow down, be patient I'm constantly, daily, every moment of my life auto monitoring my life for self-control…because people can't cope with me, can't deal with me. Sometime I'm too much for them because I'm so passionate, dramatic and I don't know how to talk without emotion. So everything I say comes out with a thousand feelings.

The significance of these excerpts is that the participants discussed how they developed their coping mechanisms in which they used to manage their relationships with other people. They stated that they can be irritable, moody, and withdrawn from the effects of learning disabilities. Aster used to blame her moods on PMS but she has learned to control her emotions. Willow stated she has to slow down, be calm and self monitor. The participants discussed how maturing has played a role in acceptance of who they are and how they cope with the effects of their learning disability. Their stories show how they are survivors. All the participants discussed how they have faced insurmountable societal and institutional barriers yet they have keep on moving forward and have made their mark in society. Kansas, discusses how she keeps trying despite the obstructions to her success.

> Kansas: As I've gotten older I don't feel like its letting go, it's almost like grabbing a hold. It's like okay it's like you are okay with losing things. I get up to the third floor and say what did I come here for. I go back to the basement and sit down at the desk and go oh, I went upstairs to get the tapes. I will go back and say I forgot the tape recorder…In way there was stuff always lacking somewhere, it was chaotic. I think some of it was sheer determination and um a great personal sacrifices. There is no doubt in my mind.
>
> The challenge comes every time I have a problem and I can't deal with it. I got overwhelmed with all this crap and again to just stop, reflect and say I am good enough and this is just learning from this cycle. One cannot flip out and get everything under control in a sense. The largest part is to be connected spiritually.
>
> LD really plays into these self-fulfilling prophecies. That is really the connection for me which is vital and it still gets me in little ways because I can't do A, B, or C, but it doesn't get me that often. I know I have my spirituality lagging and that connection hasn't been strong enough.

Aster discussed the maturation and like several of the participants she described how they have viewed and managed their learning disabilities. Several of the participants felt that rather than see their experiences as negative, they have come to see their learning

disabilities as a part of their makeup and as Aster stated that's what makes her unique. Aster used her learning disabilities as a motivating factor to push her to work harder, aim higher and accept nothing less than success in her chosen goals. Aster works to share this insight with others who are caught in the cycle of negative self-esteem. All the participants chose to push through the obstacles. Aster felt that much of her success was because of the learning disability and the way she see life through LD eyes. Aster, Kansas discussed how they saw failures as life lessons and no matter what the issues are they do not feel limited she works toward success.

> Aster: As a child it's a negative experience because you feel you are not in the mass group. As an adult who is 48 years old as I have aged it's a very wonderful thing about me. It is a part of me that is unique about me. It brings deeper empathy.
>
> I was ready to leave graduate school thinking I was dumb, but instead I fought and became more resourceful than ever. There are developmental stages and you feel good. You feel limited applying for a job where I would have to use computers or write. Um I am not so great with a checkbook, but um I don't see limitation. At this stage I feel resolved that I have a LD I know it inside of me and can spot it and help people come to acceptance of it.
>
> Our world is set up to use this traditional path to gather information. People in my class with LD didn't do that but it has been a driving force for me.
>
> I don't think you can separate having a LD and who I am. It is me. Would I have studied out of the box things if I didn't have this LD? I don't know. But what I go and take on very hands on things so I can learn not through a book or writing a paper. I go into the world and search for things I can hear and see. I use other things to get good information.

The participants discussed the consequences of having learning disabilities that effected their speech and language processing areas, which resulted in constantly self-correcting and questioning the validity of other peoples opinions of themselves. The constant questioning of self (asking is this for real, am I right or am I wrong) is emotionally tiring and frustrating. The participants experience a steady flow of negative

input and rejection from teachers, peers, and at times friends and family. The lack of validation created a yearning for acceptance.

Participants portrayed their experiences where they had the appearance to function perfectly in the able-bodied world until they were asked to perform a particular task that hits their disability head on. All the participants have a story about their experiences when others are shocked by their inability to perform certain tasks and how a new opinion about them develops. The participants further revealed their awareness when these experiences happen and are further aware that the opinion the individual had about them may change drastically. All the participants discussed this as a negative experience with residual affects especially when this experience happens when working with a supervisor, colleague or anyone in a position of power over them.

The next section will present a discussion of the daily living experiences and how the participants managed their daily tasks. This section examines those strategies that participants developed that are institutionally acceptable that ensure that the consequences of those strategies are compatible with societal norms and rules.

Daily Living Needs: "I Lost My Car Keys Again!"

The entire group of participants discussed the barriers they experienced in their daily routines and the strategies they employed to overcome those barriers. They all discussed the issues with their daily responsibilities and routines that enable them to participate in their own lives throughout the course of a day. Some of the daily living activities discussed by participants included: household tasks such as money managing, cleaning, washing clothes, organizing the home, cooking skills, and shopping.

All the participants further discussed the neuropsychological tasks that included language processing, reading, speaking, and writing. Business tasks involved work related responsibilities and social tasks include maintaining friendships, family and collegial relationships.

Each of the contributors discussed how difficult it is to involve themselves in these daily living tasks in comparison to able-bodied people for who do not see the difficulty in executing the tasks and make the tasks seem so effortless. They further discussed how being a person who has to live with learning disabilities, the affects of the disability and how they face various barriers the disability creates. The members of the study deeply expressed their experiences with the barriers, which appear to be uncomplicated and straightforward to the able-bodies populations. The groups portrayed their experiences with the daily tasks as complicated and intricate. They discussed the emotional setbacks that they had to overcome in order to complete tasks that would seem mundane and ordinary to a person without learning disabilities. The study population further discussed the practices and expectations from the range of institutions with which they interacted with in particular the educational, employment, and religious institutions that posed the greatest barriers. More than half of the group felt that as people with learning disabilities their experiences are often discounted, marginalized, and misunderstood. The example of the experiences of Willow and Caira provide a story to the impacts daily living tasks have on the group.

> Willow: In the meantime I would be losing my keys, my wallet, I would be losing things. That year can you imagine how many times I lost my car keys, house keys and student work because I have to run back and forth because the times were not good because I was always late for class?

> Caira: I was trying to ask that question and nobody was saying they understood it. At what point do you verbalize it in a way to make people understand what I meant so I said okay I would come back at another time. I had to prepare my question and ask it. I can't raise my hand and ask it because they will look at me like do you mean and then I say no. I have tons of people coming up to me in church saying.... That is how I have to prepare myself. I can't be spontaneous.
>
> Caira: My husband tells me all the time I didn't say that and I'm like that's what I meant or I might say something like I don't know, but we do have a hard time communicating. He doesn't understand when I say I will take care of that. It means he doesn't have to worry about it and I will do it.

Willow and Caira highlight a few of the daily living challenges all of the participants face keeping track of keys, wallets, work, cell phones, communicating with others and managing relationships. The participants discussed how disastrous it can be for them if they are unable to manage or keep organized enough to deal with these responsibilities in life. Willow and Caira give voice for the group of the experiences and further discussed how the disasters not only cause chaos and confusion for them but it can also affect other people.

Willow and Caira both have children and Willow gave case in points of the responsibility of picking up her children or a family member and how stressful and even panicky she has felt when she is locked out of her car or can’t find her keys. She discussed how a situation involving loss keys can escalate to institutional interruptions when, for instance, school officials become involved because she did not pick her child up on time and accuse of her of negligence or maintain her irresponsible for leaving her child outside the school. This is and experience that Willow and Caira have had on several occasions when they were delayed and one of their children had to wait until a family member could make it to the school. For both Willow and Caira this added to an on going energy depletion as a result of organization and memory barriers in their lives.

For other participants their experiences were of a similar nature but different because it did not involve children. However, they did experience keeping track of important items such as keys, debt cards etc…

Willow depicted other examples of daily living tasks from the employment sector that are draining because of the amount of physical, emotional and psychic energy that is needed to complete certain tasks. The entire group member discussed these types of expenditures of extra energy that lead to exhaustion except for Jackson.

> Willow: Well because I think a lot of times when people might say this curriculum I spent all night doing or I gave up my whole weekend to do this. You give up all your time to do this and you don't come in and say I spent six months preparing this curriculum or I took my whole winter vacation to get this done. You don't brag about it.
>
> Willow: The thing is it requires so much of my energy. I was teaching Biology class that I needed to prepare labs so I had to be on my toes all the time because they will have final and midterm exams and labs at the high school. It was hard.

Willow provided perfect examples of how daily responsibilities take more time for her to prepare. She further gave voice to the fact that sometimes her projects do not come out as good as she had hoped because the deadline approaches too quickly. Kansas' transcript also provided noteworthy discussion of the same topic. She added such information as to how these situations can cause additional stress and anxiety around projects and deadlines. The subjects also discussed that the lengthier the process to complete particular projects and meet deadlines the residual affects can hamper positive self-esteem.

However, Willow gave voice to the age-old saying practice makes perfect. She provided comments on a positive note long hours and continued practice for perfection makes her more creative and a higher-risk taker. This was true for all the participants.

Jackson with his perfection of computers, Wood as a preacher and the others as counselors, teachers, human services providers and customer services providers.

This perfection leads to coping mechanisms in which Willow and Aster discussed spending large amounts of time and energy creating organizational plans. Having a schedule for everything was one way the group found they could accommodate themselves so that they can successfully complete their daily tasks. The only two that did not discuss this type of organizational plan was Caira and Jackson.

> Willow: When my children were growing up I had it all organized. We had the schedule.
>
> Aster: I had to get maybe four people over five years (to do editing for me), but the best part of it was the discipline. I met two hours three times a week. It was in my book, like going to a class. I got all my things done. The discipline of if you would write by yourself and you can't write people do a little here and there, but because I had a nine o'clock time slot until eleven three days a week I went to their house, we would work on the paper, every other day in between I would gather the information, read it in the books, I would put what I needed and I um I finished.

In addition, to an organization plan Aster explains that with out discipline she could not have managed her schedule. Those participants that maintained a regimented commitment to their schedule had less chaos in their lives. Aster required this commitment from the people she had working for her. There were several requirements within Asters plan she would not only have to show up to the meeting but she had to have something for her employees to work on otherwise she would be paying them for doing nothing. In the above narratives Aster gives excellent examples of how she was able to problem solve and find ways to work with her learning disabilities.

Another issue the participants discussed regarding daily living tasks was the everyday problems of household chores and how that has been just as difficult to manage

and how these duties cause frustration and anxiety. In the narrative below Kansas and Nebraska provided background information on some of the challenges the participants have in managing their household.

> Kansas: The challenge comes every time I have a problem and I can't deal with it. Yesterday I needed to clean up in the basement and I got overwhelmed with all this crap and again to just stop, reflect and say I am good enough and this is just learning from this cycle. It is really the strategies we talked about the last time, which is how one cannot flip out and get everything under control in a sense. The largest part is to be connected spiritually. This is what was triggered. It’s really interesting it’s this whole psychological thing is a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I think that LD really plays into these self-fulfilling prophecies. That is really the connection for me which is vital and it still gets me in little ways because I can't do A, B, or C, but it doesn't get me that often. I know I have my spirituality lagging and that connection hasn't been strong enough
>
> Nebraska: I have some clothes. You know at this point I have a weeks worth of laundry, most of my laundry is in the laundry basket not all of it. But what starts to slow me down is I have laundry left over from last time. The whole idea of putting that away stops me. It’s not I can’t, I don't want to, something is stopping me from putting it away. When I do my own laundry my goal is to do it until it’s done because if anything remains I'm fucked.

Caira, Virginia, Kansas and Nebraska discussed being weighed down by household duties. Kansas and Nebraska gave excellent descriptions of how daily household duties can become completely overwhelming and cause a sense of defeat and despair along with a complete energy drain. It is important to keep in mind that these daily tasks occur during the same day that they have to go to work or school. Many of the participants reported that in most cases many different tasks take place in one day leading to exhaustion at the end of the day.

In the following narrative Willow discussed the use of medication to assist her in her doctorate; where as, Aster and Kansas discussed how good self-care and good nutrition is how they handle some of the manifestations of their learning disability.

> Willow: More consistently I began taking more medication when I began my doctoral degree four years ago.
>
> Aster: Doing really good self-care. You are already dealing with your brain not completely working as well and you have all sorts of limitations into society that you're in already, but then if you clog yourself with poor nutrition. … Do you think you can function? I have studied health, nutrition, things to take care of myself and I can see the difference in what I ate the night before. If I eat carbs, too many sugars I can't talk my brain morphs. … If I don't deal with my anxiety, if I eat too much sugar I am an anxious person. If I eat things that make me hype, caffeine or stuff like that I am spinning, part of my brain doesn't work very well already and it's going to get clogged even worse. If I don't take care of my nutrition my anxiety is going to be off the charts. It's going to clog my ability to think even more.
>
> Kansas: You know the disability gets heightened. The nutrition plays a part, they have done all this research and now we know the environment we grow up in has a lot to do with disabilities.

Along with Aster and Kansas discussion of nutrition Willow gave important examples of daily care that she uses and that is the ability to relax and take a break. She talk about a lot of time being spent compensating for areas of weakness. So she tries to make a daily habit that incorporate breaks and moments to re-energize which she finds is helpful. The following narrative is an example of how some people with learning disabilities have learned to relax.

> Willow: Actually I just meditated and prayed. I didn't do much of anything and I fast. So I bring a lot of spiritual books and usually it is my birthday right before school begins and I bring my lesson plan books and I bring my plan to map things out for the entire school year.

Willow reiterated the positive side of working long hours and spending more time than usual on daily tasks that it is the opportunity to practice and perfect ways to use energy wisely. Willow describes these practices as developing a “wonderful energy reserve”. She described that she is constantly put in the place of having to work longer hours, to concentrate and focus harder than others and to organize so that she can get through her

day. Willow felt that the ongoing routine created many other kinds of skills. She gave an example of how she is able to face obstacles during her day and not get upset by them as much as able-bodied people because she is used to facing and overcoming various obstacles throughout her day.

Managing Disability Oppression: "Look There's a SPED!"

The third category that emerged from the data was how participants managed the on going issues of oppression, which included several sub-categories of oppression. The first sub-category of oppression was participants' discussed how they managed prejudice, systemic disempowerment, and over all disability oppression in their lives. The second sub-category of oppression included participants describing experiences with internalized oppression. Group members talked about their experiences with internalized oppression and describe how they managed the psychological conditions, messages, day-to-day emotional experiences, and learned beliefs of inferiority as people living with a learning disability. Lastly, some of the participants discussed how every now and then it was unclear as to whether they were being mistreated because of their disability or race.

The following paragraphs show how the data revealed the manifestations of oppression in the PHPS lives. Thus, the narratives highlighted the experiences the participants had with oppressive school practices, parental/family dynamics, and how able-bodied individuals treated them. Aster, Willow, and Nebraska gave the strongest meaning in their transcripts which conveyed how many of the group members felt by describing societal experiences they have had to endure when interacting with others.

> Aster: It gets ugly. People get impatient with people with disabilities. Really impatient. It is very small steps.

> Willow: Yes. It's interesting how people will get angry with you because you can't hear them and I say, "I can't hear the waters running and think why can't you hear with the water running, with the fan on. I'm like because I can't process. It's just interesting how angry they will get. I will make them get angry with me and they will yell at me and I will say, thank you very much. I hear you now.
>
> Nebraska: I'm being killed all the time in a realistic as well as a hypothetical sense because of all those things [the re-occurring negative messages] and accepting that was a big thing for me. Accepting the fact that whenever I go out into the world I have more of a chance of being harmed.

The above conversations demonstrate the lack of patience, understanding, and assumptions able-bodied people have had towards these PHPS with learning disabilities. Aster, Willow and Nebraska portrayed how much it hurts when people they meet, know, love, and trust constantly misunderstand them, tease, and belittle them. They further discuss how this ongoing process resulted in a deflation of their self-esteem and self-worth. The entire group described how these kinds of messages, interactions, and internalizations begin at an early age. They all discussed how family practices and parenting also had a negative impact on them because there families had little to no understanding of disabilities. Kansas, Nebraska, and Virginia describe their family experiences that left them feeling deficient, inferior, and dumb. Denver’s mother had the experience with providing her with services but she did not believe the programs could be as bad as Denver was saying

> Kansas: I laid the exam on my father's desk and he calls me downstairs and says you know you got the wrong exam, this is not your piece of paper you must have the wrong one and I said why and he said you could never have notes as good as this. It was devastating. I can't describe it to you. I was totally devastated and he was serious. He really didn't look at the names and he thought it was somebody else certificate.
>
> Nebraska: My mom once in a while will call me an airhead. I can see that. I think I am a little bit spacey. I think it’s a different way to look at it that is the reason the stuff around ability is a trigger for me than race. My dad used to tell me I was an airhead or I don't know basically saying I'm dumb because I forgot something

> or wasn't paying attention, I couldn't find something that was right in front of me…(My) girlfriend at the time having no malicious intent would say things like dummy, stupid and that wasn't even the exact language my dad would use and it would make me feel horrible.
>
> Virginia: I think with my sister, sometimes, because she's one of those black people that don't believe in having disabilities or whatever or psychological stuff going on. So when I tell her, because I also have seasonal effective disorder I was talking to her last weekend and I was like all this rain, she was like what's wrong with you, when I was talking to her. I was like I don't know, all this rain is getting me down it's my seasonal effective disorder. She's like oh please there you go again! She's like what don't you have? …Most people do things this way? MMMHMMM. No I hate that phrase because I hear it all the time. That's why I know I would never say it to anyone.

Kansas, Nebraska and Virginia showed how their families had a significant impact on their socialization process as a child. The participants also showed how their families seem to have lost confidence and sometimes respect for them. This was demonstrated in Kansas's narrative where her father did not believe that she could be successful.

