Perspectives of an Individual with Learning Disabilities on Attributes that Enable Success

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of an individual with learning disabilities on the attributes that enabled life success. Specific attributes (i.e. self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal-setting, use of effective support systems, emotional coping strategies, self-determination, self-efficacy, resiliency, and a balance of creative, analytical and pragmatic intelligence) were highlighted and explored to determine their existence and effect on life success. The life experiences and perspectives of a person with learning disabilities were gained through an interview process. Data collected during this process was analyzed in hopes of rendering commonalities between attributes possessed by the participant that seemingly encouraged success and attributes commonly described in the literature. Results indicated that the participant utilized a number of the noted attributes, but in a pattern that was unique to him. Themes emerged from the data that have implications for service providers, teachers, and the parents of the learning disabled. An example of such is the need to support and encourage the maximization of individual strengths within the learning disabled individual. Understanding the unique profiles of such individuals enables service providers to assist them on their road to success.

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"An enlightenment of the spirit
To become more than it is now.
To grow past the boundaries that logic has
enslaved it in.
I hear the beat of the steps as my feet shuffle me
along
the streets of the jungle."

(An excerpt from a poem written by student with learning disabilities, cited in Pocock et al., 2002, pg.214.)

Section I: Introduction and Literature Review

It is generally assumed that knowledge gained today translates into opportunity and success for tomorrow. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is a highly regarded commodity within our cultural boundaries. What if the journey to such acquisition is hindered? Many individuals with learning disabilities confront such hindrances and obstacles on their educational and life path. How are such obstacles overcome and how is success eventually achieved?

The purpose of this study is to explore, through the life stories of an individual with self reported learning disabilities, his perspective on his disability, successes, coping strategies, goal attainment, perseverance, proactivity, self awareness, determination and use of analytic, creative and pragmatic abilities. It is hoped that this exploratory study will enrich the literature on positive coping strategies and success

factors; coincide with existing research; and help gain insight into the life story of an individual with learning disabilities relative to supports, attributes and experiences that might have led to greater life success.

Definition of Learning Disabilities

The concept of a learning disability is not new and has been documented in the literature as early as 1896 (Kerr, 1896/1897; Morgan, 1896) although the specific term was not coined until the mid 60's by Kirk (Kirk, 1968). Presently, a variety of definitions exist and are often dependent on geographical boundaries (i.e. school district, province, state, or nation). Most definitions attempt to illustrate the neuro-biological basis of learning disabilities. Due to the heterogeneous nature learning disabled population, the definition of a learning disability is continually debated and evolving, in hopes of achieving a definition that services a broad spectrum of disorders and the individuals affected.

Learning disabilities have been defined by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2002), as "a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing;

processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making)".

The definition also suggests that "For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings. The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of: specific skill instruction; accommodations; compensatory strategies; and self-advocacy skills". The reader is encouraged to review the official definition in its entirety on the LDAC website. It is of interest to note that the Nova Scotia Learning Disabilities Association also shares this exact definition of LD (LDANS, 2006).

The Learning Disabilities Association of America defines LD as "a neurological condition that interferes with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information. Learning disabilities can affect one's ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute math, reason and also affect a person's attention, memory, coordination, social skills and emotional maturity" (LDA, 2005). For the purposes of this work, the official definition used by both the Canadian and Nova Scotian LD associations will be utilized.

Etiology and Variation of Disorders

The etiology or cause of learning disabilities has been attributed to a variety of factors, including genetics, neurological impairment and obstetrical insult/injury (Levine, 2002). The prevalence of such disabilities is suggested to be between 6-10% of the population (McDermott et al, 2006). Dr. Mel Levine (2002) theorizes that learning disabilities occur when there is a malfunction in one or more of our neurodevelopmental

systems. Variations of learning disorders are the result of the uniqueness of the neurodevelopmental profile an individual possesses. For example, a student can experience cognitive dysfunction in one system, but exhibit wonderful strengths in another. He divides the systems as follows:

1. The attention control system (i.e. distribution of mental energy)
2. The memory system
3. The language system
4. The spatial ordering system (i.e. ability to make sense of visual world)
5. The sequential ordering system (i.e. ability to apply problem solve sequencially)
6. The motor system
7. The higher-thinking system (i.e. ability to reason logically)
8. The social thinking system (i.e. ability to maintain successful relationships)

The following table provides some additional examples of the various cognitive impairments that are typically associated with a learning disability (Walcot-Gayda, 2006):

Table 1: Cognitive impairments related to learning disabilities

Impairments in processes related to:	**Perceiving**	**Thinking**	**Remembering**	**Learning**
Language Processing	Difficulties in processing sarcasm or understanding when someone is joking Difficulty taking another's perspective	Difficulties in understanding: long or complex sentence structure; and with figures of speech	Difficulties with: retrieving vocabulary words; orally presented task demands	Difficulties with new vocabulary and responses to teacher-directed questions
Phonological processing	Sounds in words (e.g. bat/bag) are confused; poor sound sequencing in words; limited automaticity in decoding	Difficulty with comprehension of content caused by lack of fluency in decoding	Difficulty retaining sound/symbol correspondence	Difficulty extracting essential concepts due to focus on decoding
Visual spatial processing	Difficulty with oral or written directions for an activity; perceiving organization of ideas in a text	Difficulty identifying main ideas in a text	Difficulty with left/right; north south, hierarchical structures	Poor integration of sequential information (days of the week, recipe)

Processing speed	Poor social interactions; does not keep up with fast-paced lessons	Few connections between isolated bits of information in texts	Slow linking of new with previously learned information	Less material covered or takes extra time and much effort to cover material
Memory	Few strategies when trying to remember content or concepts	Difficulty writing since spelling may not be automatic	Difficulty retrieving previously learned information	Forgets spelling words after test; difficulty recalling significant events in history; any new learning is difficult
Attention	Difficulty knowing when to pay attention Poor reading of social situations; impulsive	Poor concentration when putting ideas together	Little effort expended for remembering ork may be disorganized; goes off on tangents,	
Executive functions (planning or decision making)	Poor recognition of value of planning; impulsive	Difficulty problem solving and understanding consequences of decisions	Difficulty in linking new with previously integrated knowledge; Few strategies Difficulties in higher levels of learning, but has isolated pieces of knowledge	

Impact of Learning Disabilities

A learning disability (LD) is a lifelong disorder that impacts all aspects of life. Unfortunately, research has not eliminated the impact that learning disabilities continues to have on individuals and society. Learning disabilities impacts the academic performance, employability, self worth and mental health of significant numbers of children, youth and adults. It has also been associated with illiteracy, imprisonment, substance abuse, unemployment and suicide (Brier, 1994; Keilitz & Dunivant, 1986; Larson, 1988; Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Much of the research that has been completed on the effects of learning disabilities focuses on children and adolescents. Adolescents may experience learned helplessness, decreased confidence in their abilities to learn and be successful, low motivation, attention challenges, increased risk of substance abuse and maladaptive behaviors (McDermott et al, 2006).

Academic Impact

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (as cited by McDermott et al., 2006), reported that 35% of children with learning disabilities drop out of high school, which is double the rate of their nondisabled peers. The NCLD also reported that only 2% of those who do graduate attend university, despite average to above average cognitive abilities. Roadblocks to academic success are common among the LD population. Individuals with learning disabilities are more likely than their nondisabled peers to demonstrate inadequate study skills, organizational challenges, difficulties with social interaction, deficits in basic academic skills (i.e. writing abilities), and low self-esteem (Skinner and Lindstrom, 2003).

Deficits in basic academic skills (oral language, reading, written language and mathematics) place learning disabled adolescents at higher risk for unsuccessful academic outcomes in higher education settings (Levine & Swartz, 2006). Levine and Schartz suggests that as students move from pupil-oriented elementary or lower schools to more content-driven secondary school settings, their academic challenges are often magnified. They note that students with disorders of learning can find graduating with a high school diploma increasingly problematic, due to the lack of the requisite skills for success. They report that traditional classroom teaching techniques may not always be suited for such students' particular learning strengths or interests. As a result intellectually diverse and capable students "fall through the cracks" and can potentially meet with academic underachievement and failure.

Levine and Swartz (2002), provide examples of specific academic obstacles that frequently impact the educational pursuits of adolescents with learning disabilities. They illustrate the process of writing as a myriad of cognitive processes and sub-processes that make it the most 'cognitively expensive performance- based task' and exclaim their mystification as to why it is the most commonly used activity to assess competencey and knowledge at most grade levels. They suggest that disorders of written output can have a profound psychological effect on an adolescent who is prone to become discouraged and anxious about academic performance. Such anxiety about school performance can result in the student ceasing to be academically productive at all.

Levine and Swartz (2002) describe another obstacle that can impede academic advancement, temporal-sequential challenges. They note that adolescents can have temporal-sequential deficits, or an inability to estimate, allocate, stage, and monitor progress towards completion of activities, that undermine efficient management of time. Adolescents with temporal sequential deficits have trouble making use of stepwise approaches to task completion. Such adolescents can often benefit from an adult or a peer who will provide assistance with structuring the timing and sequencing of activities. This type of learning disability could be as detrimental to academic pursuits as reading and writing deficits, if left unaccommodated.

Social-emotional Impact

Research focused on the impact of learning disabilities on social and emotional development appears to be growing to satisfy our need to more accurately understand that aspect of the disability. Issues surrounding social ineptitudes, low self-esteem, negative

self-image and learned helplessness are common themes within present day learning disabilities research. It is estimated that 38-75% of individuals with learning disabilities exhibit some form of social problem (Byron, 2005). Byron goes on to highlight recently completed research conducted at the Chicago Institute for Learning Disabilities. The research suggested that students with learning disabilities are at risk for developing problems in a variety of social domains:

1. Belief and feelings about self (i.e. self-concept, attributions, self-worth, loneliness,depression)
2. Social cognitive and linguistic skills (i.e. social perception, social cognition, role-taking, communicative competence)
3. Interpersonal skills (i.e. developing and sustaining relationships, classroom behavior)

It is not surprising that the learning disabled population is at risk. Students with such disabilities must face academic challenges on a daily basis, placing them at significant risk of internalizing feelings of doubt and failure. Valas (2001) explores the relationship between an LD students' self-esteem and negative academic self-perception, and their placement/participation in remediation classes. His research suggests that student's self-perception is impacted by the type and duration of such placement, suggesting that they may feel stigmatized.

Wiener and Tardif (2004), completed a study on the impact of segregated classes. They describe the study and their results as follows: Children with learning disabilities in four types of special education settings were compared in terms of social acceptance, number of friends, quality of relationship with best friends, self-concept, loneliness, depression, social skills, and problem behaviors. Two of the placements, (In-Class Support and Resource Room) were for children with mild to moderate learning disabilities and involved between 30 and 90 minutes of special education per school day.

The other two placements (Inclusion Class and Self-Contained Special Education Class) were designated for children with severe learning disabilities and involved at least a half-day of special education. Children in the more inclusive placements had more positive social and emotional functioning. Children receiving In-Class Support were more accepted by peers, had higher self-perceptions of mathematics competence, and fewer problem behaviors than children receiving Resource Room Support. Children in Inclusion Classes had more satisfying relationships with their best school friends, were less lonely, and had fewer problem behaviors than children in Self-Contained Special Education Classes.

As noted previously, limited social knowledge and understanding often play a role in the daily life of learning disabled students and adults. This population often lack basic social-emotional skills needed to achieve positive social interactions. Elias (2004) identifies the potential for social isolation, stigma, difficulty with peer interaction and acceptance, and loss of confidence in abilities, not only lost by the student, but also by those around him/her (i.e. parents and teachers). Elias suggests encouraging the development of positive social skills and social-emotional learning, by providing the student with guided opportunities to acquire such skills.

Impact Beyond High School Graduation

What the disciplines of both education and psychology know for certain is that children with learning disabilities grow up to be adults with learning disabilities. "Learning disabilities do not disappear when a student graduates from high school, they persist into adulthood." (Source, 2000, pg. 169). The need for services that are designed

to assist young adults transition successfully into post-secondary life has never been greater. How can LD students reach their academic potential and achieve life success? How can their families, teachers and service providers assist and support them on their journey toward success? "Students with learning disabilities become adults with learning disabilities and enter a stage of their lives that necessitates not only new accommodations and services, but also new ways of thinking about their disability" (Gerber, 1994, pg.6).

The impact of learning disabilities on the life of an adult are varied. Unlike a child, adolescent, or university student, adults with LD face many occupational challenges. Challenges stem from the very basic act of completing an application to complex tasks that involve the use of organizational and planning skills. Social and emotional competencies are also tested when interacting with co-workers and employers. Low self-esteem can reduce a person's independence and ability to self-advocate, and social incompetencies can result in the misunderstanding of co-workers/employers' moods and attitudes (Source 2000).

Panagos and DuBois (1999) report that the employment rate of individuals with learning disabilities immediately following high school is about the same as or slightly better than their peers without disabilities. However, a large majority of these jobs are part time and involve unskilled or semiskilled labor; thus, they are significantly lower paying than those obtained by individuals without disabilities. They also note that students with LD are significantly less likely to enroll in postsecondary or higher education training programs. This trend may be attributable to reduced career-related self-efficacy beliefs among these individuals. Based on an examination of this trend, Panagos and DuBois suggest that subjective factors (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs and

outcome expectations) rather than only objective skills (i.e., aptitudes and abilities) as being influential in shaping the career development and choices of adolescents with LD.

Greenbaum, Graham & Scales (1996) discuss the barriors to occupational success sometimes faced by adults with learning disabilities. Participants in their study identified a critical barrier in the workplace as being the fear of discrimination. Almost 40% of the participants who had been employed indicated that disclosure of their learning disability during the job application process would have resulted in not being hired. Similarly, after being hired, many of the participants were still unwilling to disclose their disability for fear of prejudice and stigmatization. As a result, the researchers noted that workplace accommodations occurred for only about 20% of the participants.

Greenbaum et al explain that it was not possible to determine if participants' fears were justified, but that it was disturbing to find that many of them were unwilling to reveal their learning disabilities to their employer or fellow workers because of fear of discrimination. They go on to report that this was particularly distressing in light of the fact that all of the respondents had previously identified themselves as learning disabled to college officials and professors in order to obtain university services and accommodations. Upon entering the workplace, however, many were unwilling to disclose their learning disabilities, even though such disclosure might result in accommodations that would make them more efficient and effective workers.

Reiff, Ginsberg & Gerber (1995) completed a qualitative research project with 71 successful adults with learning disabilities. The study indicated that the participants' individual achievements shared a number of commonalities. Reiff et al isolated a number of internal and external common factors. Internal factors included desire, goal-

orientation, and reframing. External factors included persistence, goodness of fit (i.e. a career that maximized strengths), learned creativity and social ecologies (support networks). The reseachers concluded that these commonalities represented skills and processes that could possibly be taught and learned.