The participants discussed their family experiences and then went on to discuss how oppression continues throughout life and how deeply embedded it was in their educational experiences. For Caira her family was not supportive but they did not give her a hard time regarding her grades. Denver, Savannah, Jackson, Wood, and Willow had quite a bit of support at home although Willow's mother expected her to memorize and if she didn't she was hit in the head.

Denver, Caira and Savannah discussed their experience with disability oppression in K-12. They discussed how the schools institutional practices caused them to be seen as different and inferior by the able-bodied people and this made them feel substandard. They further illustrated how able-bodied teachers and children pick up on their differences leading to stereotypes, name calling, and public humiliation in school. For Aster, Caira, Kansas, and Savannah, this was their experience in one-way or another.

Denver, Jackson, Virginia and Willow did not experience the humiliation from teachers in the same way as the others did. Wood and Nebraska were unable to explain any of his circumstances because they blocked it out and cannot remember. Aster, Caira, Denver, Kansas, and Savannah discussed how teachers would disempower them rather than empower them and they felt that teachers were not trained well.

> Denver: I finally got into a Spanish class that I wanted. That was another thing people would be like was are you taking Spanish or French and you couldn't say anything and then people would know. You are one of those! You know? So um which is really silly they should have let you take Spanish even if you are poor at reading.
>
> Caira: I also became the class clown, a lot of the things I would say when I would be answering a question and being very serious everybody would laugh and at first I would be embarrassed and then I would laugh along with them. It was fun and a way to communicate and be accepted, so being like a class clown you know that became another way for me to kind of get around what was really happening and me not knowing an answer. If I answered something completely wrong the class would laugh and then I would laugh, too. It would be like Caira, that's really funny. I didn't think of it at the time as being picked on I just thought it was funny and people were talking to me and it was one of the things that developed throughout school, high school, even in grade school that developed more and I could make people laugh with answers that I was answering because I thought it was the correct answer or the way I was reading or what. That became a mechanism I used.
>
> Savannah: When I was in 6th grade because I was so good I was always put next to the bad kids and I spent a good part of the year copying the red Thorndike dictionary because the teacher said nobody spells their name the way you spell it. I was too stupid or didn't have enough whatever the teacher said.

Denver discusses how simple difference in students' schedules could make them as being in special education. The students in special education were restricted from taking a foreign language. Meanwhile, all the other students in their grade level were taking either French or Spanish. Therefore, a student who was not taking one of the languages was then confirmed to be in special education, further stigmatizing the student.

Caira and Denver also pointed out that being in remedial classes and having to walk down particular hallways also stigmatized them as being the other.

Caira explains that being the class clown was a way of hiding her learning disability and laughing with the other students at her became a way to fit in. Lastly, Savannah and Nebraska told stories of teaching making them copy the dictionary and filling in graph paper with numbers which highlights how teachers took actions that made them feel completely foolish and confused rather than assisting them with the task they may be struggling with. The following narratives by Caira, Kansas, and Wood give further demonstration of the verbal abuse and humiliation some of the participants experienced from interactions with teachers and other school personnel.

> Caira: Math oh my goodness I would turn in my paper. The teacher would say what is this, what did you do and I would say I did the homework and she would say everything is wrong, what was I doing? Do you think I would go back to that class to get humiliated? I would go back once a week and they would say wrong, wrong, wrong. I didn't get the process it wasn't explained to me.
>
> I remember not going to class because I didn't understand. I remember Math, English, I loved English and writing, but I remember one time I went and wrote a story I spent three or four hours on and she didn't say anything about the story just that I got this wrong and what language was I speaking and how misspelled it was, grammatically incorrect and she just sliced and diced my paper up. This damaged me. I enjoyed writing but she acted like I was supposed to know. Why didn't you look these words up she asked? It’s not like we had spell check back then. If I think its spelled right why would I go to the dictionary? I as a child write a paper and turn it in and then I would get it back like that and I'm getting an F on something I was proud of and spent three hours on. I'm not coming back to that class. I'm calling the teacher names. The teacher is not taking you aside and telling you quietly they got you what is this? Yelling in front of the whole class and everyone is like Oh, Caira what did you write about? What was on your paper? I was like none of your business. That whole school process was more damaging.
>
> Kansas: The Math teacher was a miserable person. The Math teacher gave me a test across the room and said, "Miss Kansas this is a document of your stupidity." I left the room crying and he had to apologize

Wood: One of my guidance counselors told (me) I wasn't going to college.

All of the participants have had an experience similar to those described above at one time or another in their lifetime. Several have had the experience of being told in front of a group of people that they are complete idiots regularly. For other participants the experience was on going from one grade to another where teachers would belittle their work in front of the entire class. Denver pointed out that the discrimination was not limited to individual teachers and school personnel, but was institutionalized as common school practices, such as the tracking of students. Denver depicts other ways she was marginalized was when she took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) un-timed. The accommodation for Denver was to take the SAT un-time. However, this is marked on the test and released to the colleges she applied to. Denver felt the un-timed test was a reasonable accommodation as the law grants extended time on exams like the SAT; however, she was highly upset that this information was shared with the admissions offices of potentially college opportunities. Denver explains her frustration with this experience below.

> Denver: I think what is even worse is when people track you. That whole idea of tracking. …It is almost like they sent you off. They put you in lower classes. …I could get un-timed testing for my SAT. What annoyed me was they marked it on your SAT that you had nontraditional testing so already the colleges know you have a disability going in because they look at it and say Oh this wasn't taken in the traditional setting. People can look at your SATS and see it was un-timed and they say oh well you will need to take this study skills class then. You know? It's like oh, God! I'm getting all A's why do I need a study skills class, what am I doing wrong?

Denver's story further provides data on how the admission offices perpetuated institutional narrow view of people with learning disabilities by enforcing a tracking system during placement. In Denver's case the admissions office placed all students who

have had extra time on the SAT's in a study skills class whether they really needed it or not.

In the following narratives the participants discuss how the negative attitudes and beliefs about people with learning disabilities lead to internalize oppression.

> Aster: Because I felt so stupid that I had no idea how to really process information…Age of 26 that was the starting point for me. When I looked back I just thought I was stupid… I have an older brother who is mentally retarded so I already have in the family this disability thing… I'm feeling like we are a family of retarded disability people… By the time seventh and eighth grade came around I felt really dumb because you really have to read the diagrams of the sentence structure.

> Denver: I just always thought oh I can't read well. I didn't realize I was really intelligent. Had I known that, I would have felt better in myself at elementary school…You had to go to reading class and go to the resource room. I used to call it the retard room and plus it was down the hallway and you couldn't sneak into that place which is what you would try to do, sneak in and out. It was the only thing down the hallway and you couldn't just walk down the hall and drop in there. If you walk down that hallway that is where you are going. You know? It was a dead end. In middle school people never said anything to me, but you always would hear that person is in the retard room. Whatever. No one ever said anything discouraging to me; they probably could have so that was not a good place. I got out in 8th grade. I was free.

> Nebraska: I think basic people internalize oppression …you get a message enough times you start to believe it about yourself, you get it enough times from the society around you saying that you know you are going to have to be dependent on people for the rest of your life or your learning disabilities are so bad you are going to be lucky to hold down a job when you are an adult.

Nebraska summarizes the issue when she said, "people internalize oppression". The participants describe themselves as the members of an oppressed group and that they have accepted the belief that they are substandard. Based on their discussions it is clear that the participants see themselves as the subordinate. This is believable to them because they have the negative experiences, which are documented such as poor grades, the

isolating experiences in special education classroom, and constant verbal abuse based on stereotypes and stereotypical messages to prove it.

The participants demonstrated that internalized oppression could be an unconscious training of the mind that set up emotional and psychological believes of their inadequacy. The participants described their inability to read, write, remember, or perform/process in the same way that other children were able to perform made them stand out in a group. They further discussed how these emotional and psychological manifestations already had an impact on them before the influences of family life, school practices, and societal reactions/interactions set this roller coaster into motion.

The following participants Caira, Nebraska, Savannah, Virginia, Willow and Wood are people of color. This next set of examples they will discuss how their multiple social identities (i.e. race, class, gender, etc.) additionally impacts how they experience oppression. The narratives show how double and triple jeopardy creates even more obstacles and confusion for participants.

> Caira: It took me forty-five minutes to an hour for me to get to school on the bus and it was interesting because there was nobody in the school that looked like me and people used to ask me about my ponytails and how did I get my hair that way and I didn’t understand those kinds of questions. I was like what do you mean how did I get my hair that kind of way? Their hair was different than mine so the conversation was always about this and why I looked the way I looked. I guess they weren’t used to seeing people of color. … um you know the part where they are calling you names, racial names that in addition to um being put in certain classes. People would say you are in the dumb class.
>
> Nebraska: There were a couple of incidents I don't even remember who they were, these white boys and they would call me a gook or you know I remember one occasion they were acting like they had a machine gun. That was interesting, being that I was one of two Asian kids in the school.
>
> Savannah: I went into the professor to find out about my grades and he told me basically because I don't intend to pass any niggers, especially women niggers so why would you think you would do anything better and at that point I said thank

> you and left and went back to class the next day he was gone. He was fired on the spot.
>
> Virginia: Because people have these stereotypes about being a black woman in general and your qualifications of abilities. So I just think it's a double pressure because first you have to prove, sort of like you're setting an example for black people but then you also have to prove because you're also setting an example for someone with a learning disability that you are capable.…But I just kept trying to do my best and that's partly because my parents always emphasized the importance of an education. They always told me that I had to get good grades and that I had to be, because I was always the only black person in my class in all my classes in elementary school. And usually the other people in the classes were West Indian or Asian. So they always told me that I had to be better than the white kids in the class, it wasn't good enough to just be just as good as them so I always remembered that.

All the female participants that are people of color except Willow discussed several issues as women of color with learning disabilities. The women of color discussed how they internalized the negative messages, as people of color and the difficulty they had at times distinguishing between what was racism issue in comparison to what was a learning disability oppression. The women of color discussed the emotional impact from the lifetime of receiving negative messages. The significance is that none of these participants felt different from their peers until others named their differences. The participants showed how they were not immune to constant societal harassment, belittlement, betrayal, humiliation, dehumanization, and ignored this causes them to internalize many of the negative beliefs, actions, and messages.

Acceptable Survival Techniques: Creative Strategies

In this category participants described how they created their own accommodations; how they strategize and successfully maneuvered through institutional barriers that are systematic throughout our society. Participants have used their own creativity to survive in their daily exchanges. They showed how they used their own

creativity to successfully maneuver through the institutional barriers that are systematized throughout our society. The study members showed how their success often got measured based upon their use of creativity, innovation and resourcefulness in navigating around social, institutional, and cultural barriers.

In order to avoid humiliation and failure the participants have worked towards utilizing positive ways of compensating for their disabilities. Caira explains how she used the strategy of frequently asking questions to meet her learning needs.

> Caira: I knew that if I spoke in my class I would be okay. I used to ask questions about everything and the teachers would be like, Okay, Caira, what now? I would just do it anyway because one that is how I would make her explain to me what was written down. They used to hand out papers and you'd have to read them and just do the work so I would get my handout and ask her what was on the paper. They would say it's on the paper and I would say, "I know, but what do you mean by that?" The class would laugh and the teacher would answer me but that's how I would get my information.

Although Caira's strategy was successful it did not save her from humiliation in the classroom however, she was willing to stand up against the sometimes-degrading reactions of the teacher and students in the classroom to get the information she needed to be able to do assignments.

Participants also describe how they chose specific behaviors and personalities to negotiate within the systemic barriers maintained as a standard in our society.
Some participants became teacher's pets and strived to be well liked/popular among their peers to receive the help and support they needed.

> Aster: I become really popular based on my personality. Like I'm a survivalist so I knew I had to be successful. People liked me, teachers liked me, and they really did. I developed parts of my personality that were nice. … Yes we were friends with the teachers, we ran the school…Yeah. I was a leader, not academically and I got an award upon graduating for being outstanding…I would hang out with really smart people and that was a survival technique um I was just with really

> smart people who loved to learn and be in public arena and sounded very smart in academics. I learned by listening, even though I have audio processing it.
>
> Kansas: Having to learn to really schmooze people because I was constantly missing things, something is due, an appointment, or whatever kind of thing.
>
> Wood: I was always a teachers pet in gym…I became his assistant I would sit next to the smart kids and someone would read and tell me what it meant so you know that's how I was able to get through.

Participants learned to use the resources available to them. As discussed some teachers were willing to put in extra time with them as long as they appeared to be pleasant, good mannered and hard working. The participants were able to create a support system by finding allies who were willing and understanding of their needs. Several of participants were successful at getting this type of assistance. They had the right type of personality to get help. These participants were also willing to ask for help. Some members of the group also recognized that by getting help placed them in a vulnerable position and they had to be willing to put the extra time into getting the help for example, staying after school for help, which means some of the participants missed sports or hanging out with their friends after school.

Many of the participants recognized that their peers made good allies and for some they turned out to be excellent resources and support as long as they were friendly with one another. Several participants relied on their peers to get information about assignments, readings and studying. However, the participants did state that they had to be willing to out themselves, to have their weaknesses exposed to others in order to get their needs met as shown in the examples below.

> Willow: So what I did was I began strategies. I had the secretaries from both buildings and they all had copies of my house and car keys. The teachers in the high school, the teacher next door to my classroom that I was teaching had a spare key of my car.

> Savannah: All ways had enough sense to have someone edit my work. I had three teachers who would always read everything I did.
>
> Virginia: A small school of course, I felt that I had a relationship with every single one of my professors.
>
> Again so, that's what helped me again to work with them and they understood what I was having problems with and we were able to work together
>
> Wood: I have a few close pastors and if I am doing something in Psalms I ask them about a question or whatever. I will use you as my resource person tonight can you help find it for me. Thanks. I am boosting them up so they can help me find what I need. I need someone who loves King James to come forward and read and no one did and said well we aren't reading that today.

In the above narratives the participants demonstrate how they had to ask various people to assist them. Secondly, they had to give an explanation as to why they needed assistance. Although this process in the end assisted each person with being successful, it requires a great deal of trust and self-disclosure. As Willow and Kansas mentioned earlier that at the same time, daily tasks can take a lot of emotional energy and using someone as a resource person can help the individual reserve some energy preventing them from moving towards exhaustion.

Some participants discuss how they made their own accommodations by setting dates to do their bills and setting clocks to a particular time, along with other self-accommodating strategies as discussed below.

> Virginia: I have a set date where I pay all the bills so this way I don't have to worry about that. Because I know that's part of my disability where I forget things. So I think just working around it that way, you know, self accommodating. And it's like with all my clocks, well this is since we were kids though, where we keep all of our clocks in our house ten minutes early.
>
> I have this little recorder thing that when I remember not to like keep it on my dresser, but a lot of times when I'm driving I think of things so I have this little reminder thing, and I just pick it up and talk into it and then play it at the end of the day you know things that pop into my head that I know I need to do.

> Wood: There is stuff that can help me, you can download things on the computer and things that can consolidate all the reading. The piece of paper is my crutch. If I don't have the paper I panic. A lot of Sundays I get up there and don't look at the paper but I know I have it.
>
> Once I put this on the computer and type it does help me in processing….I can't read out of the wedding book but if I take this and type it up and do it in my own words it's better. It's something about putting it in my own territory.

Participants use all kinds of strategies, such as doing bills on the same date each month, maintaining an appointment book to using PDA systems for reminders. The following narratives further discuss how individuals creatively found jobs that best suited their abilities.

> Caira: I found the jobs that worked for me and gave me the energy to stay excited with it and when you're working with people you get new people everyday. That's the type of position I need to be in.
>
> I went to our business service centers where you go to the front counter and you are physically in a center where people come out to you to ship packages and you are face to face with people and that worked out fine.
>
> Aster: Right. So, I created my own work life of working for myself and interesting enough not charging very high prices because I felt like I was not really capable of, it affected me that way around the job.
>
> I don't. I don't do any of it. All of my clients are in my head and if I had to I would create systems you know for me I am really good at um like I have tenants now. I bought a building and I go through the paperwork. I create checklist forms you know so I am on top of everything. I create systems to survive. On the average I have 15-18 clients a week. I use my other skills. I don't have to produce paperwork for anybody.

Theses examples illustrated how individuals have navigated around employment barriers by finding their niche. The following statements sum up the attitudes that many of the participants showed in the area of acceptable survival techniques.

> Virginia: I think you just have to develop strategies like that. …thinking ahead just like I was saying you have to think about doing things better not just as good, so I think with the learning disability I think you have to think ahead of things.

Wood: It's making it through the effort. Adversity. I think what happens is if you walk around with it in here [touches heart and head]. I will laugh at myself. I am up in front of people all the time. I said the wrong thing and I will laugh. That is not what I meant. People will say that is what you said. If you want to believe that then you stay there. I can't bring you back. Understand that is not what I meant.

Kansas: Once the disability loses its potency it just becomes another learning and I just do it. I get into the despair I know I have to practice my spiritual connection. Strategies are part of the human way and the other one is the spiritual stuff.

Aster: It was my own accommodation.

Kansas: Strategies are part of the human way and the other one is the spiritual stuff. They go together. It's a spiritual connection, which allows me to practice this on a human level. The two are really connected and this is one of the learning tools.

Nebraska: It got to the point that I started to avoid my locker issues and to save time in between classes is I just started carrying everything in my backpack**.**

Savannah: I was very up front and honest, I knew there was something wrong, but interview me I could talk my way out of a paper bag. I pretty much talked my way into college.

I always had stories to tell and I loved that. Inventive spelling wasn't invented then, but that is how I would write as long as I could read it. I could always read back what I wrote.