Success Factors

Despite a variety of challenges, some individuals with learning disabilities have highly successful and effective lives (Lerner, 1993). What is it that leads some individuals to adapt and cope in positive ways while others are less able to cope? While there is some predictive validity for the impact of higher intelligence quotients on the determination of future success, this factor alone is not sufficient to explain the differences as the predictive ability of intelligence on job performance is as low as 4 percent (Wigdor & Garner, 1982).

According to Sternberg, there are three components identified as a part of his triarchic theory of intelligence. These components or abilities which include analytical, creative and pragmatic abilities predict success better than traditional tests of intelligence. His Test of Triarchic Abilities measures what is required to succeed in life rather than what is required to succeed in school (Wagner, 2000). Related to this, a study by Gerber, Ginsberg and Reiff (1992) found that school had very little value and relatively little connection to the success of adults with learning disabilities who were experience effective outcomes on life. Furthermore, the authors concluded that these adults had adopted a form of learned creativity to overcome obstacles related to their disability.

To venture further into the work of Sternberg and his revolutionary insights on the nature of successful intelligence, a brief summarization of his applicable theories/definitions may be necessary. Sternberg (2003) defines successful intelligence in terms of the ability to achieve success in life in terms of one's personal standards, within one's sociocultural context. He suggests that the implication of this point for consulting psychology is that success needs to be defined primarily in terms of the goals individuals set for themselves and the extent to which they have the abilities, broadly defined, to meet those goals.

Sternberg also claims that one's ability to achieve success depends on one's capitalizing on strengths and correcting or compensating for weaknesses. He suggests that people achieve success, even within the same occupation, in many different ways. For example, successful teachers and researchers achieve success through many different blendings of skills rather than through any single formula that works for all of them. Teachers and parents must help students with learning disorders determine their strengths and weaknesses. Sternberg also suggests assisting such individuals when attempting to leverage their strengths and correct or compensate their weaknesses. The third aspect in the conceptualization of Sternberg's successful intelligence is that balancing of abilities is achieved in order to adapt to, shape, and select environments. He exemplifies this by noting that intelligence involves not only to modify oneself to suit the environment (adaptation), but also modify the environment to suit oneself (shaping) and sometimes finding a new environment that is a better match to one's skills, values, or desires (selection). In the fourth and final aspect, Sternberg touches on the idea that success is attained through a balance of analytical, creative, and practical abilities. He suggests

that how successful the individual is depends on the individual's ability to capitalize on analytical, creative, and/or practical strengths and to correct or compensate for these weaknesses.

A considerable amount of Sternberg's research at Yale was developed from this theory of three main types of intelligence (analytical, creative, and practical). He describes one such study as follows (Sternberg, 1997): Students were identified either as (a) high-analytical, (b) high-creative, (c) high-practical, (d) high in all three abilities, or (e) low in all three abilities. The students were then placed in sections of a college-level introductory psychology course that emphasized primarily (a) memory-based learning and thinking, (b) analytical learning and thinking, (c) creative learning and thinking, or (d) practical learning and thinking. For example, in a memory-oriented course, individuals might be tested on the main doctrine of psychodynamic and cognitive theories of depression; in an analytically oriented course, they might be asked to compare and contrast the theories; in a creatively oriented course, to generate their own theory; and in a practically oriented course, to apply an existing theory to help a depressed friend. All students were then evaluated for (a) memory-based achievement, (b) analytically based achievement, (c) creatively based achievement, and (d) practically based achievement. For example, students might have been asked to remember the main details of an experiment (memory), analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the experiment (analytical), generate their own experiment (creative), or apply the results of an experiment to their lives (practical). Evaluations included homework assignments, examinations (including both multiple-choice and essay items), and an independent project, all of which were assessed for all four kinds of achievements.

When the research was completed, Sternberg concluded that when students learn in a way that lets them capitalize on their strengths as well as compensate for and remediate weaknesses, they perform better than when they are taught in standard ways. He also suggested that all students potentially learn better when they are presented subject matter taught to them in a variety of ways. Sternberg acknowledges that our educational system works well for a select few (those with strong memories and analytical abilities), and those with creative and practical abilities are essentially "iced out" of the system, because he reports that at no point are they allowed to let their abilities shine through and help them perform better in school. He makes a strong comment when he concludes that these individuals often appear to be intellectually lacking but in reality the conventional standards for evaluating abilities are lacking. Sternberg urges service providers to assist individuals in the discovery of their intellectual profile.

Service providers can ensure and encourage success by stepping away from the typically narrowly defined notion of intelligence, and encompass a more versatile, dynamic conceptualization. In regard to teachers, he suggests (Sternberg, 1998) that instruction should allow students to capitalize on strengths and identify/compensate for weaknesses. He suggests that if educational programming is entirely individualized, students do not experience their weaknesses, robbing them of the opportunity to strengthen them.

As noted by Hearne and Stone (1995), research on learning disabilities has for the most part focussed on ways to accommodate individuals and/or strengthen areas of weakness with the result that areas of strength are often ignored as a means of

compensation. They argued that conventional remediation techniques often fail and there is a need for a shift in focus away from a single focus on the deficit model to something more positive. For more than two decades, researchers in the realm of learning disabilities have been attempting to determine the individual characteristics, behaviors and experiences that lead to successful life outcomes.

Questions and theories have been developed in the examination of what major factors contribute to success and propel students with learning disabilities into reaching their full potential and satisfying their life goals. Factors or attributes such as resilience, self-advocacy, self-determination, self-efficacy and self-awareness are being identified, defined and quantified, and a new dimension of services for the learning disables is emerging (Pocock et al, 2002; Werner 1993; Raskind et al, 1999; Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Gerber & Reiff, 1996). Heiman and Precel (2003), describe the concept of external (i.e. social support) and internal (i.e. goal orientation) variables attributed to success. A shift from focusing on academic remediation, to focusing on the development of success attributes is beginning to take place (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).

Definition of Success

What is success? Success is many different things to many different people. Success is bound by both culture and gender. The notion of individual success changes over a life span. Success can be viewed as the striving for and successful acquistion of basic human goals. Strom (1980) suggested that three basic human goals exist and are shared by most. The first of such goals is rootedness, which is defined by the need to feel a sense of belonging, family and/or community. The second goal is to be proactive,

meaning a determination to control one's destiny. The third is to establish a sense of identity or self-concept as a person. Attainment of such goals would seemingly indicate a level of social, personal and life success.

Success can also be viewed as the ability to meet or surpass both culturally and individually driven expectations in personal, education and career domains. Success can be defined in terms of education, life satisfaction, independence, interpersonal relationships and self-esteem or self-concept (Raskind et al., 2003). This multidimensional definition of success will be used in this research project.

Success attributes, for the purpose of this work, will be defined as the factors, behaviors, personal characteristics, attitudes and experiences that eventually lead to successful life outcomes for individuals with LD (Raskind et al., 2003). A successful individual is being defined as one who has been involved in a specific field or organization for a minimum of five consecutive years and who has maintained or improved their position in the organization/field. In effect it is highly personal perspective but one which can be supported through maintained employment, maintained relationships and/or success in an academic pursuit.

The Frostig Center Research

The research of the Frostig Center (Raskind, et al, 1999 & 2003) revealed a number of success attributes that direct students with learning disabilities to either positive or negative adult outcomes. The success attributes include: self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal-setting, the presence and use of effective support systems, and emotional coping strategies. Frostig researchers (2003) emphasize that not every

successful individual possesses each of these attributes, and some attributes may be present to a greater or lesser degree. They suggest that successful persons with learning disabilities are much more likely to possess these characteristics than unsuccessful individuals. Success was measured in terms of positive family and friend relationships, self-approval, job satisfaction, physical and mental health, financial comfort, spiritual commitment, and an overall sense of meaning in one's life. Different individuals may place lesser or greater emphasis on these various components of success (Raskind, et al, 2003).

The work of the Frostig Center in Pasadena, California, is one of the longest standing longitudinal research studies in the field of learning disabilities. The researchers traced the lives of students with learning disabilities in an attempt to classify and identify common factors that predict successful life outcomes (Raskind, et al, 1999 & 2003). The major goal of the study was to determine if the presence or absence of success attributes would make a difference to life outcomes. As noted earlier, the study highlighted the importance of six different attributes.

- Self-awareness: awareness of and the ability to compartmentalize their disability. It also reflects the ability to recognize their talents and challenges.
- Proactivity: ability to take action and become involved in decisions that directly effect them.
- Perseverance: remain focused on chosen path or goals
- Goal-setting: set goals that are specific, but flexible
- Presence and use of effective support systems: open to support from others, but demonstrates independence when appropriate
- Emotional coping strategies: possess effective means of reducing and coping with general stress and disability-related stress.

Noting the importance of these attributes, the Frostig researchers also asked if these attributes could be taught or enhanced. The concept of providing or teaching

students with learning disabilities specific success attributes or strategies is not entirely new. However, a shift seems to be in progress that extends beyond the notion of achieving academic success and forces those involved in the study of learning disabilities to consider success of learning disabled individuals from a developmental point of view. What are the implications of a learning disability across a lifespan? How can success be defined for a student with a learning disability beyond high school graduation.

A broader definition of success was developed in the 2003 qualitative research project completed as part of the original 20-year Frostig study. The multidimensional definition of success included eight domains: employment, education, independence, family relations, social relations, crime/substance abuse, life satisfaction and psychological health. The researchers (2003) attempted to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the above mentioned success attributes, using qualitative analysis that focused on the "insider's" view of the impact of the various attributes on their success.

Some individuals with learning disabilities are clearly successful and some are unfortunately not. Do the success attributes identified by the Frostig Center play an important role on the trajectory of a person's life? Children with learning disabilities grow up to be adults with learning disabilities. These individuals must function in settings beyond school, and as noted previously service providers must provide for more than academic support. Learning disabled adults may benefit greatly from the development and fostering of success attributes. Frostig researchers (2003) suggest that these attributes or success factors have a more significant impact on life outcomes than do cognitive and academic ability. "Although background variables did not differentiate

successful participants and unsuccessful participants, the presence or absence of the attributes differed dramatically between the groups" (Goldberg et al., 2003, pg.224).

Significance of Success Factors

How do all of these noted success attributes develop or evolve? Are certain students genetically predisposed to self-advocate or do they naturally develop an enhanced sense of self and have increased level of self-awareness? Smith (1999) suggests that some of the factors attributed to success actually evolve through the perception of others. As a child develops into adulthood, particular attributes shift from what is deemed a negative characteristic and becomes a more positive trait. She notes as an example, "students who have been called stubborn, unyielding, willful, turn these negative traits into positive attributes of stubbornness in adulthood, which is a fierce determination, a fighting spirit, a perseverance that leads them to achieve what they want to accomplish" (Smith, 1999, pg1).

Can success attributes be learned? Can we teach life success? Literature suggests that success factors or strategies can be taught (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003; Raskind et al, 2002). To date, several studies have been completed that consider various success attributes among students with learning disabilities. Attempts to identify and develop curriculum and programs aimed at the development of various success attributes and strategies in children and young adults with learning disabilities is relatively common in the literature of the past decade.

To illustrate such work, Pocock et al (2002) developed a program designed to increase self-advocacy, self-concept and self-determination in students with learning

disabilities. The resulting program was termed Learning and Education About Disabilities (LEAD). The authors note that the program was rooted in the need for students to better understand their disability and more effectively advocate for themselves with teachers who lacked a comprehensive understanding of learning disabilities and the accommodations required. Pocock et al suggested that increase self-advocacy and self-concept were subsets of self determination, and that these factors could be taught to high school students. The reader is referred to the cited article for a more detailed description of the program and its components.

Self-determination and its implication on post-secondary success for students is garnering considerable attention in the field of learning disabilities. This concept is not only of interest to LD students, but also to individuals involved in service delivery for the learning disabled. Self determination has been defined as:

> "...a combination of skills knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviour. An understanding of one's strength's and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attributes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in society." (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer, 1998, pg.2).

Research completed by Sarver in 2000, investigated the link between self-determination and academic success for university students with learning disabilities. A 92-item self-report instrument was administered to determine the students' level of self-determination and their grade point average was reviewed. The results suggested that there was a positive and significant correlation between a student's level of self-determination and their grades.

Self-efficacy is also a recurring theme in the literature surrounding success in LD students. "Self-efficacy influences task choice, effort, persistence, and achievement. Compared with students who doubt their learning capabilities, those who have a sense of efficacy for particular tasks participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at a higher level" (Schunk and Zimmerman 1997, pg. 36). Margolis and McCabe (2004) suggest that many struggling learners resist academics, thinking that they lack the ability to succeed. These individuals can be viewed as having low rather than high self-efficacy. They suggest that the key to reversing this outlook is for teachers and service providers to stress the development of self-efficacy. The authors note that development in this area may be possible if students are provided with needed learning strategies; if their efforts and persistence are reinforced; if they are exposed to positive peer models; if they are taught to make facilitative attributions; and if they are encouraged to create personally important goals.

Self-concept and self-efficacy are tightly interwoven within the fabric of identity formation. Erik Erikson's (see Arnet, 2007 & Lerner et al., 2005) theoretical framework regarding psychosocial development, more specifically identity development, provides a useful perspective from which to view the evolution of such attributes (see Arnet, 2007 & Lerner et al., 2005). Erikson theorized that as individuals develop they progress through several distinct psychosocial stages. Identity formation is a dynamic process within these stages, but is suggested by Erikson to be most active during adolescence. Self-concepts, beliefs, attitudes, attributions, values, notions of self-efficacy, sense of belonging and affiliations combine to produce a sense of identity, and fuel personal expectations thus influencing goal setting. When the process of identity formation is disrupted or fails,

Erikson suggests that identity confusion may occur. In regards to the learning disabled population, a sense of self or identity encourages both advocacy and appropriate goal setting. However, social isolation, labeling and stigmatism place such individuals at risk for identity confusion.

The successful transition from high school to a post secondary institution appears to be the marker by which academic success is measured. The assumption that learning disabilities can be remediated before high school graduation is obviously false, and service providers at the university or college levels are providing continuing academic supports in an attempt to ease the transition into higher education (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Gerber (2003) emphasizes the importance that technological advancement is playing in the academic lives of students with learning disabilities. He also describes a unique external factor that may work to benefit those with learning disabilities. "Highly successful adults with learning disabilities have had and are having powerful effects on motivating other individuals with learning disabilities. In some cases, these successful adults with learning disabilities are creating opportunities for others that, in earlier times, would not have existed" (Gerber, 2003, pg. 326).