In this section each participant provided an assortment of examples demonstrating the creativity they used at home, in school, and at work to manage their lives. For the most part they were very successful and eased the burdens for the participants.

Institutionally Unacceptable Survival Techniques: "So I Just Skipped Class!"

This category is institutionally unacceptable survival techniques. It reviews how participants engaged in behaviors that included acts of misconduct in the classroom, anger, academic dishonesty, skipping classes and/or school, and other disruptive behaviors that are considered outside the boundaries of accepted/good behavior by

educational institutions and other similar agencies. Several participants describe using survival techniques promoted by frustration, humiliation and emotional despair due to the lack of effective support in school and at home. Their experiences further described how they creatively schemed and strategize their way around the institutional barriers existing in schools.

The participants described how they were forced to reside in an environment where the authority figure/teacher was the master oppressor who set the standards of the oppressive culture in the classroom. They spoke of the classrooms being deficient in nurturance, support, and how the teacher placed them at an educational and emotional disadvantage where embarrassment and humiliation were standard practices. The participants' further discussed how the inability to succeed in academic settings stimulated them to anxiously grasp for survival techniques that assisted them from time to time escaping the daily humiliation and internalization of oppression. Aster and Caira each share examples of strategies they engaged in to cope with the educational pressures, lack of effective institutional support, and lack of knowledge about learning disabilities.

> Aster: In the elementary school I cheated. I'm a clever person so I would write on my desk, on the ruler it's all the spelling stuff. I did it for years. …You don't feel good about yourself. I do remember that.
>
> Caira: I tried to make believe I didn't hear the questions or I would make believe I forgot my book. I would always have an excuse because I didn't understand the work. I didn't know what they were talking about.

The narratives given by Aster and Caira demonstrated how they used their witty abilities to remain members of the class. Aster gave an example of academic dishonesty in which she resorted to cheating in order to pass and not be humiliated by the instructor and her peers.

Aster discussed how she cheated in order to pass the spelling test. She also discussed how badly it made her feel to cheat. This is and example of the beginning of the internalization process. Caira's example brings our attention to a different type of strategy that she used to cope with the classroom environment, where she was mandated to participate and called upon without notice or enough time to process the information. These sorts of classroom practices increased Caira's' anxiety. Nonetheless, both participants demonstrate strong wills and extreme creativity to maintain their membership in the classroom along with trying to maintain their humility. These examples definitively portray how the lack of understanding by their teachers' hurt their self-esteem when they were forced to pretend that everything is okay.

Another negative emotion participants described they had to deal with was the feeling of being fretful about their inability to perform academically. This resulted in participants creating distractions in the classroom to remove attention from them. Caira describes intentionally doing things such as pretending not to hear the question" that would consequentially take the teachers attention off of her during lessons. Other participants similarly explained that they did not want to be called upon because they were fearful of humiliation, embarrassment, or because they simply lacked an understanding of what was being requested of them. Wood describes another example of disruptive behavior below.

> Wood: I was always a talker. I always got in trouble in all my classes for talking, so I would get sent to the principals office or go down the hall or then they moved me next door to the teachers desk, then I'd be disruptive. I was disruptive in study hall and then you had detention and had to stay out of school and then I would lie my way out of staying after school because if I stay out of school my parents would know I was being disruptive.

In other cases the participants discussed behaviors that were self-destructive and at other times were destructive to others. For example, Denver and Jackson mentioned the fact that they did not want to stay in the special education classroom because they feared for their safety. Their peers were throwing chairs around the classroom, drug dealing and there was a high risk they my get beaten up.

Caira speaks of another strategy she used, which focused on how teachers bad attitudes. Caira felt as an adult looking back at her childhood, that the "teachers had bad attitude(s)". She mentioned her concerns regarding teachers who take advantage of children and how the children are unaware of their rights. Caira further stated her concerns regarding how many students with disabilities are not aware of their rights as children and young adults. Nebraska provides a good example of how teacher gave her assignments that just kept her busy and out of the way.

> Nebraska: I remember having to write numbers for extra credit, they are teaching you repetitive math. They would give us a ten by ten grid and for extra credit you could write one, two, three, four, all the way to a hundred and then when you get done you could write a new sheet---one hundred and one all the way to like two hundred. Yeah that was our extra credit.

The following data provided important information as to why some of the participants chose to skip classes. Caira discussed some of the reasons why she felt it was necessary to skip class. First she discussed that she was the only black person in her classroom and that this made her uncomfortable because of the way some of the people treated her. Secondly, she felt it was hard to tell if the teacher was discriminating against here because she was black or because she had a hard time understand instructions. The issue was that the teacher was consistently unwilling to give her an explanation of the written directions for assignments. In response to Caira's questions about how to proceed,

the teacher would tell her to just read the directions on the paper over and over. Other participants discussed having this same experience. However, Caira's way of coping with the issue of not being able to process the information she needed was to skip that class and consequently fail. Caira explained, "if we had a test that day I wouldn't go to class, I would skip. I had a very bad attendance record. I was (on) internal suspension for being absent".

Denver's experience was very different than Caira's as she was given accommodations for her learning disability and she had an Individualized Education Plan. Denver's complaint was that students with behavior problems were assigned to the same class as she was. As mentioned earlier Denver's experienced in special education classes were that students threw chairs at the teachers and were violent and destructive. She felt the threat of harm and ultimately feared the other students. She would hide in the bathroom and she went as far as getting a job outside the school in which she had forged her mother's signature in order to be signed out of school.

> Denver: Then I just didn't go, show up. I think we used to go to the bathrooms and hide. …I had a job. I signed myself out. I wrote Denver Colorado won't be here today.

Signing the note from her parents was particularly creative in Denver's case from the beginning of school Denver had her signature on file rather than her mothers. The next few narratives reveal participants attempts to manage their environment, and to earn acceptance of peers by participating in academically and socially risky behavior. Nebraska discussed following along in the classroom caused her boredom, frustration, anxiety, and tension. She further went on to talk about other illegal activities she used to engage in.

> Nebraska: Every single day all you are doing is getting out of your chair and talking to people and they can't have you doing this all the time, it's disrupting everyone…..What I used to do is take a lot of chances. Stole a car when I was fifteen just because I thought it would be a fun idea. When I was in college we always used to go caving, smoking in this cave and like crawl up into spaces that were very dangerous you know almost died a couple of times for doing those kind of things. Like nearly blowing my hands off and you know just holding on to M80's and lighting them.
>
> That's also around the time I learned to break into houses. I also thought if I didn't make it in the real world I would become a criminal. It's still a possibility I could learn how to hot wire cars, break into cars, I could steal stuff like mad, and those are all of my talents I think the problem is excitement. The shoplifting isn't so much excitement. For me when I was younger I just thought people were so stupid and I could go into a craft store and take something and it would be so easy.

Nebraska further describes how she was able to outsmart others. She discussed how outsmarting others by stealing from them made her feel good. She further went on to say how difficult it was to control her impulsivity. Other participants discussed using strategies that helped them at work such as arriving late to programs and how to try and control their anxiety.

> Wood: I always knew that reading was difficult. Sunday school is where you had to read out loud and I would always do something. So then my strategy is I would go late and then all the assignment is done and I don't have to do it. Now I know how to fake things. I got my bible and I know certain things I don't do. I know I have difficulty and I can get up and do what I have to. I say calm down, take a deep breath and go ahead and do it.
>
> Wood used several strategies to get out of having to read out loud in the church. He mentioned that as a minister he would be called upon to read a passage from the bible in the beginning of a service or also be asked to say a prayer. One of his strategies was to "arrive late" to the functions so that all of the assignments would have been given out. Secondly, he would "fake things" like having to go to the bathroom to again prevent himself from public humiliation. Nebraska, attempting to manage her work schedule, used other coping mechanisms.
>
> Nebraska: Some of the stuff is just not urgent. Some of the people I don't think I need to call back because I just don't care and I'm supposed to call them back as my job duties.

In the above narrative Nebraska decided that calling people back was not important. This was her coping mechanism however; this type of decision is one that can cause problems later on down the road. Although Nebraska has rationalized to her self that she does not need to call people back it could have negative consequences

What each participant reveled is that there are many gaps that needed to be identified. There is a magnitude of ineffective support in schools and a lack of knowledge about learning disabilities in general; many individuals are left finding creative ways to cope that unfortunately have resulted in negative, disruptive or harmful behaviors to protect themselves from environmental oppression. Participants also shared the safe strategies they used to creatively manage their environments.

Services: Accommodations Please!

Participants had a great deal to say about services and support. The data provide two categories that could be hard to distinguish between one another however, the methodology I used to differentiate between the two is that services represent the actual systems or institutional setting that provided programs to assist people with disabilities. Support includes two components the emotional and physical aspects of providing support to a person with learning disabilities by another individual/s. Services can also represent a specific organization that is institutionalized.

Services Needed

The following section provides the data the participants reveled through their descriptions of areas they had difficulties in. They discussed their need for services and particularly focused upon experiences in educational and employment contexts, but also discussed the needs of services in terms of daily needs. Group members also provide an

in depth discussion of their daily living needs which will follow in another section, but will be briefly touched upon here.

K-12

Several of the participants felt the impact of having limited to no services available. Aster discussed how she had to endure all of the negative messages in the classroom. Rather than the educational institutions providing her with support Aster has had to struggle through her life. The stigma will always be with her because the lack of ability is engrained in her as part of her life cycle. Aster, now a professional therapist with a doctorate, clearly has the ability to learn and the ability to be successful in her chosen profession. However, she still discussed needing help and assistance with her academic work both as a child and an adult. Aster and Denver describe the emotional toll and negative messages internalized in school from no support.

> Aster: No, it was you're not trying hard enough; you're a cheater because you're a bad girl. You know it's nothing about learning style or education or maybe I needed something differently.
>
> Denver: I didn't have any tutoring at all, no reading help. I felt like they had got me up to where I needed to be and that I was doing well. Then in 4th grade I kind of fell back behind.

Denver discussed beginning school receiving support, but once she was doing well academically the support was discontinued. Denver gave an excellent example of the occurrence in educational institutions where the school systems stop support to her when she began to do well. The institution believed the idea that Denver was "all better" and by continuing to provide her with support would cost the institution more money. Once the support stopped Denver began to fall behind.

For other participants the schools did not provide support for them. This is often due to funding issues. In Savannah's case she was overlooked and ignored whereas, she should have been recommended for disability testing. Savannah's story discussed how her learning disability was not diagnosed at a young age, which is echoed by all members of the group except for Jackson and Denver who were tested at an early age.

> Savannah: When I was in school I was not diagnosed until I was 18. School was pretty hard for me. I was always in the top groups because my mother insisted on it. If there was a language in the third grade I got the language or Math or what have you. Then I had to make these things up at summer school because I couldn't catch up with my classmates. I went through school always going to summer school. School was 12 months a year and you got your report card. Whatever you got your D or F and you took it in summer school and it became a way of life up until the 12th grade when um I quit school and decided I had enough. I couldn't read. I couldn't pass the test unless I took an oral exam I would have had all failing grades in HS.

In the narrative above Savannah discussed the emotional toll she experienced year after year. She further describes how her family was also adversely affected because they had to pay for her to go to summer school. Based on the information provided by Savannah the school clearly recognized her struggle to read and pass tests unless certain accommodations were received. However, in the 1960's the common practice was to pass students along and move them through the system.

> Savannah: When I was off in elementary school and all through middle school and HS I don't think I ever passed a course. I had all failing grades but they never showed up on my report card because I was a good, little, quiet, polite, cute, petite thing. I was always the teacher's pet and they said we would help you out. What I have learned is that is not help. That is really a disservice. I graduated from HS functionally literate and um didn't even know it.

Higher Education

Participants also discussed how the lack of support also impacted them when they went on to college. Participants provided the examples below they discussed how

difficult a decision it is to decide to get support because of the fear of the stigma. Not only did they fear the stigma from faculty but also the stigma from their peers. Many participants described their fear that if they told a faculty member that they had learning disabilities they would be considered unqualified for their degree program.

> Willow: The first doctoral class I came home almost in tears because my first class I couldn't keep up with the speed of the professor and my um classmates and the level of conversation they were having because of them just come out of masters degree into doctoral degree and they all know what they were talking about and I had no clue what they were saying.
>
> When this amount of reading was assigned for the next class like one hundred pages in a week I said how in heaven am I going to do this? I thought I couldn't do this work. I came home and said to the children and they say how did it go and I say, "I can't do this. I can't. I just can't keep up. It's not for me." It was hard.

In the data presented by Willow she does not mention her disability or the need for support. She walks into her first doctoral class without support. Willow immediately decided that she couldn't do the work, it was too hard, and that college was not for her. Several participants discussed this experience the fear of being "outed" as a person with a learning disability. At the same time, there were other participants who had varying experiences with access to support. Virginia stated, "She knew she needed help, but she explains that she does not recall support being available". Virginia also felt that if the professors were more aware of the needs of students that they could be more helpful without her having to seek support.

> Virginia: I don't think they had a disability services department. I mean I'm sure they do now. I don't know. I just think that there needs to be more support from the professors. Not really though since we have disability services, but just more, like I felt like I had no support the whole time I was in this because everybody was so busy.
>
> Denver: on the other hand, chose college based upon the services that would be available to her at the institution. Denver was at a place where she felt comfortable advocating for herself, and knew what type of assistance she needed.

> Denver: I got into John Hopkins. I was going to go to their Special Technology Program. There are only a few places in the country that were doing that at that time. I did go there, went down, met with people, had a good interview. People in my department I really liked. I think it would have been a nice place to go. I went to check out disability services and by that time my disabilities were really bothering me a lot and I needed to know what I could get for accommodations here because if I had none I couldn't come. You know? So um, after I checked in with everybody I didn't speak with my department about my LD at all and then I went to Disability Services and this one woman wasn't really helpful I told her these are the things that I need and they couldn't do much for me or she didn't want to. Either the department wasn't a department or they didn't have anything that would assist me academically or anything.

Employment

Participants further disclosed that the barriers in employment are very similar to those barriers in the educational institutions. Participants discussed the need for services that would provide appropriate support in the workplace. Participants further discussed that even though their employer is mandated to provide them with accommodations they were not given accommodations nor were accommodations discussed. Others discussed being unaware of their rights so they never had the chance to be accommodated. Aster and Caira discussed the fear of taking a chance at new jobs because they feared employers would view them incapable of performing particular functions of the job. Several of the participants felt they were working below their actual skill levels. Aster believes she is not capable of performing appropriate functions particular jobs due to her disability.

> Aster: I didn't understand about working in a job force and getting accommodations. I had no idea that was available.

> Willow: I been teaching seventeen years and this year I began advocating I learned there's a person in my district who dealt with adult disabilities …the woman that I met when we spoke of disability advocating this she said somebody should have come to my room and do a study.

In both narratives above the participants had been working for over ten years and were never accommodated at their place of employment. Both Aster and Willow were working for state institutions where support is available to employees with disabilities, but rarely mentioned, resulting in them both not knowing about the services. Once they realized support was available they were able to take advantage of the services they needed to be able to perform their duties and responsibility.

Services Provided

The following category portrays the participants' experiences with the appropriate services being available. In the data to follow, the participants described the types of services they received in secondary education. Denver was diagnosed early and was provided with the appropriate services in second grade. Unlike Wood who had a disability all along, but was not diagnosed until he was an adult although he received some services when he was hit by a car. Nonetheless, he gained access to services from a speech and language therapist who helped him tremendously. His teachers through a different grading system, additionally accommodated Wood where he would get two grades per class, one for effort and the other for his actual work.

> Denver: I went to public school because of Special Education. So in first grade reading was the hard thing and that was discovered right away. In second grade I started Special Education and I had a reading specialist that would come in and I would work with three days a week. Just by myself and um she was excellent.
>
> Wood: I remember after I got hit by the car. The stuttering picked up or something or maybe they noticed it more and I took a speech therapy class.

Denver and Wood gave excellent examples of how educators can create a positive learning environment for students who struggle with academics. Through these

accommodations the teachers had the opportunity to acknowledge that Wood was trying hard to do the work, which positively reinforced Wood's efforts.

Higher Education

The group members provided significant data regarding the different types of services available in higher education in several different ways. In Denver's case she began to use the adaptive computers and the modern technology, which had a major impact on her ability to perform academically.

> Denver: Computers. Senior year (college) just got computer lab in the school of business. That is why undergraduate was so hard. As soon as I got there I bought a computer and that thing was amazing. You could write trash and just go back and fix it. It wasn't tedious, it wasn't hard and the um idea of rough draft, final draft started to have a lot of sense to it now so it wasn't so cumbersome like on a typewriter. To not be able to read or write well and then have to do it on a typewriter where if you are dyslexic still mixing up things and all these letters its so frustrating and I took typing in HS. I could type, but still like I don't know why this is even now when I type I do it backwards. I can write them backwards. That is the weirdest thing to me. You would think that wouldn't happen when they are on two different hands.
>
> Denver: Technology really helped me as a person with a disability. My education really opened up because I could type whatever and go back and put something new in there. I could use all the words I didn't know how to spell, all the vocabulary I could use. Where I couldn't use it before because I couldn't spell it. Here I could spell it incorrectly and go to spell check! Boop! So like my vocabulary, even though I had a good one before I couldn't use it. I would look up every word. I would say what's another word; you would sample it down to something you could spell to save time otherwise you'd be looking in the dictionary every two seconds.

Denver's experience with adaptive computers and society's movement towards technology has greatly benefited her. Access to computers opened up many doors that were once closed to several of the participants. Denver and Willow additionally describe the positive impact of having access to different services while in college.