Nancy Barga (1996) completed a qualitative study that examined the factors that contributed to the success of students with learning disabilities in school and explored how these students manage their learning disability from primary to university. Barga interviewed nine learning disabled students who were enrolled in university. The author defined a learning disabled student as a someone who had been diagnosed by a school psychologist or by an educational institute employing the US federal government criteria for a learning disability. Successful students with learning disabilities was defined by

the researcher as high school graduates that were currently enrolled in and completing a college degree.

Barga reported that the students experienced some form of labeling and stigmatization. She also noted that the students employed both positive and negative coping strategies. Positive strategies were categorized as: benefactors (support system), self-improvement techniques (seeking help), and study skills and management strategies. Negative strategies included avoiding disclosure of their disability and attempting to pass as nondisabled, which ultimately created both stress and tension in the lives of those students. The students that experienced the most success and least degree of stress employed the positive coping strategies.

Hall, Spruill and Webster (2002) conducted a study that examined the emotional resiliency, stress levels, locus of control, and need for achievement in college students with learning disabilities by comparing them to their nondisabled peers. Their findings were quite interesting. Firstly they found no significant difference between the groups in the area of locus of control (perceptions of externally controlled attributions). This suggests a realistic assessment of how events impact their lives. Need for achievement was defined as " the motivation to strive for success, to master difficult challenges, and to meet high personally generated standards of excellence" (Hall, Spruill & Webster, 2002, pg. 80). The authors reported that college students with LD demonstrated a higher need for achievement than their college peers.

In this particular study, the researchers noted that surprisingly students with LD self-reported fewer college stressors compared to their nondisabled peers. Two possible explanations are given for this finding. The first is that "protective mechanisms of

resilience counteracts the level of success in LD students..." and " an alternative explanation may be that students with learning disabilities face more challenges and consequently develop more effective ways of coping with stress by the time they reach college." (Hall, Spruill & Webster, 2002, pg. 85).

As resiliency is a recurring concept in the literature on academic success in LD students, it is of interest to note that Hall, Spruill & Webster described resilient individuals as " those who experience successful outcomes despite adverse experiences." (Hall, Spruill & Webster, 2002, pg. 80). It has been suggested that protective factors (i.e. support from teachers, parents, and mentors) can act as protective buffers from adverse circumstances (i.e. academic challenges and disability stress) (Werner & Smith 2001). Learning disabled students with emotional resilience seem to more efficiently handle the associated stress of having a disability.

Dole (2000) reports that the exploration of both risk and resilience is highly relevant for the field of learning disabilities. She suggests that problems such as underachievement, high drop-out rates, low self-esteem, emotional problems, lack of social skills, underemployment, job difficulties, and prolonged dependence on others have an impact across the life span. Individuals with learning disabilities are at high risk of unsuccessful outcomes because they commonly manifest these problems. In an attempt to illustrate the implications of resiliency, Dole refers to Werner's Kauai longitudinal study. Reviewing the study, she describes it as involving 22 children who were diagnosed as having learning disabilities by the age of 10. Dole notes that if the study had concluded when the subjects reached age 18, the prognosis would have been very negative, because a majority of them scored lower than the controls on self-

assurance, self-efficacy, and interpersonal skills. However, by age 32, the lives of most of these individuals had improved remarkably, suggesting an evolution of such abilities.

Dole highlights five internal and external clusters of protective buffers/resilient factors that appeared to be a predictor of success for the individuals involved. She describes the clusters as follows: The first cluster included personality characteristics, such as planning ability and self-efficacy, that enabled the individuals to generate positive responses from caring others. The second cluster included skills and values that enabled them to make efficient use of their abilities, such as setting realistic educational and vocational goals and faith that they could succeed despite the odds. Cluster three included parental management characteristics that fostered self-esteem in the children. Cluster four consisted of the presence of other supportive adults like grandparents, mentors, and members of church groups. Cluster five was the opening up of opportunities at major life transitions.

Dr. Mel Levine described certain individuals with learning disabilities as "persons whose life performances fall short" (Levine, 2001, pg.1). Does the existence of the attributes described (i.e. self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal-setting, the presence and use of effective support systems, emotional coping strategies, resilience, self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-efficacy) work to prevent such shortfalls? What role do these attributes play in the success of learning disabled persons and how did these attributes develop? As noted, these recurring questions are the foundation for a growing body of research based on success attributes and their developmental implications.

Section II: Methodology

Participant

Voluntary participation of a previously diagnosed adult with learning disabilities, who reported success in the realms previously noted (i.e. education, career, social relationships), was the participant objective for this study. The candidate for the study was obtained through a volunteer process in response to a request via Dr. Fred French, a member of the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University, who has a list of persons willing to speak to his classes regarding success and learning disabilities. The participant granted informed consent and the study was conducted in an urban area of Nova Scotia, wherein both the participant and researcher reside. The participant was a 42- year-old male, who at the time of the study worked as a lawyer. His initial diagnosis of learning disabilities occurred during adolescence. He described himself as an advocate for the learning disabled. See the *Findings* section for additional and more specific background information regarding the participant.

Procedure

This investigation utilized a qualitative process, combining elements of case study, grounded theory and narrative analysis/inquiry. It was hoped that this approach would provide the researcher with a rich understanding into the impact and development of success attributes. Information was gathered through an interview process. Questions were open-ended, allowing the researcher the opportunity to not only further explore the participant's responses, but to also allow for the emergence of unforeseen themes. The

interview questions were rooted in the theories of the Frostig research on success attributes and how they may manifest and be expressed within an individual. The Frostig's guide for life success (2003) was influential in the development of the interview questions. The use of a semi-structured interview process helped reveal insight into specific coping strategies, unattainable through quantitative methods. "The purpose of qualitative research is to generate hypotheses, not confirm them" (Sells et al, 1997, pg. 168). The participant was viewed as a giver of information rather than a subject (Sells et al, 1997). This approach was utilized in hopes of providing addition insight to the realm of success attributes, based on data collected from the prospective of an "insider" or someone with learning disabilities.

As noted, elements of grounded theory encompass this research process. Grounded theory evolved from the necessity to generate and/or compliment theory from qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded theory has been referred to as the legitimacy of knowledge grounded in the idiosyncrasies of lived experience (Piantanida et al., 2004). It allows researcher across countless domains, including sociology, education, psychology, to gain insight from what is not easily measured or quantified, the human experience. Grounded theorists often cannot agree on what constitutes the "pure" methodology within the theoretical framework, leaving room for flexibility and interpretation of it's use (Fassinger, 2005). This study will not utilize one of the more common grounded theory approaches, that is of coding interviews/information for conceptual relevance. Instead it will explore information (stories and responses) for the emergence of common themes (i.e. the presence and evolution of self-determination).

The interview process consisted of two sessions. Session one consisted of a screening process to determine whether or not the potential candidate met the criteria for inclusion (maintained successful involvement/employment in a field for a minimum of five years, capable of articulating self knowledge, seeing themselves as successful and having a history of a what they refer to as a diagnosed or self identified learning disability: no verification of diagnostic information will be gathered). This interview found in Appendix A - 1 was conducted over the phone. Session two involved core data collection using semi-structured interview questions found in Appendix A - 2. This session was also conducted via phone. At the conclusion of the second interview, specific clarification and perception checking of information to validate participant's perspectives occurred.

The data collected, or narrative, was analyzed, interpreted and categorized by the researcher. Narrative analysis and inquiry are intertwined in this study. Narrative analysis (Burck, 2005) explores how an individual constructs their self-accounts and experiences. These accounts are viewed as claims of identity and are categorized. Bleakly (2005) describes narrative inquiry as using life stories as data, but rather than just categorize and segment the data, the story should be also viewed as a whole. The narratives were analyzed, through the lens of Strom's basic human goals, Erikson's theories on identity formation and Frostig's success attributes.

Criteria of Quality

In an attempt to judge the validity of this study, Eisner's (1998) criteria for assessing qualitative research was utilized. In terms of structural corroboration, Eisner

suggests that the researcher most guard against relying on limited sources of information and solely on their own interpretations of the data. Although only one source of the data existed, the participant's narrative, that narrative was shared with the research advisor and committee members, inorder to generate a variety of interpretation alternatives. Such varied interpretations lead to what Eisner refers to as consensual validation, theorizing that different interpreters will bring different perspectives and understandings to the data. The result should be a more comprehensive and rich interpretation of the data. It is hoped that this study brings greater insight into the understanding of success attributes, meeting Eisner's criteria of referential adequacy.

Ethical Considerations

The participant's identity was not revealed inorder to protect his privacy. This study was deemed to be of minimal risk to the participant, as the focus was on the positive attributes that encourage success. However, the participant was informed of his opportunity to discuss/debrief regarding any negative issues that may arise from the questioning (see Appendix A-3). It was hoped that the participant would benefit from revisiting stories and experiences that ultimately lead to his life success. The researcher also acknowledged the need for ethical sensitivity when interpreting data, and a need for a positive rapport during the interview process, to encourage the trust of the participant and access to his stories.

Section III: Case Analysis and Interpretations

Background Information

The participant was a 42-year-old male who at the time of data collection worked as a lawyer/general council for an international company. Developmental history revealed a preterm birth (one month early). The participant's premature birth, in combination with oxygen-deprivation during delivery, resulted in a two-week hospitalization. As a preschooler, he sustained a minor head injury as the result of a car accident. However, follow-up medical/neurological assessments suggested that no lasting effects of the injury were present. Fine and gross motor development was reported to be delayed, but with therapy, eventually continued to develop.

The participant was first diagnosed with a learning disability at the age of 13, at a regional children's hospital. He notes that he knew things were "very wrong" much earlier than age 13. He describes his disability as having significant impact on his academic attempts, specifically literacy development (reading and writing), his numeracy abilities and his motor development (difficulty with sports and graphomotor abilities). He suggests that his intellectual abilities and the ability to discuss or understand a concept or current issue were never in question, "I was a great conversationalist". At young age the participant presented with well-developed expressive and receptive language abilities, but struggled enormously in all areas of academics. He reported that difficulties with spelling, written output and graphomotor function were and remain quite significant. Challenges with sequencing, organization and time management also characterize his

learning disorder profile. As noted in the literature, such impairments are typical of the criteria utilized to diagnose learning disabilities. There is no evidence that any immediate family members share the diagnosis.

Reaction to the diagnosis was described as being a relief for both the participant and his parents, "suddenly there was an explanation for my difficulties and the disconnect between my strengths and weaknesses". He also remembers feeling relief that his difficulties were not stemming from the head injury he sustained in a car accident. He noted that his parents shared a similar reaction, they were relieved it was not sustained brain damage and encouraged to at least know what they were all dealing with- a learning disability. Even with the relief of knowing he had a learning disability, both he and his parents were concerned for his academic future and professional possibilities.

> "We did not receive a great deal of advice as to how to move forward, even though we knew what it was, it was still an oddity. We were not sure what it meant for my future."

The participant notes that the school board's initial reaction to the diagnosis was that of both support and uncertainty, due to the fact that three decades ago learning disabilities, especially in a rural area were just becoming part of the educational vocabulary. His academic history and school experiences illustrates both uncertainty and willingness on the part of the schools and teachers involved.

Academic History

The search for a diagnosis was preceded and prompted by academic underachievement. Prior to and proceeding his diagnosis of LD, a variety of educational

challenges were very apparent. His elementary were characterized by frustration, and he illustrates his perceptions as follows:

> "Academically I was struggling in every way. I always felt bright enough, but could not understand why school was so challenging. Things were just not falling into place. My classmates were surpassing me, I was struggling with all the basics".

As noted, as a young child he experienced difficulty with basic skills acquisition of both literacy and numeracy, coupled with motor and sequential deficits, resulting in a floodgate of academic underperformance and emotional stress. Levine and Swartz (2006) describe the profound psychological effect this can have on a student. Like the participant, they note that students can feel discouraged, frustrated and anxious in regard to academic performance. This is especially true when the learning disorder effects systems or abilities that are highly valued within the walls of a classroom.

Literacy abilities are the foundation from which most academic activity catapults. If the student, and in this case the participant, has extreme challenges with written expression, frustrations understandably multiply as such demands increase. Based on the participant's insights, it would appear that challenges with writing were a significant obstacle in his academic career. The participant also experienced temporal-sequential challenges. As noted (Levine 2002), such deficits can result in difficulty with efficient use of time and organizational abilities, both of which are critical for success in a traditional educational setting. These challenges were significant obstacles for the participant and represent the uniqueness of his disorder profile.

As noted in the literature (Levine and Swartz, 2006), students with LD are at risk of academic failure, particularly if content delivery does not match their neuro-

development profile. In the case of our participant his profile was not being matched or effectively accommodated in a 1960/70's rural school system. The participant describes the rural school board's attempts to accommodate his unique learning profile as "hit or miss and experimental". He did note that teachers were always open and accepting of his difficulties. Before the diagnosis and in response to his academic challenges, he was placed in a segregated, remedial class for 3 years during mid to late elementary. He reported being very aware that his placement in this class may not have been appropriate, knowing at the time that his "classmates were cognitively very different". He added that the experience was devastating and took him away from his core peer group. This illustrates both Erikson's and Strom's conceptualizations of identity development. During this period of his life, the need to identity with a peer group is crucial to positive social development. It would appear from his narrative, that the participant felt socially isolated from his peer group and unable to identify with the students in the segregated classroom, placing him at risk for identity confusion or not knowing where he fits in.

During the interview process he also shared that he feels he never completely "got over" being placed in a class away from his peers. Feelings of devastation, stigmatism and social isolation are commonly reported as the perceptions of individuals with LD toward segregated placements (Valas, 2001). The participant's early feelings toward being placed in a separate classroom, not only highlight his notions on inclusion even as a young child, but also may have been one of the elements that ignited his need to self-advocate. Perhaps his ability to advocate evolved from the need to prevent future exclusion.

The participant noted that a significant turning point occurred when he was asked by a guidance counselor in grade 6, if he wanted to move on to the next grade, continuing in the remedial class, or did he want to repeat grade 6 in a regular class. He describes the significance:

> "I felt that they were saying I was bright enough to make choices in my own education. I felt as though I had some control. I made the choice to get out of the class, even if it meant losing a year".

Elias (2004), describes the emotional significance learning disabled students or individuals derive from knowing that others have faith in their abilities. The above example illustrates that perfectly. It would seem that the participant gained not only the ability to make a choice, but also the knowledge that others felt he was 'bright' enough to make that choice. This would appear to be an important marker on his road to identity formation, proactivity and also his need for autonomy. Repeating a year came at a huge cost for the participant, but in his estimation, it was worth it to return to regular classes and reconnect with a more similar peer group. Although he reports challenges in his repeated grade six year, he describes that he "managed to grade". He continued on in regular academic classes, receiving resource support (literacy development) on a frequent basis.