> Denver: I went to (the university) to get my doctorate and um that was the best decision I ever made. It was there I met a number of people that really assisted

> me in my learning style. Having one there and learned about my style of learning and all the things I can do to accommodate myself. I never knew any of this stuff. It helped me out a lot with reading. It was easy if I got a book on tape. I would read along with it. I could do my readings in half the time. If I had my books on tape when I was an undergrad I would have had fun in school!
>
> Willow: Class notes became available to us through the professors and I never had that in my life. Not only class notes, but teachers would post things. In fact they began using handouts, agendas, even topics that we're going to discuss for the day. One of the professors had a PowerPoint and it was amazing and I always wondered if that has anything to do with my professors doing accommodations. I never knew that happened at the university, doctoral level**.**
>
> Willow: Then Disability Services began teaching me how to read things and organizing things and I said, "DS, the ironic thing is I teach this to my students, but I never use them myself. You know I teach writing techniques, organizers, and all kinds of outlines with the students and the highlighting and post notes. We use those in the middle school, but for whatever reason it never occurred to me, but because of my ADD I am not consistent.

Having access to effective services in college was truly life changing for many of the participants as highlighted by Denver and Willow. Other participants used other techniques and strategies to accomplish the academic task require in higher education as highlighted in earlier themes.

Daily Living

While it is clear that access to effective services can drastically improve the lives of the participants in many venues, very few services were available for assisting the participants with their daily living needs. There are some services through private and state agencies however, some are ineffective and many more are needed. In the narrative below Willow discusses attending professional workshops on ADHD to learn more about how she could assist her students in the classroom, her son, as well as, herself.

> Willow: I started taking professional workshops on ADHD in the classroom and accommodations for my students and my son and then started attending a group CHAD **….**I started attending once a week, once every two weeks and I took a lot of information.

Willow described CHAD (Children and Adults with ADHD) as an organization that is committed to servicing families in various ways thereby providing a strong example of the types of accommodations can be made to assist families with their daily living needs. Willow was able to find a few services that played an important role in helping her both personally and professionally. As discussed by the participants, face various daily living challenges as discussed earlier. The next category describes how individuals provide support to people with learning disabilities.

Support: Family, Friends, Teachers, and other Professionals

The data provided several different categories that the process of providing support for people with learning disabilities can be defined. Support can be encouraging and helpful; it can also be disheartening, humiliating, and discouraging when it is provided in an ineffective or in a negative way. In this analysis several different sub-categories of support were identified throughout the transcripts: support needed, support provided/support available, support provided not effective, and support given. The defining breaking down of these categories is as follows: support needed, explains when participants realize that there are areas in their lives where they have come up against barriers and there were no way to cross the barriers. In order to alleviate this gap everyday support would be helpful in providing the appropriate bridge to enable participants to cross those barriers they have confronted.

Support provided/support available; discusses the type of support, the participants received. It also defines when support may be available and provided to the participants by someone such as family members, friends, teachers, employers, or others. Support provided not effective, accounts for the type of support that is given to participants with

the goal that the support will be of assistance however; the type of assistance given is not effective. The final category support given illustrates the types of support participants have provided/given to others.

The first category of support to be discussed is support needed. As mentioned above support needed branches into the many institutional arms that should provide support. The participants expressed the confusion they had as children with learning disabilities. Many felt all alone in their struggle because their family and the educational institutions labeled them as underachievers. The participant's family members and teachers labeled them and the participants accepted and recognized the label as their reality. However, for most of the participants none of the adults or professionals really understood, believed, or recognized the struggle the participants were experiencing. The study members discussed that the only choice they had was to accept their inabilities and comply with the belief that they were less than others. The abuse the participants received in the educational institutions was not something the participants came home and complained about everyday to their parents except for Denver. As the participants matured their networks expand to friends, teacher, coaches, religious leaders etc …if they felt they could trust the members of their network then they would go to them for help. What several of the participant discussed as most difficult was the lack of support from those they trusted the most. This was because of the lack of understanding of their learning disabilities.

Furthermore, the data showed that many of the participants as young children were unaware and did not understand the manifestations of their learning disability. This is also an issue for parents at this point. Only one participant Denver was diagnosed

before she started school. Jackson was diagnosed when he was going into middle school. The rest of the participants went through most of their lives undiagnosed until adulthood. Several of the participants recognized that their parents may have had learning disabilities thus, the inability to assist them. Some of the participants added that their parents did not take an active role in assisting them with their homework. The following narratives give examples of these issues.

> Aster: My parents weren't aware, there was no support, and um I think my father was also learning disabled. I really don't know about my Mom and um something was wrong with us and it was in that stupid category. …They had a lot of compassion. I cried many times.

> Caira: My mother and father weren't really involved in our school activities because they were working and they were both involved in (outside activities) and that was there second world. If we weren't tagging along with them we were at home. That is the type of involvement. We went to Sunday school on Sundays; you know that is pretty much what we did.

As mentioned above many of the participants were not diagnosed at an early age in some cases they were born before the schools had adopted support and services for people with learning disabilities. Other reasons students did not get assistance could be issues of gender and/or race? The participants further revealed that in these resource rooms that the diversity in disability was so varied that, along with individuals being at different levels of abilities and issues of behavior problems that it was a difficult place to perform and achieve. Several participants felt that more teachers were needed in the special education classrooms due to the nature of the needs of all the students in the classroom. The following narrative by Denver gives excellent examples of the above mention experiences.

> Denver: Middle school was horrible. I had terrible teachers and looking back it's not their fault, there were so many kids in there. It had resource room style, I got

> no one on one attention at all the kids are having a really hard time. I hated those teachers because of that. I really was resentful.
>
> Aster: I was caught up about being dumb, lazy or um preoccupied or things that put me in a different box instead of the intellect one.
>
> Savannah: Math I just you know you had ten fingers and it all made sense cause you only went up to ten so as long as I could use my fingers I was okay. And when they took the fingers away I was in a lot of hot water.

The believes about self the participants derive from being in this type of classroom environments is that they were lazy or dumb as mentioned in Aster's narrative. Or if they cannot perform that they are in trouble. Denver mentioned as an after thought that as an adult educator she understood the predicament that the teachers' were in based on the teacher to students' ratio and the tremendous diversity of students needs.

She also felt that teachers needed many different methodologies to keep control of the classroom some teachers had good methodologies and others not so good. Another example of controlling the students in the classroom is given by Nebraska. To keep Nebraska occupied her teacher gave her the task of filling in graph paper for extra credit. This method has been used for extra credit or punishments. The goal being to keep the student preoccupied, quite, and out of the way.

> Nebraska: I remember having to write numbers for extra credit, they are teaching you repetitive math. They would give us a ten by ten grid and for extra credit you could write one, two, three, four, all the way to a hundred and then when you get done you could write a new sheet---one hundred and one all the way to like two hundred. Yeah that was our extra credit.

The participants further discussed that they needed support in every avenue. Whether it is schoolwork or on the job the lack of support was dramatic for them. They felt that without support they suffered tremendously. The participants further discussed the constant battle within themselves as mentioned in the narrative below "What is wrong

with me?" This question remains deep inside many of the participants and they never got an answer for most of their lives.

The participants discussed the misconceptions they had about themselves because all the evidence pointed towards them being inadequate. Virginia discusses her frustrations in having to stay after school every day for extra help. Although, she still did not understand what she was being taught. The issue for Virginia is that the teachers taught the subject the exact same way they taught it in the daytime. Virginia's frustration was that if she did not understand the process during the daytime unless a different approach is used staying after school was a waste of her time.

> Virginia: So I remember being very frustrated with that and then staying after school and tears because I just couldn't get it.
>
> Aster: I had to write these theoretical papers and I remember sobbing. I couldn't do it and I remembered thinking what is wrong with me. I don't know how to do it and here I am full time. It was time for me to produce and my work life was not the same. I got remarks back saying rewrite and what does this mean.

Virginia and Aster both emphasized their frustrations in not being able to accomplish what appeared to be achievable goals based on able-bodied peoples performance. However for them the same task caused them to break into tears, events they still suffer from to this day. Virginia also added that for her to voluntarily take time to stay after school to go over an academic subject was already a great sacrifice when all her friends were taking off in different directions and that she missed many of the activities that were happening after school.

Virginia provided data regarding her experience as a graduate student this excerpt is provided below. In the account, Virginia's barriers were "what she needed from the faculty" vs. "the faculties expectations of her". Additionally, her committee chair was not

available in the manner of, time and the creation of a particular type of space that she needed. Virginia felt that the support she needed required others to provide her extra time around the particular goals, the way professors gave directions, ensuring an explanation of those directions, and ensuring an understanding of that explanation. She stated she further needed extra time to complete the work; time to incorporate the use of editors; the use of writers; and organizational assistance to manage the different type of assignments and services needed. Virginia felt that it was very difficult to get her committee chair to make the time commitment in providing her with extra time and the support she needed. This time commitment from faculty also needed to be provided during informed discussion and decision-making meetings.

> Virginia: But here I don’t feel like that opportunity is there. Because someone’s always on sabbatical and then their all doing their own thing trying to get tenure so you know, you have to book a month ahead of time just to get a spot to see them. There just needs to be more support.
>
> Nebraska: I think its being a person with a disability and thinking back to graduate school I didn't feel like I had accommodations. I remember feeling at one point not good about what was going in class and its like feeling completely unsupported. I talked to my faculty about it and she was just like you should do x, y and z. I was like you don't understand; I need help to do those things. She was like here is a phone number.

The needs for participants with learning disabilities in the employment arena pose totally different issues of support needed. Based on the discussions that participants provided the area of employment was where many of the largest violation of ADA compliance occurred. The participants discussed their fear of asking for support from supervisors and colleagues in fear of retaliation in the form of being seen as; incapable, requiring too much support, or support may be considered to expensive and ultimately the may lose of their job.

> Caira: At (my job) I had to take tests I couldn't pass. I know my job, but when it came to the test I couldn't take them. This was stressful to me in the job I know it inside and out, but test time was stress. I didn't know if I'd lose my job or not get a merit raise because I couldn't pass the test.

Caira had to take a written exam that had questions about her everyday work. She stated she was unable to pass the test because she needed more time and feedback. She further discussed that her inability to pass the test affected her pay increases and any promotions she may have been eligible for. She felt a reasonable accommodation would have been to take an oral exam or a test in which she could have demonstrated her knowledge yet this would still allow the company to ascertain her abilities.

> Willow: Lesson plans? Forget it. I had to do it on the weekend and I would be going to bed late.

> Savannah: I worked as a textbook manager at a college bookstore. I did all the ordering for the entire college. I worked with text book companies all over the world, it was really a neat job I felt that I was lacking because one of the things I had to do was type up purchase orders and most people can get that done in an afternoon and it took me weeks. I had to take the PO's home and the woman over me would get so upset because the spelling was terrible and she didn't understand LD because she was in her sixties

In the narrative above Willow needed extra time to do her lesson plans. She stated that the extra time needed is an issue because she has to give up time with her family, sleep, downtime, and vacations and use all her time doing her lesson plans. As far as she knows there is nothing that can be done to assist her in this area.

For Willow and Nebraska it is difficult when there is not enough time in the day. They provided perfect examples of how they are forced to work extra hours and can miss out on family time and just pure fun. Savannah gave a similar example of taking the extra time to get work done. However, she had to take work home to complete and then her

boss told her all her spelling was wrong. She would get very hurt and discouraged because she had spent so much extra time on the project.

> Kansas: I wanted to have a supervisor who would mentor me. This was my illusion. That if I had a boss he would mentor me, explain things and I was out in left field all-alone. So um that was very difficult. Very, very and it was also that all the inadequacies came out, what I know, what I don't. Then I had a very young supervisor.

> Nebraska: That is the thing about disabilities so many people grow up in families where the parents are able bodied and the child has a disability so there is no connection. I even think growing up with LD when you try to have a connection I think the biggest thing for people with disabilities is they grow up places where they don't have the same type of support. It's real important to have that support system.

Support Provided Not Effective

Support provided not effective takes into account several different ethical and emotional contexts. The confusion for all those involved is that the support provided is given by people such as parents, educators, friends etc… who believe that they are providing an effective assistance for the individual with the learning disability that will make their daily living easier. Nonetheless, the support is not effective for the person with the learning disability. As the individual with the learning disability if they complain, or tell others that the support is not helpful or that it is not working then they are seen as ungrateful, spoiled, selfish, impossible etc. In the narrative below Denver provides a very good description of a state of the art classroom that the school and the parents supported fully as a program that would give students with learning disabilities the support they needed however, the program was ineffective and more like daily torture.

> Denver: I didn’t like it (special education classrooms). I wanted nothing to do with it. You never got any one on one attention; you were with six or seven kids who were complete mess. I was doing well in school. I did really well in middle

> school like I was getting solid A's. Going down there kids are cutting class, you are not there to learn anything, the kids would give the teachers a hard time it was awful and because I was quiet and did my work I was easy for them, they (the teachers) could throw a book at me and just walk away and have to deal with these other kids. The teachers would say to me, "Here do this." That is what I would get…
>
> They (the teachers) would throw a book at me and I would be like I don't read. I was like what? That's why I'm here. They loved to set up the thing that is on the wall and they put the words up and scan the story. Like a projector. It would do a fast story. Project a story on the wall and only see certain words and the thing would be so fast you'd read the first sentence and sit there for twenty minutes while the story is going on. You already lost the story in the first sentence. It is supposed to help increase your reading speed or something like that.
>
> That's exactly what we were the guinea pigs. That's how we felt. We were all saying it too. My friend Abby said it, too. I said I am not taking this class! I am not staying in this class.

In Virginia's dialogue she used an editing process. She wrote the paper and then had the editors edit her writing. Virginia felt this editing process had its own set of problems. She felt that once the editor edits her paper, the next step is for her to make the corrections; the next step is to turn the paper into the faculty. The faculty then edits the paper, and then gives it back to Virginia for corrections. Virginia would then rewrite the paper with the corrections from the faculty and then runs it by the editor. The circle continue, to at some point in this process Virginia stated she began to feel she no longer knew what was going on in her own paper. She felt that the paper had been edited so much that she became confused about her own work and in this case the editing process had not worked.

In this narrative below Virginia discusses her concerns with the editing process.

> Virginia: Where you think in your mind ok this looks good, and then… So, and it helps to have an editor but then again, there were some things that I had written, or had written a certain way and then the editor has a suggestion but then they advised it like what she wrote. So then I'm thinking, oh I should've just kept it my way, you know. But then again, I'm like ok, well she's the expert. That's another

> frustrating part too. You know everyone's having different opinions on how it should be But it's you know, well, it should be written this way you would use these words to express it. So yeah but you have to go with the person who's with their style because that's what matters in the end. And that was difficult to adjust to because my style was totally different from my editor's style that's different from my advisors style.

The above descriptions describes the pros and cons of support needed, and support provided and in this particular case the support provided was not effective.

Support Provided and Support Available

Support provided and support available are two types of support that are significant to the participants. The data showed the participants experienced positive outcomes both physically and emotionally from support that was effective. The participants described these types of support, which came from many different arenas such as family, friend, educational support, and outside agencies.

In the following narratives the participants provide several examples of how families are able to provide support to them. Denver, Wood, and Savannah's parents were teachers. This made a significant difference with the parental influence on their schoolwork and the parents' ability to assist their children with homework and other academic difficulties. The type of assistance these three participants received is very different in comparison to those participants whose parents were not educators.

> Wood: My mother was a stay home mom until I got into second grade and she went back substitute teaching and then fourth or fifth grade she was full time as a teacher and we were in the same school together. Penmanship I had no problem because my mother said write large and I would write little and she would tell me to make it larger because the teacher could read it better and I had this little itty bitty writing. She said they are going to have difficulty in reading that and I noticed that later on when I got into junior high school and we had to write papers I would always get a good grade because the teacher was able to read my handwriting and it was nice large and legible and that was a plus.

> Denver: My mother could say one thing and it was never a fight for her. My mother could ask for testing at any point in time and they would just do it! I can remember my mother doing that during fourth grade when she wasn't sure I was doing as well and she requested tests and wanted to see what kind of progress I was making. I do remember doing that and never a problem they always went along with it. I can't get away from it. They are just going to put me in the slow class. I was annoyed. My father said just go there, shut your mouth, get you're A's and move on. You don't have anywhere else to go and these are the only people that are going to take you.

The participants demonstrated that there was a positive out come for them when they felt supported and cared about particularly by their parents. The participants further discussed the importance in the support coming from people that they loved and trusted. They felt this created a special type of emotional strength for them. The data gathered from the participants depicted that there where intermittent times when the participants got the support they needed. The participant's memories of being supported in the educational institutions were just as poignant as those stories when students were not supported.

> Savannah: In second grade I remember sitting in reading group and I couldn't read at all and the teacher did this thing and she was ahead of her time she had one person read and I was the echo. So it would say look at.... I would say look at.... It looked like I was reading. I picked up some sight words that way you know?
>
> Savannah: she said to me you pick your favorite verse from the bible and just always read that one. So I did. I memorized one verse from the bible and when it was my turn to read which was about every month I would stand up and open the bible to the right spot that she had marked for me, recite my passage and close the bible, sit down and nobody was the wiser.

The data that Savannah provided above is important because it demonstrates the ways assistance can be given without humiliating the participant by announcing to the entire class that the person cannot read as justification as to why the teacher is providing a particular type of support to the student. Secondly, the ultimate outcome of the support

is that the participants felt part of the class and were able to learn the assigned lesson with the accommodation.

Jackson attended a school for students with learning disabilities. The support and services were systemic. What Jackson described were the adaptive computer programs that assisted students with reading and writing on the computer. These computer programs provided the appropriate type of support that the students needed in order to keep up with their lessons.