Academic issues and stresses become almost intolerable as he progressed toward high school. "I scraped through grade 9! Things felt like they were really starting to fall apart in the upper grades. It was when things started to become really frustrating for me". This appears to be a common experience shared by many individuals with learning disabilities. Levine and Swartz (2006), suggests that these individuals lack basic

academic skills and this deficit becomes more and more apparent as the student progresses toward the upper grades. Classes become more content driven and fast paced compared to the nature of the lower grades, and skill deficits are more difficult to overcome. They note that academic shutdown, decrease productivity and avoidance are very probable during this period of education.

"Grade 10 was disastrous! I could not get through grade ten math, even if I tried taking it today- I wouldn't get through it". He remembers feeling extremely unhappy during this time and that the school was only providing very modest accommodations for him (additional spelling insruction during the period allotted for French). "In my regular grade 10 class, I had started to avoid school because of never feeling successful." As a result his mom explored a private school that focused solely on the needs of the learning disabled, which could provide specific instruction designed to strengthen not only his numeracy challenges, but also his literacy skills. This school was located hundreds of kilometers from his home and would mean leaving his friends and family.

The participant describes this time as another turning point, where he was given the opportunity to make a decision that would effect his future.

> "I had aspirations for university but huge gaps in basic literacy and math skills. I knew my higher cognitive abilities were OK, so it was very frustrating. I felt like I had to make a decision again, but felt like it was the right choice for the future. At the (private school) I gained very basic academic skills and my self-confidence was really boosted. It allowed me to experience success and focus on what I could do."

It would appear that students who are given the opportunity to experience success, often respond with increased self-efficacy. As self-efficacy develops, the door to goal setting begins to open and self-determination enters. After one year in private school, he

returned to his local high school to complete grade 11 and 12. He recalls feeling like " I was a man on a mission to get out of (private school) and back to my high school and friends. I could see the bigger picture of the future and what I needed to do". He noted working extremely diligently while at private school, motivated by the notion of returning home and having new academic skills that would help him reach his goal of university. He went on to become a debating champion and win scholarships to university. The opportunity to attend private school appears to have benefited him and brought him closer to ultimate success in a variety of ways. Firstly, it can be viewed as another step toward both autonomy and the development of his proactive abilities. Secondly, the need for inclusion is again evident, as reports wanting to return to his high school and peer group. Finally, during his time at the private school, the success he found there was of extreme importance to his self-concept and self-efficacy, which in regard to development is timed perfectly to Erikson's period of identity formation.

He was accepted into an undergraduate degree, within which he pursued studies in both political science and philosophy. He characterizes these years as being a time in which he was very politically active and involved. He not only received academic supports from the university, he also worked to ensure equitable services for other learning disabled students. This would appear to be another important stepping stone on his path to advocacy and identity development. He was aligning himself with a specific group, the learning disabled.

The participant made significant personal connections during that time as well. His academic advisor became and remains involved in his life. He describes the evolution of their relationship as starting with him seeking her advice, to present day,

when she will often seek his advice on LD related issues, in an effort to better assist her current students. It would seem that the perceptions of the advisor shifted over time (Smith, 1999), and this allowed for a switching of roles. Raskind et al (2003) note that such switching of roles is characteristic of success for the learning disabled population. Research suggests (Barga, 1996) that students who affiliate themselves with a support network in university, illustrated in the relationship the participant forged with his advisor, the likelihood of success increases.

He finished all academic endeavors (P-12 and undergraduate studies) in a rural Nova Scotia area, with the exception of Law school, which was completed in an urban setting. He completed his academic career when he graduated from law school.

Perception of Success

This study explores not only the factors that contribute to success, but also the concept of success in general. For that reason it was deemed necessary to make inquiry regarding the participants perceptions of success, specifically success in the domains of education, career and social relationships. The participant revealed that he believes generally that success is accomplishing what others think you are incapable of. This type of achievement is a reoccurring undercurrent in many of the participant's revelations.

More specific ideas of success were revealed as follows:

- Education- "Achieving a recognized credential and gaining the intellectual background that allows you to make connections in daily situations. You can apply your knowledge across various contexts".

- Career- "I need to be recognized as being competent and qualified. People come to me because I have the answers and get things done. It is recognition from supervisors and peers. Success is measured by delivery, as in 'He did that', where you are not just a cog in the wheel."
- Socially-"I liked to be seen as a rescuer, solving problems for others. Someone who can be counted on. Integrity is also fundamental to success and having people see you as you see yourself".

These notions of success appear closely linked to Strom's (1980) theory of basic human need. The participant places emphasis on being a qualified, contributing member of society through both educational and career goal attainments (rootedness). He acknowledges the importance of others viewing him as competent (identity). It could also be assumed that educational credentials lead to increased opportunities to make choices and control one's life path (proactive).

Self-awareness, acceptance and advocacy

The participant described himself as a "MacIntosh in an IBM world". As noted, the initial LD diagnoses was greeted with relief, but he remembers being aware of his unique challenges well before the diagnosis was given. Awareness, acceptance and advocacy appear to closely linked for the participant. He suggests that he has always had a sound understanding of his personal strengths (i.e. strategic thinking) and weaknesses (i.e. organization, writing, spelling). Appropriate understanding strengths and challenges

is an element in Erikson's (Arnett, 2007) identity development, suggesting that identity formation involves reflecting on your abilities.

When asked to elaborate on his strengths, he responded by saying:

> "I consider my interpersonal skills a strength, I work well with people and easily gain their confidence. I can also see across many issues and find relationships and make strategic connections. I am a problem solver. I also should mention that I have an extremely good memory. I remember in context."

The participant suggests that he has gained the respect of others by demonstrating strengths in some areas, but does not worry about being an expert in all domains. He also claims that he has " a cluster of strengths that would not have developed without LD, for example, always looking for a different way to accomplish things'. He defines his LD as an exaggeration of common challenges.

Within the realm of self-awareness, understanding challenges appears to be as important as recognizing strengths. This seems particularly true for individuals with learning disabilities. The participant acknowledged several challenges that exist for him.

> "My challenges relate to my disabilities. For example, project management, sequencing and organization. Priority planning is still a difficulty."

The importance or identifying and maximizing personal strengths is a repeated theme in the literature (Levine, 2002, Sternberg, 1997, 2003). Individuals who possess awareness in their areas of strength and need, often apply that knowledge strategically to daily expectations. This is suggested to increase their opportunities to experience success and limit frustration. This notion appears applicable to the participant, for example noting his

difficulty with written output, he out sources when necessary, avoiding unneeded stress and frustrations. He also uses his strengths to overshadow his challenges.

Advocacy grew naturally from his self-awareness and acceptance. Even as an undergraduate, he assisted his university in the creation of new policy, modeled to benefit the learning disabled. His ability to advocate for himself may have ensured his acceptance into law school, based on the assumption that he convinced the committee to except him in light of his low LSAT scores. He combined his reported strong interpersonal and communication skills to enable him to not only gain access to institutions that would typically not consider him, but also to share his story and experience with others. He continues to do so today, offering his insights on a regular basis to educators and researchers.

Within the literature, connections have been made between the degree of understanding an individual possesses regarding their learning disability and their ability to successfully advocate for themselves (Pocock, 2002). I am making the assumption that a similar connection exists within the participant. He has illustrated that self-awareness, leads to the ability to advocate, which leads to opportunity that may have been denied, which eventually leads to success.