> Jackson: I'd have that class for an entire period. I'd have benchmark for another period story grammar marker for entire period or you could do story grammar marker all day long because his classes were so interchangeable it's good every teacher was specially trained to do these things they would work together with each other they would say maybe you could open this book and work with this.

On the other hand, Denver was so used to accommodations not being helpful she managed her way through college the best she could. In the narrative below her professor questioned her poor handwriting on a test and offered her support services and options for test taking which totally surprised Denver that there was a professor willing to provide support services for her by accommodating her.

> Denver: My handwriting is very poor and a teacher came up to me and said you have a LD. I was like big surprise. They were like I need to talk to you. I was trying to be incognito there. I was like I use the computer and she said you can't use it all the time…. The only woman there picked it up. Most of the tests were multiple choices, but when you have to handwrite an essay. Plus she said I should have told her because she could have given me an oral exam. She said I should have told her and she could have accommodated me. She was the only teacher.

In the next narrative Aster was inventive she sought out writing assistance by inquiring at the English department for support with her writing. Several of the participants were successful graduate students by using this type of support. Hiring writers and editors from the English department can be a very success way in completing

the writing requirements for many programs. However, it is very time consuming and for Aster it was very costly.

> Aster: I was in the throws of writing my Masters. I needed help finish writing my papers, I had my comprehensives to do. What I did was went to the English department and got a woman who was getting her doctorate in English. I would talk, she would help organize my thoughts and I handwrote my comps and then I would go home and type it into the computer and reread it and reread it know visually what needed help and go back to her and she would pull out more. I could do the groundwork, but I couldn't write by myself. I had to have help.
>
> They were kind, capable, they were writers more than people who understood disabilities so they could see the writing process where I was suffering, but they were also very compassionate people and they were willing to know that I was articulate and they would always say, "Write it down, write it down." They would do the whole writing organization piece to it. They would sometimes give me bigger and better words because things needed to be more academic and I don't have that kind of vocabulary. I gathered words; I kept a notebook of bigger words I didn't know, pedagogy, things I learned in academia, words I needed to write in academia. I kept a notebook that would help me have good word recall. That was a problem. So I had a list of words. Words I didn't know how to spell for sure. I was seeing them more than anybody else. Even people in graduate school they weren't my friends, they were professional help but they were um angels number one. They had patience. They were my right hand. They were the people who guided me through the process.

Aster described how the use of editors was the greatest support system she ever had while in the writing process during her masters and doctorial degree. Aster further stated, graduate students with learning disabilities would benefit from the use of editors for both the writing and the editing. However, she felt that some of the negative repercussions of the use of editors and writers were that it is a costly venture. Secondly, the use of writers and editors can be a difficult process because it required coordination of time and the appropriate use of that time to get the work done. The editors also have to be familiar with the topic being written about so she needed the editors and writers to

read all of her text in order for them to have an understanding of her subject, research terminology, and direction she was taking.

The other type of support provided is the support the participants found on the job. In the data below Kansas describes how her supervisor provided the support she need to benefit from. She found that it was the little thing like the way that directions are explained and a supervisor or colleague who takes the time to help or be sensitive to her needs.

> Kansas: Then I got a young supervisor who was phenomenal and really mentored me and really knew how to handle me and we became very close friends and he really mentored me and showed me the ins and outs of administration and institution.

There are many other types of assistance participants sought out for support. For example psychotherapy, nutritionists, hypnotists, acupuncture, support groups etc… This group of study participants was aware of the different types of support that is available for all people and how it could benefit people with learning disabilities. The participants were also aware of the many different types of support programs and services that the everyday person may not be aware of, seek out or be able to afford. The following narratives are examples of the other types of support professionals with learning disabilities have used.

> Willow: Yes because I started getting therapy and this is when I discovered the ADHD and the condition in my nerve plate that created all these, a tornado in my mind. What gets me back in shape is connecting my services, the meditations. I'm seeing a hypnotherapist who is helping me create strategies for the day of the quiet moments. Organizing my mind, focusing techniques and quieting my mind.

> Nebraska: When I was seeing the therapist I started seeing her when I first came here because I was going through a cycle and really wanted to apply myself and I want to read the books and I said what am I supposed to do and she said listen to people talk and she said as long as it was working keep doing it.

What is noteworthy in this data is that the individuals found help and benefited from the different types of support in different ways. Many therapists like other professionals are not aware of how to assist people with learning disabilities. In the two cases above both the participants had positive experience.

Support Given

The final type of support to be discussed is support given. Based on the experiences the professionals with learning disabilities have had and their ability to assist other is unique. The following accounts discuss how these helping professionals with learning disabilities gave support to others, how they learned to provide this support and why they felt they were good at providing the type of support that others needed.
In this study two of the participants are teachers who work with children. They describe how they assist children in their classroom.

> Willow: I feel great. It's wonderful because one of the things that I've noticed in the helping profession is that I can relate to many of my students that have particular learning disabilities, styles because I have experienced almost the same kind of issues and disabilities, for example um, students with ADD, students that have disabilities with the abstract thinking of a concept, one of the things that I personally have problems and difficulties with is abstract so for me to be able to understand things I need pictures, examples. I need to see someone doing something before I intend to do it. This all translates into my teaching practice.
>
> Savannah: I wrote with the kids, you know it was really cool. I do it in journal form and don't look at the spelling. It helped to free up kids. I would say as long as you can read it I don't care. I would say we will hire and editor and get a dictionary later on.

The next narratives provides a description of how Aster provides one on one coaching for people with disabilities as a therapist and further on in this section Caira discusses how she works with people in the area of customer service.

> Aster: I think this is how I became a coach of the disabled. Um like I know through my interviewing and there are very clear steps they need to take, this goes

> along with the coaching counseling I make recommendations all the time and create a step program from them to go. I accommodate my clients all time. I literally help them accomplish some of their goals and that is not my role as a therapist so much as a coach. I've added this whole action step as coach, coaching people. People need help. Hands on help. They do! They need a lot of compassion and not a lot of judgment for what is quote unquote broken. They need help.

In the narrative above Aster has taken on added responsibilities because she knows that her clients with disabilities need particular types of assistance that they will not be able to get anywhere else. She is very clear on the steps that need to be taken to get tasks done and the type of energy and "hands on help" that people with disabilities need. Furthermore, she will not let her clients go without accommodations because in her mind that is just unheard of. This is similar to how Caira feels about her customers she states she has the skills to calm down irate customers. That she takes into consideration how people are feeling when they come in her office. She also has a very positive demeanor with a willingness to help attitude to ease the process that people may be unclear of. This is an excellent example of the opposite way she was treated by her teachers.

> Caira: I was good in calming down irate customers. I'm dealing with people you have to take into account how they are feeling, um they might be having a bad day. Being sensitive of my situation. Whenever a customer comes through the door I'm trying to make them feel like I'm happy to see them and they are important to me and happy that they are here to give me their business no matter what else is going on because you don't know what that person is dealing with. You can see when a person comes into ship a package they may be having challenges doing that and I am like oh okay well I can see how she is doing that I may have done it like too. I can see how I may be a help to them where as I may not have been as sensitive had I not had to think about everything I'm doing. Now because of what I'm doing a lot of things come naturally, but just in everyday life I have to think harder about what I'm doing to make sure I'm doing it the right way or to make sure that its going to turn out the way it needs to turn out or I'm reading this right.

> Virginia: I worked full time at the residential home with four guys with Downs Syndrome. Like I help them to understand their disability, and what some of their limitations might be and how to sort of work around those limitations so they can be successful.

> Wood: Bill Bob was a pastor that lived (near here) and um he died about two years ago. His wife died first and then he said don't leave me alone and every two or three months we would go spend the night with them and be around the fireplace and talk junk and um he said that I was a people collector.
>
> I am still a volunteer at the big sister program at the (Acorns). We match high school students with first, second, third, fifth grade students. I am there every um Wed afternoon. I need to do this. Like I have the time to do it but I am there. They call me Dad. I am one of the originators of the program. I am a helping person….You know so its trying to take people who are having social issues in their lives and you are bringing them out of their social dysfunction.

In the data provided by Virginia who worked at group homes for people with disabilities she makes sure that her clients know the manifestations of their disabilities and their abilities. Wood, on the other hand, gives support by spending time with people, being a good listener, and just being available to them. Each person's complex experiences managing oppression, dealing with the lack of institutional support, while also developing new life skills and strategies, and knowledge about how to support others all shape a person's self-esteem.

Self-Esteem

In this section I review how participants describe their self-esteem. Self-esteem is a person's general assessment or judgment of his or her own self-worth (Andersen 1994). Self-esteem plays a large role in the way people with learning disabilities come to identify with who they are and what they need to do to be successful members of society. Self-esteem is developed through several types of experiences; positive reinforcements at home, in school, and among peers. Feelings of being loved by parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, other family members, and feeling accepted by people such as friends, teachers, coaches, other parents, and so forth, strongly impact one's self-esteem.

Self-esteem is further created when individuals learn to perform, accomplish, and carry out daily tasks. Through this learning a sense of confidence is formed and the feelings of mastery and the ability to solve problems independently is developed. In order for people to feel good about themselves the ability to successfully complete tasks set forth can be critical.

Likewise, low self-esteem is developed when children are unable to perform, accomplish, and carry out various daily tasks. The feelings of incompleteness, the inability to solve problems independently, and poor performance lead to negative thoughts for many children and adults with learning disabilities experience. Parents and teachers yelling at the child with a learning disability, "you can do better" when they are doing their best can lead the child to develop feelings of inadequacy. There seems to be a consistent theme of children with learning disabilities experiencing a constant nagging that they need to put more effort into their work. The labels of being troublemakers, lazy, or that they have bad attitudes further hinders their ability to develop a positive self-esteem.

When in comparison to their peer's people with learning disabilities see a significant difference between their friends, peers and themselves. The negative messages constantly influence one's self-esteem, oftentimes due to the flaws in the ways that our society designs our teaching protocols and the lack of support and resources for families. The negative thoughts and beliefs sometimes begin at home depending upon how the family members handle their children's abilities. The following comments by Kansas demonstrate how family dynamics can affect a child's self-esteem.

> Kansas: My sister was always the favorite of my father and I was the favorite of my mother. My sister excelled in school and she was called the brains.

> In HS I remember my sister would come home and the main dinner is at lunchtime and we would sit around the table and my mother would say what did you do at school and my sister would say I did French, Math and English and I would say we laughed. I had a good time in school. I had some depression as a kid and I masked it. I became the clown of every group I was in. I made everyone laugh.

In the first narrative Kansas provides a picture of how her father considered her sister the smartest child in the family. Kansas internalized the negative believes her father and sister had about her and it has effected her self-esteem all of her life. The family made these degrading comments to Kansas quite often. Kansas has explained that her father was emotionally abusive towards her because he felt she was the "dumbest in the family". In the second narrative, Kansas further depicted how she coped with being labeled the dumb child in and outside of school. In order to feel accepted, Kansas became the class clown.

Aster, Caira, Denver, Kansas, Nebraska, and Wood felt forced into acting out to save themselves from being humiliated in the classroom. Caira also discussed how she played the role of class clown. She explains "everyone would laugh at me" and then she would be admired by her peers they saw her as cool and funny. She also described how she felt brave for taking the risk of being laughed at by her peers. The participants used being the class clown or displaying bad behavior to draw the focus of the teacher away from the task at hand such as reading out loud or answering a question in front of the entire class. In other words, they chose the type of embarrassment they wanted to experience in this way they were in control.

The participants further discussed the fear of being seen as dumb and publicly humiliated in front of the class and how this experience would cause them to suffer. All

the participants had difficulty focusing, and a hard time reading or writing in the classroom. These types of inability usually lead to punishment enforced by teachers, which reinforced the negative messages that they may also be receiving at home. The cumulative effects of these on-going negative messages only deepen the negative images they internalized about themselves. Kansas' experience echoes this exact situation as she explains,

> "That I can't focus, that I have a tough time reading. This was all registered as being dumb. Having no brain and um that is just what it was and I internalized and accepted that."

The participants reiterated that in a society where educational achievement shapes a person destiny the fact that they were not able to follow "simple directions" resulted in the feelings of shame and dismay. The participants felt a sense of hopelessness this made the participants try to figure out, as Aster stated, "what is wrong with me"? Aster's narrative gives another example of how these negative feelings result in the internalization of low-self esteem.

> Aster: [I was] learning to be ashamed of myself because something was wrong with me…
>
> And I have a vivid memory of feeling that. I didn't feel good about myself. I never felt smart, capable; you know kind of the era, feeling of retardness, if that was a word. My family spent a lot of time with the retarded thing because of my brother and it was almost like we were a member of it, not because of my brother, but because of who we were. Who I was.

The participants named and describe their anger and frustration. They went one step further and discussed how these issues can lead to depression and other forms of disabilities such as anxiety disorders and posttraumatic stress. Virginia experiences clearly highlight the downward spiral that can result from tension and continuous failure.

Virginia describes taking a test after studying as hard as she could for it and failing it several times.

> Virginia: I remember it was ten questions, and you had to get 8 out of ten right. But you could take it 100 times until you get it. I remember it was just so traumatic for me because I would just study, study, study, study. And I remember one time I was just in tears the first time I took it and I had to take the test like three times before I finally got an A on the test.

Although in this situation Virginia persevered, these on going stress take an emotional toll on the participants resulting in daily tasks seeming unmanageable. In this next scenario Virginia experienced a nervous breakdown and literally destroyed everything around her. If others had not come to her aid and if she had not gotten the help she needed she could have been lead her down her own path of self-destruction, a place where she may not have been able to recover from.

> Virginia: Well I was ready to give up a few times. I don't know, it just, it's discouraging. Because here I am thinking ok, it's good now, and then you get back and all these things are crossed out and red marks all over. And I was like ok,… So one night I was doing my stats work and I was getting frustrated we didn't have computers then. So actually I still had my typewriter I had my typewriter, I think I was typing a paper or something and I just got so frustrated and I threw my typewriter across the room. I just had this incident where I just started tearing everything apart!… I just got overwhelmed I guess. I probably beat myself up when I was like, oh you should be able to do this.

Virginia further demonstrated how the emotionally wearing and defeating circumstances can carry over from school into the workplace and into people's private lives. What is uncanny is the on-going willingness and persistence that each participant had shown no matter how many times they have gotten discouraged, they just keep on going.

Another phenomenon that was discussed by several group members was the feeling of being able and yet the feeling of being unable, it is an on-going dance between the two. Savannah's story highlights this unique dance.

> Savannah: I found it was offense because I wanted to be able to do it myself and especially after teaching for so long and teaching reading I should be able to write a simple sentence. You know? And I couldn't. And it irked me that I couldn't and you know I would leave a word out. I would spell little wrong. Simple things and I couldn't see it and it would drive me up the wall. I would sit there and read it out loud and touch every word, get it wrong, not knowing and she would come along and read it to me and say did you mean to say the dog little on the porch? It wasn't in an annoying way that she did it, it was just the way I received it because I wanted it to be right, to be perfect.

Savannah is able to teach reading and writing to her students in the 4th grade. She performs all the major functions of her job as a teacher. Yet when she is trying to read or write for herself it all falls apart. She is unable to write a "simple sentence" or "spell simple words". This inability creates an emotional hurricane. She gets "irked", annoyed with herself, angry with herself, and frustrated. This type of anger and frustration can lead to depression.

This phenomenon is unique to people with learning disabilities that may be able to do a task one day and not the next day. There are days when people with learning disabilities are unable to complete certain task which leads to people working longing hours to successfully complete all of their tasks. Coping strategies may lead to unhealthy habits such as Virginia who felt life was too short and so she worked 70-80 hrs a week, and was always totally busy doing far more then she was physically and mentally capable of handling.

Then there are individuals who cope by attempting to ignore their problems and pretending that everything is ok. Willow described that "nothing ever bothers her" and

that everything is always okay. However, this is also a defensive coping mechanism because so many things are difficult for people with learning disabilities that it is sometimes easier to ignore things. In some cases, people with learning disabilities are in denial; they have a false sense of well-being, and the attitude that nothing ever troubles them. Instead they fear that if they let things get to them then you may not recover from them.

In the narrative below Willow talks about “it” what she is describing is the pain that can break an individual to the point of not being able to come back to reality. Her biggest fear is that she will lose her strength. Let the disability win or recognize that the disability is stronger than her. Sometimes the disability is stronger not accepting this can cause sever anxiety. On the other hand, it is also a coping mechanism for some and for others they just have a type of high tolerance that they have learned to maintain. Willow goes on to discuss the “double weapon”

> Willow: Yes, but in a way I think it’s a double weapon because this could be a sense of denial in a way by not recognizing or talking about it so you pretend that it doesn't exist. Until what point we become blind to it…
> Now that I'm a little older and more mature I am able to rejoice with it and take it inside myself and really rejoice and see it. Um, before it was very hard and I think it comes from my upbringing, this humbleness that I grew up with of not bragging. It is one of those gifts and I think it comes with my Christianity upbringing. In the bible there's a part that says when you are fasting and praying you know just don't show, just wash up, clean up and don't look with this sacrificing like thing. Nobody should notice that you are doing it**.**

Willow further describes how difficult it is to be complemented about how well one does. When as a person with learning disabilities believe that although they are doing well and keeping up with others that there is some sense of falsehood in their abilities. Willow also provides us with an understanding of how religious beliefs also taught Willow to hide her struggles with her disability.

While some suppress or ignore their learning barriers, others do express having found ways to develop more positive self-images. Nonetheless, there are still certain words or phrases that can trigger people back into feeling inferior. Nebraska states that she is doing well and that she can get around the negative messages. However, she gets really triggered when someone she believes cares about her, someone she feels she knows, loves and trusts calls her stupid she will have an immediate break down. This is true for many people with learning disabilities. They have a high tolerance for people on the outside but when a person they trust calls them stupid they loose it. The other point that Nebraska makes here in this narrative is that she does not feel stupid, but it is the use of the word; the weight of the word, and who uses the word that dishevels her.

> Nebraska: Those types of messages being reaffirmed. That still is something that can still trigger me. Whenever I date people I say the one thing you can never do is call me stupid because I will get very sad, get angry and I will cry. Like it's just something that really triggers me. So its funny I never feel stupid, its something about the word can bring up whatever insecurity.

of well-being. Being athletic, or being artistic, musical, or belonging to another type of group can help to build ones self-esteem. Strong friendships and beliefs in powers greater than us can lead to a good sense of self. In the narratives below Kansas and Virginia discuss their happier experiences being involved in various groups and having good friends.

> Kansas: I had wonderful friends. I was very good in athletics. A very good dancer…

> Virginia: I was part of the New York youth band singers. I was always into plays too. I loved performing I guess. So, I remember I went to a different activity every single day of the week. I was a part of the key club, the gospel choir, the band, and horticulture club. Whatever I could fit into my schedule I was a part of. And then still after school went to the Salvation Army and participated in all that stuff. And I was actually studying to become a minister, so there was somebody

> prepping me for that. I did a lot of leadership stuff. And did little mini sermons. So yeah, just had to keep busy.

Each of these professionals in helping professions with learning disabilities has put great efforts into countering the negative messages tossed at them and in developing a strong sense of self. It is important to learn from them that they have had to develop really strong coping mechanisms to help them through the tough times because these difficult times are part of their every day lives. The data they provided also give us great data on how they cope with the daily frustrations.

> Kansas: I think what makes it heavy for me is that in some place I can overcome this and some I cannot. Now with my spiritual attitude I say I need help here… Sometimes I fall off the wagon, but again that is learning to manage it. The meaning of it is that they are always together and as long as I can see myself connected to the next person we are in this together. I think part of what the disability has done to people has isolated me out so I couldn't see the connectedness because there was a wall and I wasn't good enough so how could I really reach out if I can work on this basic belief of mine that I am good enough and I can feel connected—that's the basic lesson of all of this. It's a spiritual principle of connectedness that is linked with compassion.

The importance in this narrative is that Kansas discussed the truth about her life and that life with learning disabilities is not always going to be easy. Nonetheless, when she "falls off the wagon" she needs a way to get back on and thus she uses a spiritual principle of connectedness. This is one strategy that others could benefit from, especially after years of negative messages and feedback that pick away at one's self-esteem. Engaging in an ongoing process of self-reflection can assist individuals with working through difficult times and maintaining a positive self-image.

Self-Reflection

In this section I examine the category of self-reflection that is how the participants describe a process where they seek their inner most thoughts and analyze the self, their

interactions with others, their relationships, feelings, beliefs, and life more generally. Self-reflection can play a very important role in one's personal growth and development. Many participants shared their self reflective processes leading to personal and emotional outcomes, the identification of shifting patterns in their lives, and the acknowledgement of their paths towards accepting and embracing their learning disability as part of their humanity.

I will begin with a statement by Aster who outlines her emotional thoughts about having a learning disability.

> Aster: Because I have lived through disability I am not ashamed of it. I have suffered which has helped me understand. I believe when you have growth from opportunities you grow inside yourself.

This dialogue by Aster is very powerful, she points out how she has become the person she is due to the experiences she has endured as a person with a learning disability. She has learned through suffering, a means through which many people come to learn and grow. Wood's struggle with his learning disability is similar to that of Aster, but he was able to bring all aspects of self together thereby finding his path in life, one of the greatest gift one can have.

> Wood: I remember it was I don't think my parents actually knew I was dyslexic. It was something my father had said earlier back in my ministry that I had gifts that I was not using. He said you can imitate everybody, you got all this stuff, but you are not bringing that with you. You are two different people and so once I got the book that was it. I had my own style. I couldn't pattern myself after anybody else. I was my own person. You know? I did what was easy for me. Once I got that in my head I was like I got this.

The existence of a learning disability is part of the participant's daily lives and their experience is daily. The participants' discussed having a learning disability sometimes requires placing one foot in front of the other and each day to move forward on their various

paths. They further discussed that learning disabilities can feel like a constant lurking risk. Learning disabilities create challenges though some days the challenges are greater than on other days.

Kansas is quite familiar with the daily challenges and has embraced her life by harboring spiritual beliefs, which is how she handles hurdles that crop up in her daily life. Caira also shares her own emotional journey and her ability to become one with her learning disability.

> Kansas: Every day, one day at a time and seeing my whole life in a different perspective. I cannot see it without acknowledging karma that I have had past lives. It is this larger circle of life. I am in a cycle. I might be a speck, one does not exclude the other and that you know if LD is here it is one part of me, it is not who I am, I am spirit always and I am learning to be human and deal with this crap, it is like school of learning.

> Caira: I never really looked at myself as having learning disabilities, but through work and life experiences seeing the different ways I would handle a situation or understand it was because of the way I perceived things because of my disabilities or the way that I cope with the disability. With that understanding it made things full circle where I understand I'm not crazy and this is why I'm thinking the way I'm thinking.

The above narratives highlighted the personal and emotional outcomes of participants on a path towards empowerment. The next issue that has emerged from the data is the patterns participants identified that have led to the implementation of new self-practice. Caira, through self-reflection and work experience, learned to double check her work or otherwise make mistakes, and this awareness facilitated future success.

> Caira: I said to people sign on line ten, sign on line twenty and they would be like twenty and then I'd say oh I mean two. Upside down it looks like a twenty and they would laugh. That didn't offend me… You catch it after the day when doing your paperwork. I would be trying to see why the numbers were transposed. I would know to check. You learn yourself and you know how to check behind yourself. If a number says twenty five you check and see if it comes up to fifty two and you know you do those check and balances to check yourself.

Understanding self and finding the motivations to build ones own self is needed in all areas of ones life a strong being is needed to participate in home and work. In our society people are quick: to question one another before understanding others and to pass judgment on others. This makes life twice as difficult for people living with disabilities. There is no space for people whose logic does not follow that of what the majority feels is the correct way of thinking. Negative assumptions are easy for many to make about others without opening ourselves up to understanding that we are all different and we all carry out assignments in different ways.

The participants revealed that the responsibility of understanding people's different approaches and processes and teaching others about human differences has often fallen onto the shoulders of the participants. Everyday, individuals with learning disabilities have to learn to adapt to a rigid society that expects sameness rather than appreciating individual differences. Caira, Willow, and Savannah discuss how they adapted to different situations.

> Caira: Now I understand I just do it that way and I understand so I might have to look at things a little longer, have it written down and read it before I ask that question before I would just do it and go over it and go through a whole process. Now I know how to prepare myself for different situations. Now I can go over it and present it as opposed to just raising my hand because I know what I mean the first time but to communicate it might not be ready for everybody else to understand it. I have to break it down to be understood by most people.
>
> Willow: Knowing how difficult it is for me to do certain things and get organized I've decided and this is why I reinvented myself and it makes me so proud because I'm advocating for myself something that I've never done before. All these years as a grown up adult with all these disabilities I've never done this before, advocated for me.
>
> Savannah: I realized pretty early on if I took jobs working with people, people liked to talk more than they like to do anything else and that was a good place to be! So I worked at camps and talked and when it came to doing stuff like poetry it was like that's okay nobody cares how you spell as long as you can read it. That

> kind of stuff. That was fine and then I worked in Head Start. I always made sure I worked in places where there wasn't a lot of print. Reading stories. I just made sure I pre read the story before I presented it to the kids, I found out it was a really good technique.

Caira, Willow, and Savannah have changed the way that they approach others and employment so that their lives will be easier. They have “reinvented themselves” to make their travels through this universe easier. In the narrative below Caira describes how she developed a work environment that meets her needs along with the ability to perform the major functions of her job in a very successful manner. Although she works alone this is what she prefers. She does not want to have to deal with the added confusion and restrictive environment colleagues and institutions can create in a work environment. Caira is in control of her own space, how the space is organized and how she performs her duties and responsibilities.

> Caira: I'm working by myself and I can run my office the way I feel it should be run and to cater to the customers. I don't cater to the people in the office, I cater to the customers.

In order to move through life and to survive, people have had to be very disciplined and committed to working on the self. Kansas gives us further information on how she has learned to make herself a stronger person by working on her potential and not her limitations.

> Kansas: So it’s really how can we work on our potential and not our limitations and I think having gone through the disability has really helped me fortify that view. How can we I mean the possibility? I think for all of us with LD that is one of the larger burdens.

As the participants reinvent theirselves, or create the self over and over again, it can lead to many great things as Aster notes.

> Aster: I am thrilled over the years 90 percent due to my learning disability I had to step out of the box and not be a traditionalist. That has given me more opportunity

> to explore unique things. I have a unique life. I get to work for myself somehow because I am a problem solver. My work life success would be better working for myself.

Aster very well could have given up when she was unable to find work and was feeling disappointed and depressed. However, as a survivor she created her own job. Her self-employment allowed her to not to have to worry about standards set by an organization that would limit her creative abilities and particular needs. Aster's statement about being a "non-traditionalist" is very common because people with learning disabilities have to take many risks, step outside of the box and do and try different things to survive.

The personal and emotional outcomes and recognizing of the patterns that lead to success have helped the participants develop a positive and commanding sense of self that has resulted in compassion towards others. Many of the participants see themselves as amazingly helpful, full of compassion, kind, considerate and very empathetic due to their experiences living with a disability. Aster and Nebraska share these sentiments.

> Aster: I think it has given me unbelievable compassion for people.
> Nebraska: One of the great things about me is I care about everyone. I have also been a person who has been able to see good stuff in people…I am terribly optimistic as well. I think optimism is an incredible gift to have. Its funny cause a lot of people think optimism believes things are always going to be peachy which is not the case but it's always giving things the benefit of the doubt. Optimism in my personal life translates to the people around me and giving them the benefit of the doubt and having belief in them.

All in all each of the professionals in helping professions with learning disabilities have worked hard to get to where they are today. They have all struggled and have endured hard times, but through self-reflection, pain, healing, and change, they have reached various important goals in their lives. Most of all, they have developed a deep inner strength, passion, and harmony.

Table 3 Summary of Results

	AST	CAI	DEN	JAC	KAN	NEB	SAV	VIR	WIO	WOO
PUMLD	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
DLN	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
MDOO	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
AST	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
SAP	x		x		x		x	x	x	x
SP	x	x	x						x	
SPNE	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
SA/SP	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
SG	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
SE	x	x			x	x	x	x		x
SR	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x

CHAPTER 6

STUDY FINDINGS IN RELATIONSHIP TO LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the initial research questions based upon the data discussed in chapter five. I will situate the research findings within the literature review to depict the existing intersections and commonalities and to highlight current gaps in the literature. I will begin by focusing on research question one and proceed through each of the research questions.

- To what extent are Professionals in the Helping Professions (PHP) with learning disabilities able to name the support, services, and assistance that exist to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?
- What type of support, services, and assistance would PHP with learning disabilities choose for themselves to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?
- How do PHP with learning disabilities describe the support, service, and assistance that are available to them?
- To what extent are the available support, services, and assistance congruent with requirements articulated by PHP with learning disabilities?

Research Question 1

My first question asked participants to discuss their experiences with their learning disabilities.

> To what extent are Professionals in the Helping Professions (PHP) with learning disabilities able to name the support, services, and assistance that exist to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?

The data that the PHPs provided shows that eight out of ten participants, Aster, Caira, Kansas, Nebraska, Savannah, Virginia, Willow and Wood, were unable to specifically name a range of available services. Two of the ten participants, Denver and Jackson were

provided with specific services from their educational institutions during their secondary education and were able to name those services. Likewise, Denver and Willow also named utilizing services during college. All of the PHPs were able to describe experiences with support and assistance. However, the PHPs did not typically describe their experience with support and assistance as successfully helping them engage in the full range of activities needed for their daily living. I will now discuss the findings connected to the literature by beginning with services and then moving to support and assistance.

Services

For most PHPs the only time services were available was during their participation in educational institutions. Services in educational institutions in the 1970's, 80's 90's and 2000 in comparison to today (2009) have made considerable strides forward. Although many changes have taken place, services are still primarily located only in educational institutions and issues of early diagnosis effective academic support, and inclusion still remain problematic. Overall, there are major deficits in education programs career and counseling services, disciplinary and transition planning and other institutions such as health care, social activities, government, and legal services (Hutchinson, 1995).

Denver and Jackson were the only PHPs that were diagnosed and provided with services throughout their secondary education. The age of the participants in this study is a significant factor in terms of their personal experiences with or without services. For example, Kansas was born in 1939; Wood in 1948, Savannah in 1954, Willow in 1958, and Aster and Caira were born in 1959. There were little to no services available during

their educational experiences because the federal government, parents, and professionals were still in the discussion stage about learning disabilities between 1960 and 1975 (Hallahan & Mercer, 2000). Kansas and Wood never even saw the beginning stages of services, and the remaining participants were in their last few years of school when services started to become available.

On the other hand, Virginia was born in 1962, Denver in 1966, Nebraska 1975, and Jackson in 1983. Services were more commonly integrated during these participants' educational experiences. Nevertheless, Denver and Jackson were the only two people to receive services. Denver may have received services as a result of being white and having a teacher for a mother. Nebraska is Asian, and Virginia is African American and they never received services. Jackson the youngest participant is a white male and went to a special school where a fuller range of services were provided to students with disabilities. The quality of educational services often depends on funding, dedication, and the personal beliefs of staff about children with learning disabilities. Aster, Caira, Nebraska, Virginia, and Willow could have received services if there were adequately trained professionals and teachers present to recognize their learning disabilities and to get them on the path to receiving services.

Support and Assistance

Participants were able to name some support and assistance, which they described through both emotional and physical experiences. The majority of these few instances were while the participants were in school, as little support and assistance was provided within the participants' places of employment or through other organizations. The participants named their family members, a few special teachers, and peers as people that

provided support and care. Others provided support by being good listeners and by assisting with homework or other classroom work. Most participants did not specifically name support and assistance as helping with a full range of life activities, but instead described how their lives were filled with a lack of effective support and assistance. As Kauffman (2005) has noted, this may be due to educational institutions perpetuating false beliefs about the range of achievement that people with learning disabilities can accomplish. Davis and Lombardi (1996) also point out that standards fall short of the true abilities of people with learning disabilities, which may again explain why the participants have all described a lack of effective support and assistance within educational institutions.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused how the participants found success through the use of support, services and assistance.

> What type of support, services, and assistance would PHP with learning disabilities choose for themselves to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living?

The PHPs' in this study did not describe their experiences with an overall emphasis on services (some of the participants did not even have access to services), but everyone provided detailed descriptions about their experiences with support and assistance throughout their lives. The most significant theme from their descriptions is that their lives have been negatively impacted by the lack of effective services, support and assistance. This outcome was commonly due to family members' lack of awareness of services, subpar educational practices, and no services available in places of employment, which all had a significant impact on their daily living needs. Although the

participants describe some positive experiences, the bulk of the data emphasizes how their overall experiences impacted their self-esteem, led them to engage in destructive or disruptive behavior in school, and led to the manifestation of internalized oppression among participants. Many researchers have noted that learning disabilities affect people's self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and/ or daily living activities (Hallahan & Kauffman 1988, Huntington & Bender 1993, Smith 1994, Davis & Lombardi 1996). The prevalence of disability oppression is directly connected to the negative experiences of the PHPs.

Disability Oppression (Ableism)

Temporary able-bodied people such as parents, teachers, clergy, doctors, etc consciously and unconsciously oppress people with disabilities. People with learning disabilities are impacted daily because of individual attitudes and behaviors towards people with learning disabilities just as the PHP's described. The deficiencies in the educational programs and services designed to assist people with learning disabilities has had a negative impact on the quality of life for children with learning disabilities (Lichtenstein, 1993, Kortering Braziel, 2002).

Because of the oppressive assumptions are so prevalent in society, able-bodied people quickly and negatively labeled PHPs. Members of the family system, and teachers humiliated and harassed the PHPs. This harassment and humiliation has had life long effects PHPs. These effects are understandable because individuals spend at least twelve years in the educational institution, and depending on family members the harassment and humiliation can go on for a lifetime. Hehir (2002) adds, "negative cultural

assumptions about disability continue to have a negative influence on the education of children with disabilities" (p. 4).

The PHPs of this study included women, and/or people of color who have learning disabilities and they discussed how they encountered more barriers to success due to double and triple jeopardy. Many of the manifestations of oppression were perpetuated in the classroom. The PHP's quality of life was further affected by the lack of awareness, lack of availability of appropriate information, and the lack of knowledgeable service provider's. Many have highlighted how this deep lack of knowledge leads to a lack of appropriate services, specific accommodations, and resources for people with learning disabilities (Fleming & Kroese 1990, French 1996, Silver, Strehorn & Bourke, 1997, Krupp, 1994 & Andersen, 1994).

Based on the data collected most of the available support and assistance was located within educational institutions, but PHPs with learning disabilities often experienced that support as punishment. As students, several PHPs were forced to spend their after school time receiving "extra help" which did not help because the subject was taught in the same way for a second time. Staying after school for this "extra help" was not only ineffective, it penalized them by cutting into their social lives, sport activities and other extra curricular actives.

Virginia discussed being so frustrated that she cried because she would work so hard on her schoolwork and then be required to stay after school for help that was not "helpful." Caira discussed how she would spend so much time working on her papers for her English class and the teacher yelled out loud in front of the class "is your paper a joke" and then chastised her in front of the entire class. Similar situations happened to

PHP's in college where they had to struggle through classes. Many of the PHPs had to repeat classes and spend all their extra time reading and working on homework assignments trying to keep up with the work because services, support, and assistance were severely lacking. The study data indicates that lack of services, support, and assistance experienced by PHPs can often be explained by disability oppression and thus the systemic lack of knowledge about learning disabilities and how to effectively assist people with disabilities.

Internalized Oppression

Beverly Fletcher (1999) explains internalized oppression as a complex phenomenon where an enemy within develops as oppressed groups are immersed in negative images of themselves. Oppressed groups with internalized oppression consciously and unconsciously begin to accept the misinformation, prejudicial perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, symbols, and stereotypes of the dominant group resulting in a process of holding oneself back through a belief in one's poor self-esteem (Fletcher, 1999). The narratives of the PHPs clearly indicate that they were forced to fight against internalized oppression daily as they were constantly labeled, stereotyped, and belittled by others, which had a significant impact on their self esteem and self worth. Hehir (2002) explains how "the pervasiveness of ableist assumptions in the education of these children not only reinforce prevailing prejudices against disability but also contribute to low levels of educational attainment and employment" (p. 4). Due to a lack of services, support, and assistance, some PHPs coped by becoming self-employed while others struggled with finding jobs where they could thrive.

The nature of the manifestation of learning disabilities can create a layer of disbelief among people with disabilities. For each individual with a learning disability it is sometimes hard to believe that one does not understand the work placed before him or her. Usually it is a general misunderstanding that the person with the learning disability believes they know and understand what they are being asked of and it is not until they actually perform the work that is being requested that they find out they "did not understand" the actual request. Usually after many times of having this experience, people with learning disabilities are finally convinced that they do not understand. Thus, the internalization of the oppression is able to take hold in various ways. This process continues to impact one's self-esteem and can lead to other disabilities such as depression, anxiety, obsession compulsive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder etc.. One way the young PHPs dealt with both institutional and internalized oppression was through adaptive behaviors.

Self-Esteem

An individual's growth and development and how they assess their own self worth are an aspect of how self-esteem is developed. The implications of constant humiliation, reprimand, and negative feedback can develop into a lowered sense of self worth hence a lowered self esteem. Smith (1994) and Huntington & Bender (1993) explain that the emotional well being of people with learning disabilities can be both positive and negative depending on each individual's growth and development and attitudes towards change/self transformation. The PHPs were in some ways able to let go of the negative labeling that their teachers and peers attached to them most of their lives. In particular for Kansas, Caira, and Aster teachers were particularly tough on them.

Further evidence shows many of the PHPs were not diagnosed until after they finished college or were well into their middle ages. For some participants, this had to do with their age and for others the educational institutions did not test them. Significantly, educators did not discuss or recognize that these PHPs had any type of learning disability.

This data is significant for it shows that there were no influences by the label "learning disabled" on the PHP because they were unaware that they had learning disabilities. What they were most aware of was that they were unable to perform the academic responsibilities and were unaware of why this was such an issue for them except for the facts that they were considered unintelligent. The PHPS experience was similar to other findings where participants were considered less than their peers based on the attitudes and behaviors of the teachers who should have been providing them with a service (Maine State Department of Human Services 1997, & Krupp, 1994). As professionals in the field of education, their job is not to humiliate and chastise the student because they could not fit into their curriculum design, but to design a curriculum that they fit the students. The educator should understand the effort and work that the students are capable of achieving and work with them from that perspective.

This type of on-going harassment and humiliation in the classroom can cause some students with learning disabilities to see themselves as castoffs from society, people that other students do not want to be seen with for fear they may be labeled too. Connor (2006) showed that some regular education students have negative attitudes toward their peers in special education, which leads to bullying and stereotypical name calling by peers. Unfortunately, teachers in the schools may have reinforced many of these labels by their behavior in the classroom. PHPs experienced being told that they are not college

material, and if they asked for help, they were told they should not be in that particular class. It is difficult for students with learning disabilities to have friends or to find a partner because of these labels (Smith, 1994, Lichtenstein, 1993, & Connor, 2006).

An additional barrier or added layer of confusion for some PHPs was coming from diverse backgrounds. PHPs did recognize that their learning disabilities separated them from the rest of their peers (Connor, 2006 & Lichtenstein, 1993). However, for some it was difficult for them to know if they were being discriminated against because they were people of color or because of their learning styles. Other ways students with learning disabilities search for acceptance is they often give up, they stop caring, they tell jokes, they fool around, and or they behave poorly due to their frustrations. Both Kansas and Caira discussed telling jokes about themselves and laughing along with others about their academic confusion.

Denver discussed her revulsion about being placed in the special education classroom where she had to walk down a particular hallway that only lead to the special education room, making her status and participation in special education visible for all to see. As Huntington and Bender (1993) discuss, special education means one thing to most people, that these students are different they are slow, they need slower classes, remedial classes, and they don't have to do any of their work, because it doesn't count. Teenagers with learning disabilities exhibit elevated levels of anxiety, depression and suicide (Huntington & Bender, 1993, Telander, 1994, & Smith, 1994).

Institutionally Unacceptable Survival Techniques: So I Skipped Class

Some students with learning disabilities act out as a way of dealing with their disability. I categorized these experiences as institutionally unacceptable survival

techniques, which include acts of misconduct in the classroom, academic dishonesty, the skipping of classes and/or school, and other disruptive behaviors that are considered outside the boundaries of accepted/good behavior by educational institutions and other similar agencies. Several of the PHPs discussed how they engaged in dangerous behaviors to try and shift the focus off of their learning disability, to escape humiliation, or simply out of built up frustration with the oppressive environment. Sitlington (1996) explains that in many cases students with learning disabilities are trying to prove their worthiness through bad behavior, which leads to negative consequences. Negative self-images can lead to bad choices and students with learning disabilities have a higher incidence of criminal behavior. Over 65% of inmates that are incarcerated have learning disabilities. That is more then half the population of inmates (Learning Disabilities of America, 2009).

The PHPs' behaviors were in more ways, acts of survival than what one might define as bad behavior. Caira skipped classes so she would not be chastised or humiliated by the teachers. Aster and Caira cheated in different ways trying to be successful and to avoid being humiliated in the classroom. Aster, Caira, and Denver skipped classes where teachers were the least helpful. In each of these discussions the PHPs needed services, support or assistance and this was something they were not receiving from the educational institution, thus as children they had to create their own way of survival. What is further significant is that the PHPs also took risks in their search for acceptance and peer approval. Nebraska gave several examples of her risk taking and illegal activities. Caira, Denver, and Savannah mentioned skipping school, Wood discussed constantly talking and Caira and Kansas took on the class clown role to strive for peer

acceptance. If the PHPs had received services, support or assistance they would have been less likely to experience this depth of disability oppression. The final theme, although less prominent, are the positive experiences reported by the PHPs.

Positive Experience Reported

Denver discussed her early years in special education as a very positive experience full of encouragement, support and assistance. Her classes were held in a small schoolhouse with a teacher that sat one on one with her and taught her how to read and write. She enjoyed working with this special education teacher because she was truly able to learn. Denver spent 6 years in the small schoolhouse with 15 other children in a classroom. She also discussed that out of the 16 students in the classroom a good percentage of them were also in the special education class so she had a strong group of peer relationships and a lot of friends that were in the same situation as she was and so this became an affirming experience. Denver felt that her experience in special education in elementary school was full of cutting edge services, support and assistance.

Jackson mentioned a few similar experiences when he reached the middle school level, which was when he was tested and began to receive special education services. For Jackson there were some trial and errors until the appropriate services were agreed upon. Once he began at his new school with state of the art programs and services his experience was a very positive and affirming one. Jackson, at this point, was attending a school for children with learning disabilities. This school provided many effective services, support and assistance. This school had cutting edge curriculums, computer programming, small classrooms and services that transferred accommodations in all classrooms to create cohesiveness throughout the day for students.

Although Aster, Caira, Kansas, Nebraska, Savannah, and Willow did not have services provided to them during their secondary education they did receive support and assistance in several arenas. Denver, Jackson, Savannah, Willow Wood, and Nebraska, had very supportive parents in some respects. In fact Denver, Savannah, and Woods mothers were teachers. Having a parent as a teacher had great benefits for each of the participants. Denver's mother ensured that she was given educational testing in a timely manner and that the services, support and assistance were put into place for her. Woods mother worked with him on his writing and gave him advice on what he needed to do, to do well in school. His parents further advocated for him when they placed him in the wrong classes in school. His parents would speak to the counselor and had his classes changed.

All of the participants came from a two-parent family and explained having parents who loved and cared about them. Aster, Caira, Kansas, Jackson, Nebraska's and Virginia parents were as supportive of their children as they could be though they did not have the same teacher based knowledge and skills for working with their children on their schoolwork. Aster described gaining the respect of some of her teachers and she utilized them as a positive resource for support and assistance. Denver and Jackson also began with very positive interactions and experiences with teachers and knew how to use them as a resource for support and assistance. Likewise, Aster and Denver were able to maintain good and independent relationships with their peers. As Wood grew older and was in college he was able to create positive relationships with his peers and thus get the help he needed to complete his reading assignments.

All, but Caira and Jackson of the PHP's went on to college. Aster, and Jackson created the own businesses and work for themselves. Although researchers (Renfroe, 1998; Sitlington, 1996) explain that many students with learning disabilities are unemployed and living with their parents or guardians, each of the PHPs in this study are employed and working in a job that they like. Although for each of the participants support and assistance is not available in the work force, they are striking in their ability to meet challenges to be successful. For individuals with learning disabilities, quality of life is often measured by a person's ability to complete educational goals, maintain good friendships, obtain a meaningful job and have a roof over their heads i.e. personal success (Telander, 1994).

Research Question 3

The third research question concentrated on the participant's ability to discuss the type of support services and assistance that was available for them to choose to address their daily needs.

How do PHP with learning disabilities describe the support, service, and assistance that are available to them?

Although the participants did not answer this specific question, they did highlight support that has helped. All of the PHPs have been forced to seek assistance from partners, friends, and outsiders due to the lack of institutional services and support. Each PHP discussed individuals such as teachers, professors, siblings, parents, or supervisors who were helpful to them. For the PHPs that went on to college their desires for a particular type of service support and assistance was named. The PHPs discussed the need for readers, extra time and editors. They also discussed the need for faculty to be more understanding of their academic and communicative needs. In particular, the PHPs

who went on to achieve their doctorates needed far more support and assistance from the faculty than what they received. It is also a very fine line for individuals with learning disabilities to reach out for assistance out of fear that they will be dropped from the program or not be accepted into particular programs. Professors tend to be in a hurry and rush through instructions and or assignments. The PHPs noted that it was extremely helpful when they were able to work with people who had patience and the ability to explain things in more than one way.

Similarly, Kansas discussed having an extremely supportive supervisor who served as her mentor. In places of employment most people with learning disabilities need to find reliable people to assist them with different duties and responsibilities. Having a helpful mentor who one can go to for professional support and assistance on projects was a highly recommended suggestion. Other PHPs were able to make arrangements for support and assistance in different areas of their jobs through negotiations with colleagues.

For example, one of the PHPs made sure that she remained at the front desk where she was able to verbally answer client's questions and manage client conflicts. This PHPs ability to remain at the front desk allowed her to use her strengths on a daily basis rather than facing tasks that are challenged by her specific learning disability. Others took jobs in which they were their own boss and managed their own business. This allowed them to regulate their own work process, set up shop the way they needed it organized and to keep others from changing their system around so they do not get confused.

Though it is often difficult to rely on other people for assistance on the job needs may be able to be met depending on the type of company or business in which one is employed. The use of a computer, particular types of software, written out instructions, the use of templates, the understanding from supervisors and colleagues were all examples of helpful support and assistance.

PHPs noted that if a job requires testing for promotions then extra time on the exam, or oral exams to demonstrate their skills would be a better way to test the individual's knowledge for the position.

Finally, the PHPs described assistance and support from family and friends as essential. It is possible that PHPs might have further discussed services/programs, support and assistance had they experienced more of it during their lives. There are so many areas of potential support that are currently neglected that people with learning disabilities sometimes assume that there is no support and assistance available in certain areas.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question requested participants to discuss weather or not the support, services, and assistance that they received were appropriate?

> To what extent are the available support, services, and assistance congruent with requirements articulated by PHP with learning disabilities?

The data showed that the services, support and assistant often were not compatible with the needs of the PHPs. As mentioned earlier in this chapter a few of the PHPs were born before services became available in education. As for the PHPs that were born during the time period that services, support and assistance were legally

mandated, only two of the PHPs were given the full opportunity to benefit from the appropriate services needed.

Furthermore, although services were provided to the two PHPS during their secondary education, one had several issues with the way that the services were provided. They were very frustrated with how they were grouped with students with severe behavioral problems. Although Denver was provided with services, support, and assistance, she still experienced labeling and the feeling of being less than her peers. The goal of accommodations is to provide the students with the equipment to be able to perform equally as their peers.

Jackson's experience was congruent with his expectations once he was placed in middle school. The support, services, and assistance were part of a universal instructional design created in an educational institution for people with learning disabilities. This was one area that created harmony in Jackson's life. However, in every other part of his life there was no synchronization. He still had a difficult time reading menus; following directions, daily organization, and relationships with friends, not to mention that the accommodations were only part of middle school and not high school.

Regarding the parts of life that fall outside educational institutions, people with learning disabilities have no support, services, or assistance clearly available to them. Daily living needs include navigation through education, health care, the legal system, housing, religious institutions, government systems, employment and social lives. Outside of educational institutions it is difficult for most people to name the type of services, support, and assistance they needed to live a fulfilled life because there really are no well-known programs or services available. The next chapter will address the

implications of these overarching findings and the next steps needed to allow for future studies to find services, support, and assistance congruent with the needs of people with learning disabilities.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I might be a spec [sic], one does not exclude the other and that you know if learning disability is here it is one part of me. It is not who I am, I am spirit always and I am learning to be human and deal with this crap, it is like the school of learning. Kansas

The purpose of this study was to examine the requirements for support, service, and assistance articulated by helping professionals with learning disabilities and the availability of articulated services. In this chapter I will briefly present some reflections on my role as a researcher, the unexpected impact of the research on myself, and provide recommendations for future research.

Management of Self as Researcher

I chose to use phenomenological in-depth interviewing to come to a greater understanding of how participants would formulate meaning of their experiences. As a researcher who is also a member of the target population it was imperative for me to comprehend how I formulated meaning of the interview process.

Throughout this study, I had to face up to my role as the researcher and make the extra effort be aware of my own prejudices and particular perspectives of the world. My experience as a professional in a helping profession with learning disabilities was similar to the experiences described by the participants. I learned early in the interview process that my role as the researcher was to report the stories as revealed by the participants and not to attach my own meaning to the stories that they told. As a result, I established procedures to maintain good boundaries between their experiences and points of view and my own points of view and experiences.

The participants were happy to participate in the interviews because none of them had ever discussed their experiences as people with learning disabilities. They all stated that they learned a lot about themselves and their learning disabilities by participating in the interview process. The interviews provided the participants an opportunity to reflect upon and share their experiences. The participants were interested in knowing whether other people's experiences were similar to theirs and the findings of the study indicate that there were many similarities across participant's experiences. Based on the data collected from the interviews the participants shared many stories that brought up painful memories.

The strongest most powerful stories for me were about their experiences within educational institutions. The stories revealed many coping mechanisms for each individual that proved to be unique in some cases and in many others, were similar across the participants group. The PHP's showed their strength, pain, sense of humor, and resilience. They also showed how they cared for and were especially attentive to other peoples needs.

This research has created one opportunity for their stories to be heard. Their stories reveal the ongoing need to make changes in our society to better accommodate the needs of people with learning disabilities including creating laws that support the needs of people with learning disabilities and institutional changes which address educational. Coalition of people working together including people with learning disabilities, parents, educators, policy makers, judges, and other professionals can make our society more inclusive and empowering for people with learning disabilities.

The Problems & Recommendations

In 1984 learning disabilities were understood as a disability that affected an individual's quality of life (Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities). Yet, 20 years later there are still little to no quality services available to assist people with learning disabilities with their daily living needs. Some educational institutions have changed over the years improving their services, but most are limited in the quality of service, support, and assistance provided to students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, if a child is from a marginalized group in society (e.g. low-income, person of color or female) the chances of their getting appropriate accommodations are even less likely.

Creating new policies and procedures for people with learning disabilities across institutions does not require extra ordinary work or funding as some people may believe or argue. It is imperative to have policymakers who understand learning disabilities engaged in creating effective policies that will meet the needs of people with ld. Learning disabilities are hidden disabilities to some and our society has no basic understanding of how to treat people with hidden disabilities. Government and society together can determine how we can make our culture more universally accessible. This must include education and ongoing teaching of social responsibility towards others, creating universal change in attitudes and behaviors towards people different than us and holding individuals responsible for devaluing and hateful attitudes towards others.

Educational Institutions

Research has shown that educational institutions have slowly gotten better about providing support, services and assistance to people with learning disabilities. However,

the improvements are not substantial and still need significant progress to reach the goal of universal accessibility. Schools are still placing children with behavior issues with students with learning disabilities.

Students of color with learning disabilities are labeled mildly mentally retarded and placed in inappropriate classrooms. Educational institutions are also very selective about for whom they provide services. If students with learning disabilities do well academically with accommodations, educational institutions sometimes remove students from special education services because they believe they have been “cured”. This is clearly problematic and can be best understood by comparing learning disabilities to other disabilities and the services they receive. Special education services provides a person who is blind with documents in Braille and if they are successful with their class work. Braille is not taken away from them nor would they assume that the individual is cured. This relationship between disability and necessary accommodations need to be similarly understood, as the learning disability does not magically go away.

There are techniques and teaching methods that could easily be incorporated into public school curriculum from which all students would benefit. I recommend the inclusive model of Universal Design (UD) or Universal Instructional Design (UID). Universal Design outlines guiding principles that focus upon inclusively and accessibility for all people where as Universal Instructional Design applies these same principles, but with an emphasis on educational contexts. When using either model the goal is to create an environment where accessibility is forethought not an after thought, and where Universal Design is systematized and becomes the norm.

The eight principles of Universal Instructional Design are: to create a welcoming classroom climate; determine the essential components of the course; provide clear communication, expectations and feedback; explore ways to incorporate natural supports for learning; provide varied instructional methods for diverse learners, abilities, and ways of knowing; provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate knowledge; and encourage faculty-student interaction (Opitz & Block, 2008). There are various ways to get creative and apply this model to best fit one's educational institution.

The application of universal instructional design should include the creation of multi sensory approaches to learning. For example, books could be read out loud in class, as well as the books could be available in media formats and taught through film. For a math based curriculum students could use beads, calculators, Legos, etc. for working with numbers and manipulating numbers. Programs such as self-paced math and reading programs could also be included as teaching tools. There are many types of electronic hardware that can be used to assist all students, not just students with disabilities. UID principles are the core requirements, yet a lot of creativity is welcomed for meeting these principles, which deeply enhance every students learning.

Specialized schools are another possible option for students with learning disabilities. Specialized schools for students with learning disabilities have opened across the country all using different methodologies to effectively teach students. Their methodology is systematized and often applies Universal Design methods. These educational institutions have smaller teacher to student ratios (e.g. 1:6), individualized attention for all students, fluidity in the curriculum and the use of computer and adaptive software for classrooms. Some students feel validated and empowered because their peers

have similar learning styles so they are not embarrassed to speak or ask questions in front of others.

However, there are a few major problems with the sole use of specialized institutions to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities. To begin, the schools are costly and each public education institution has to agree to send/pay for students to attend the school. The cost of the schools can create financial restraints for many public schools, but it is still essential they meet the needs of identified students. More importantly, students with disabilities are then segregated from other kinds of peers, which can be socially marginalizing and prevent them from the opportunity to develop skills necessary for working with diverse groups of people. I disagree with separate but equal practices, which currently is the case with special education classrooms and specialized institutions. My proposal is to take the philosophy of the specialized schools and integrate the teaching methodologies into regular education classrooms. If specialized institutions can create universal curriculum designs then so can public schools for both able-bodied and learning disabled students.

Funding for Public Schools

States and municipalities have sought creative strategies for securing sources to fund services meeting the common good. One potential source of new revenue for new educational programs and the necessary structural changes could become available by applying a state tax on professional sports organizations. Current sports organizations are bringing in enormous profits while other areas in our society struggle such as education. If a tax was put into place to provide funding to educational systems the children would benefit from smaller classrooms, inclusive curriculums, and environments that meet all

students needs. This is just one suggestion. There are several other feasible ways to reallocate funds for our schools, but this depends on our societal values. Another needed step is to better train our educators.

Teacher Training

Presently, teacher education programs require prospective teachers to take only one class on the topic of special education. They are taught minimal information about how to work with students with disabilities. They are not given in depth training regarding teaching methodologies for working with a range of students with disabilities. Most teachers believe this responsibility is only for special education teachers. This thinking is problematic given that all teachers are left with the responsibility to recognize disabilities among students and recommend them for testing so as to insure that each child receive the services they need to be successful. As research has demonstrated, many students experience being diagnosed too late or not at all.

I recommend new requirements for undergraduate and graduate students pursuing teaching careers. Classes exploring oppression theory are extremely important in order for teachers to transform oppressive beliefs about people that are different. All human beings are socialized to have prejudices against those that are different from them and it takes knowledge and effort to break these harmful ideas. Classes in oppression theory will assist teachers in adjusting their ideas and assisting those that are different from them in a more creative and empowering way. This awareness will assist teachers with working with students from many diverse backgrounds whether it be ability, race, class, gender, etc.

Likewise, higher education institutions also need to make a stronger commitment to people with disabilities. Most administrations do not have a clear understanding of the needs of people with disabilities and would rather ignore the realistic needs than place the appropriate funding into the organizations that will provide services. Although most public institutions have some form of a Disability Services not all offices are equipped with the necessary staff to effectively provide the needed services. Some institutions only have one director who is also required to hold other professional positions such as also being a dean. The amount of time needed to develop and maintain effective services is substantial and cannot be done if a person is pulled in multiple directions.

Disability Services need to be fully staffed as the range of disabilities and accommodations are extremely complex and require particular attention to numerous professional areas. A great deal of work is needed to educating college campuses about disabilities. This in itself is a fulltime job because most faculty and administrators are unaware of the problems people with disabilities face. I recommend that disability administrators work with all agencies on a campus from admissions, housing, auxiliary services, physical plant, facilities, space management, scheduling, registrar's offices, to faculty. All organizations on campus need to be aware of how to address the needs of students with disabilities.

Additionally, all levels of each department need to address how they may accommodate students with disabilities. For example, Housing offices need to ensure that the buildings are accessible and that the room selection process is accommodating for people with disabilities. Campus maintenance departments need to be aware of the needs they may have to address such as lowering light switches and door knobs for people with

various disabilities The current lack of information on campus can be fully addressed through ongoing training, seminars, and meetings to address the issues of inaccessibility. It should not be a choice for administrators, deans, and department heads to be open to the suggestions; it should be a requirement. Colleges and universities need to work as a team to create reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

Legal Institutions

The legal system is an institution that is difficult for most people to navigate. Although courts have language interpreters, sign language interpreters, and physically accessible buildings to create accessibility they have not incorporated a systematic process to accommodate people with learning disabilities. As mentioned earlier, 65% of inmates in jail have learning disabilities. Breaking the law is breaking the law, but it would be helpful for the judicial system to have some understanding of the needs of people with learning disabilities. Locking people up because of their impulsivity, for example, is not necessarily the best way to accommodate people with disabilities whose actions fall outside the social norm. Significantly slowing the court process down and ensuring that each individual understands the process is an important needed change. Courts sometimes recognize that a crime has been committed due to poor judgment rather than because of malicious intent and a lesser sentence may be provided. Likewise, courts should incorporate an understanding of disability manifestations as they make their sentencing decisions.

Government Institutions

The government provides funding for people with physical disabilities to employ personal care attendants (PCA). PCA's provide services for people such as fixing meals, cleaning houses, bathing, dressing, and feeding persons with disabilities. This funding is very limited for people with disabilities and certainly not enough to provide life support. Yet, the government has not considered this type of service for people with leaning disabilities. Having access to a person or office that can assist with daily living tasks could be greatly beneficial. I propose a drop in service for certain accommodations that could be supported by the government in metropolitan areas. This sort of service could be incorporated into the Vocational Rehabilitation Services as one way to assist people with learning disabilities. Such services could provide help with job applications, interviews, resumes, homework, rental contracts, car and home purchases, finances, legal issues, job coaches and other daily living tasks as needed.

Employment Institutions

People with learning disabilities are usually able to pick up and catch on with most employment opportunities if given an appropriate amount of time. Some may need particular types of accommodations to be successful. The three months probationary period equals termination for most people with learning disabilities because they have to find appropriate accommodations quickly or develop new skills quicker than is possible. With a job coach people with learning disabilities would gain a better understanding of their duties and responsibilities and have a better change of developing the needed skills. There are also many other ways to provide effective accommodations so that the person can successfully complete all their job responsibilities. I recommend that clear

communication be regularly offered and that the appropriate accommodations be are put into place to ensure success.

One type of on the job accommodation for people with learning disabilities is adaptive computing. There are many types of software programs from voice input to voice output that work effectively as they read to you or you speak and the program writes the information that the person speaks. The most popular programs for voice output is Read and Write TextHelp© and program Kurkwiel 3000©. For voice input there is Dragon Naturally Speaking©. In addition to computer software there are date books, cell phones with organizers, PDA's and finally assistance from colleagues and supervisors. Teamwork trading between colleague's duties and responsibilities is another option that works successfully as employees get to work on tasks that match their strengths.

Summary

People with learning disabilities have always had to go out on a limb and the limb is often cut from underneath them. Dual diagnoses are becoming more and more common across people with learning disabilities. For example, many students with ADHD are often diagnosed with depression. The manifestation of disability oppression may explain why people with learning disabilities are suffering from additional psychological disabilities. Nevertheless, the PHPs in this study have shown us that despite the odds and the ongoing challenges, they will and have persevered. This does not to lessen the pain, the amount of work and the struggle they have experienced to be successful in life, but acknowledges that success despite the challenges.

The difficulty for most people with learning disabilities is that they are unable to find reliable people and services to assist them with their daily living needs and quality of life. This study has the possibility of taking on a special significance as the baby boomers are reaching an age where medical concerns are increasing and veterans are returning from war with disabilities such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Brain Injuries, and depression. It is imperative that our society develops widespread compassion and understanding towards others. The belief that people with disabilities are not capable of being professionals needs to be drastically challenged. The PHPs in this study have demonstrated that they can be employable professionals who have an important impact on other people's lives. Just because people with learning disabilities may not comprehend, process, speak, read, write, remember, or organize in the same manner as people without disabilities does not mean they cannot be efficient in running an office, a business, or be successful in their lives. Creating a just society for people with learning disabilities requires lot of work, but there are feasible models and options for making this happen. Each and every institution needs to take the needs of people with learning disabilities into consideration. Taking steps towards liberation for one can end in liberation for all.

Table 4: Summary of Research

Author/Year	Content of Study	Results of Study
Affleck, J., Edgar, E., Levine, P. & Kortering. (1990)	2,655 participants 13 school districts in Washington, D.C. Graduated or "aged-out" of special education programs 1,142 able-bodied cohorts.	The results showed that the able-boded students achieved far better than the students with disabilities. Employment, postsecondary education, independent living, salary access of adult services.
Banfalvy. (1996)	Surveyed 1300 adults with learning difficulties from all over the country of Hungary.	Success in school and success in the labor market does not ensure that adults would have success in social areas of their lives.
Cigno, K. & Burke (1997)	15 single mothers with a child with a disability	Single mothers were struggling. No support from their partners. Isolated, Lacked transportation Fears for the future.
Dagan, D., Ruddick L. & Jones, J.	Study of 29 older people Interviewed at three points during 53 month period.	Within first 41 months, their quality of life improved.
Dagnan, D. Trout, A., Jones, J. & McEvoy. (1996)	Four men Transition from hospital to community	Increased quality of life accomplishment of activity, choice and dignity. Increased outside activity
Author/Year	Content of Study	Results of Study

Davis, R. & Lombardi, T. (1996)	12 participants Used special education programs Mildly mental retardation or learning disability 40 participants Not mentally retarded or learning disabled received services from regular education	The participants that received regular education scored 32 points higher on the quality of life survey than the participants who received special education programs
Edgar, E. (1995)	Two groups of graduates from 1985-1990 488 graduates from special education. 610 graduates who were able-bodied.	Able-bodied participants had significantly higher rate of success in attending college programs. Group of Disabled attended vocational and non-college postsecondary programs.
Fleming, I. & Kroese, B. (1990)	17 Adults with learning difficulties transferred from long-stay hostel into small community based group homes	Behaviors of the residents were dependent on the structure established by the staff. The residents did not develop any meaningful relationships with the community members.
Greenbaum, B. Graham, S. & Scales, W. (1996)	49 adults with Learning Disabilities who attended large public universities during 1980-1992	They did not disclose their LD to their employer. They felt that their LD had an adverse effect on their work. They were concerned about discrimination in the work place.

Levine, P. & Nourse, S. (1998)	Review of 13 frequently referenced follow-up studies.	Acquiring a postsecondary degree did not guarantee employment for people with disabilities.
Liechtenstein, S. (1993)	Four young adults identified with learning disabilities.	Major deficits in their special education programs and transition planning services.
Maine State Department of Human Services. (1997)	Six focus groups of people with disabilities.	Professionals needed to be better listeners. Health professionals had the wrong attitude about disabilities. Lack of accommodations in health care, education, social, employment, and businesses.
Silver, Strehorn and Bourke (1997	54 students with disabilities who graduated during 1985 –1992. Students had received disability support services during this seven-year period.	Study revealed faculty and administrators discouraged students with disabilities from pursuing their major and career choice based on their disability
Reiff, H., Ginsberg, R. & Gerber, P. (1995)	71 successful adults with learning disabilities.	Models designed to help teachers to assist students. Recognizing students' success rather than their deficits.

Reiter, S. & Bendov, D. (1996)	35 residents with disabilities from four group homes in Israel. 30 adults with learning disabilities living at home with their parents.	Each group had positive perspectives about themselves and both groups were pleased with their quality of life.
Renfroe, W. & Others (1988)	253 high school students with disabilities.	87% of the males and 52% of the females participated in vocational classes. Over 50% of the students took at least one course at a community college or a technical school. The mentally retarded and educable retarded graduates, were unemployed and were not looking for employment.
Roper, S. (1995)	1200 American adults	3 out of 10 had experience with learning disabilities. Participants believed non-related disabilities were directly related to learning disabilities. Learning disabilities should be identified between 3-4 years of age. Many resources for gaining insight are schools, doctors and librarian.

		The term “learning difference” was a more preferable term. Services for students’ with learning disabilities should be inclusive. Participants supported funding for learning disabilities. Learning Disabled suffer injustices
Sitlington, P. (1989)	1012 learning disabilities graduated.	54% of the participants who had graduated and 38% of those who had dropped out of school were employed, living independently or living with a parent or relative. Those living with a parent or relative paid a portion of their living expenses.
Spreen, O. (1988)	203 adults with learning disabilities. Interviewed at age 18 and 25.	Neurological symptoms visible. No proof that the neurological symptoms disappeared
Tomblin, M. (1999)	Three adults with learning disabilities. Eight years study.	Effects of LD on young peoples lives are unlikely to be eliminated entirely. Problems of unemployment and underemployment. Reviewed participant views of success.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FOR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You have been recommended for participation in this study because of your knowledge and experience as a person who works in a helping profession and has a learning disability. Your participation is important, as your perspective will contribute to the understanding of and need for appropriate services for people with learning disabilities.

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

- I will be interviewed by Madeline L. Peters using the procedures of phenomenological interviewing and I agree to participate in three 90 minute interviews.

- In these interviews I will reflect on my life history as a person with a learning disability and as a professional in a helping profession. In the second interview I will reflect on the details of my experiences as a person with a learning disability and as a professional in a helping profession. In the final interview I will reflect on the meaning of my experiences as a person with a learning disability and as a professional in a helping profession.

- I understand that each interview will be recorded and that a second party other than the researcher will transcribe the data. I understand that the transcriber will sign a certificate of confidentiality. My name, home address and home phone number are requested at the time of the interview to facilitate the researcher with follow-up in the case of incomplete data.

- I understand that my name <u>will not</u> be used and I <u>will not</u> be identified personally in any manner. I understand that it will be necessary to identify participants by disability, age, sex, number of years with disability and years of experience requesting and receiving accommodations.

- Because of the small number of participants, approximately twelve, I understand that there is some risk that I may be identified as a participant of this study.

- I understand that information collected in this study will be included in Madeline L. Peters dissertation and may be incorporated into manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.

- At the conclusion of the study, I understand that I will have access to the final dissertation manuscript.

- As a participant in the study I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

- I understand that I am free to participate or not to participate without prejudice.

Name (Print):_____

Signature: _____Date:_____

School Name (Print):_____Phone_____

_____ _____
Madeline L. Peters Date

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT MAILING 1

Dear Professional in a Helping Profession;

My name is Madeline L. Peters; I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I am in the Social Justice Program which is a division of the Student Development and Pupil Personnel Services in the School of Education.

I am conducting a phenomenological study of the requirements for support, service, and assistance articulated by helping professionals with learning disabilities and the availability of articulated services. I am in need of volunteers to participate in my study. If you're aware of any such individuals please pass this letter on to them.

I am contacting you in hope that you will pass this letter to colleagues in your division in a helping profession who has a learning disability.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely

Madeline L. Peters

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT MAILING 2

Dear Professional in a Helping Profession

My name is Madeline L. Peters I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I am in the Social Justice Program which is a division of the Student Development and Pupil Personnel Services in the School of Education.

I am conducting a phenomenological study of the requirements for support, service, and assistance articulated by helping professionals with learning disabilities and the availability of articulated services.

This letter was passed on to you because you fit the profile of the individuals I am looking for to participate in my study.

The purpose of my study is to explore the ways that professionals in helping professions who have learning disabilities describe support, service, and assistance that is available to assist people with learning disabilities to successfully engage in the full range of activities for their daily living. Further, this study will examine how helping professionals with learning disabilities experience these articulated services as available to them, and the extent to which the services available are congruent with their articulated needs.

The data collection method will consist of three 90 minute interviews spaced over a couple of weeks. If you are willing to participate in this study please fill out the demographic information at the bottom of this form and return it in the pre-paid envelope. You will receive a phone call shortly after I receive your form.

I appreciate your taking the time to read this letter. I hope that you will agree to participate.

Thank you,

Madeline L Peters

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

First Name_____ Last Name_____

Address_____

Telephone_____

Female_____ Male_____ Transgender_____

African Decent ____

Asian Decent ____

Latino/a ____

Native American ____

Caucasian ____

Age: 20-30 ____
31-40 ____
41-50 ____
51-60 ____
61-70 ____

Disability/ies

Learning Disability ____

Mobility ____

Medical ____

ADD/HD ____

Psychological ____

Blind ____

Deaf ____

Thank you,

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