Self-awareness and acceptance appear to exist within the participant. For example, he describes "having no issues with having a disability", an almost total acceptance, but he describes that he still faces struggles and reminders on a daily basis. He used the example of signing the consent form, which enabled him to take part in this project. He remarked that every time he looks at his signature he is reminded of the struggles he still has with writing (graphomotor). It is also of interest to note that he

claims to sometimes feel like an imposter, even in the face of much success, as though people will assume he is not competent. Although, speculative on the part of the researcher, it appears that the participant still encounters self-doubt in regard to his competencies, even though he has already attained what society deems as success.

Overall, he suggests that that his LD "has created more good than bad" and he remembers a college advisor taking the time to explain his assessed cognitive profile. She went through his most recent psycho-educational assessment in a step by step manner, explaining how his abilities and challenges translate into everyday obstacles. The participant suggested that this was a turning point in his self-awareness, "I had to understand how the disability worked in order to deal with it". This would also have the potential of strengthening his notions of self-efficacy (acknowledging capabilities), in turn allowing him to advocate for himself in a more efficient manner. Knowing specifically what your challenges are, allows individuals with LD to seek supports that diminish the gap between ability and achievement.

Proactivity

A proactive approach to being accepted by others and proving his abilities and competencies is exemplified in his extra-curricular activities throughout school. He was involved on debating teams, student governments and university senate.

> "Being the student union president meant no one asked questions about your abilities. I found another way of proving I was competent. I think I debated so much in high school, to prove I was capable, and perhaps accommodations would be granted more easily. I would try to win the teacher's confidence and respect early. Today the same is true with my career, I try to prove my competency early on, knowing that they will eventually encounter my challenges."

Proactive qualities within individuals who have learning disabilities appears to propel them closer to achieving success (Goldberg, et al 2003). Individuals who can advocate and participate in the world around them, socially, economically and politically are considered proactive. They feel as though they have control over their destiny. The participant reported that being in a position of control and or decision making was extremely important to him. This again illustrates Strom's (1980) basic human need to be proactive.

When asked to what degree do you have control over your life, the participant responded with "I have a high degree of control, but sometimes wonder when it is going to end". Even with this suggestion of uncertainty and doubt, the participant also described himself as being both self-confident and assertive, especially in areas in which he considers having a strength (i.e. analytic or strategic thinking).

> "I feel fairly self-confident in areas in which I feel strong, an example of that would be analytical thinking. This confidence comes from advising (a political leader) at the age of twenty-seven, and he actually took my advice!!! For me, confidence is subject specific. Assertiveness is very similar- subject specific- I am assertive in areas of strength".

When asked to describe his decision making process, an important element in proactivity, and how that process evolved over time, he used the example of deciding whether or not to apply for a job that required extensive writing. Initially he considered his weaknesses (i.e. writing abilities) and the additional challenges he would encounter and then began to problem solve. He concluded that he could hire an editor when he needed one. He suggests that his decision making and problem solving abilities have

evolved with time and out of the necessity to deal with his disability, if that played a significant role in the situation.

Perseverance, Self-Determination and Goal-setting

In terms of perseverance and goal setting, the participant described feeling that he was meeting the goals he had envisioned for himself. He noted that he often re-evaluates his goals and his attempts to meet them. "I frequently re-evaluate whether or not I need to take more career risks....am I being too cautious?". His goals are not only specific, but also flexible. It would also appear that goal setting was a strategy he used relatively early in his life. When he was in private school and attempting to rejoin his classmates in high school, he described himself as a man with a mission and noted that he was looking toward the future and the skills he would need (see Academic History).

A wonderful example of perseverance is illustrated in his persistence to gain enrollment in law school, also noted previously. The participant shared the idea that the first case he ever won was the convincing the law school admissions board to consider him for enrollment even with significantly low LSAT scores. Combining his awareness of his disability and strengths (i.e. analytical and interpersonal skills) he 'educated' the board as to why LSAT scores should not exclude him from law school. As noted previously, he was granted admission.

Goldberg et al (2003) describe the trait of perseverance within an individual with a learning disorder as being productive when that individual understands when to pursue and when to stop. Individuals who successfully exhibit perseverance have flexible and alternative ways in which to achieve their goals, and they frequently re-evaluate their

approach. The participant exemplified both flexibility and the need to re-evaluate when pursuing his goals.

Presently, he describes himself as having high levels of self–determination. Elements of self-determination were also evident in the previously described desire and determination to gain what he needed academically from private school and return to his high school and then eventually university. It would appear that his determination was a significant element on his path to educational accomplishments. Sarver (2000), suggest exactly that, students who exhibit self-determination have an increased chance of academic success.

The road to self-determination is not always smooth. Using the example of being determined to one day enter the political realm, he notes that his determination can often be encapsulated in caution. He suggests that this cautious approach to run for political office, for example, may stem from a fear of failure. As noted previously, a sense of doubt, even in the face of past success, surfaces from within his narrative.

Self-efficacy and Resilience

Self- efficacy appears to be illustrated within his experience at private school. It was during that time that he first felt successful, which he reports lead to the belief of having the ability to succeed. Panagos and DuBois (1999) describe the relationship between level of self-efficacy and a learning disabled person's post-secondary and occupational choices. The more self-efficacy, the more varied the possibilities/choices. As the participant began experiencing success and participating in education decisions, it appears that his efficacy levels began to increase. Self-efficacy

attributes can be traced back to his description of feeling that he could effect change when asked to make decisions regarding his grade 6 placement (see Academic History). He developed a goal to attend law school because he believed it was within the realm of his capabilities.

Resilience is a common characteristic of successful people who have learning disorders (Dole, 2000). The reader is reminded of the resilient factors highlighted in the literature by Dole. The participant exhibits a number of the factors discussed, all of which appear to foster success. For example, he appears to have set realistic and achievable occupational goals; he describes his parents as being both supportive and understanding, which predictably fostered an increased self-esteem; his reported interpersonal skills allowed him to generate positive responses from caring others. These elements combine to form a resilience that typically works to shield individuals from the inherent risks associated with learning disabilities.

When asked how the participant deals with obstacles and or setbacks, his reply was very concrete. "I do not blame others, I immediately begin to fix the problem and I ask for help if needed". He also suggests that he effectively accommodates change or a problem that may arise by approaching it from a strategic or analytical perspective. He describes an example of change as being a new boss. He notes that this can typically cause anxiety (i.e. disclosure of/or reaction to LD) but acknowledges that things usually work out, without a need to become extremely distressed over the change.

Emotional Coping Strategies and Support networks

In order to illuminate the participant's emotional coping strategies, he was asked how he copes with both stress and frustration. In response, he described a stressful situation and how he would deal with it. If the stress was a result of a significant workload, he would break the task into more manageable pieces and "create artificial success points". Frustration often arises when his learning disability is preventing him from doing what he needs to at work (i.e. report editing). He claims that he has learned to let go to a certain degree and be satisfied with the fact that "spelling and grammar can be figured out later". He reports that he often verbalizes his frustrations to other in order to gain an additional perspective.

Strom (1980) describes rootedness as the human need to feel a sense of belonging or family. This could be viewed in broad terms as belonging to a community, or more specifically, belonging or being rooted to a family support network. When asked to describe his support networks, he immediately referenced his family and friends. He described feeling that his parents never doubted his abilities and were of constant support. He made a very powerful statement when he suggested that although they supported him entirely, he felt that they never truly understood what it was like to be learning disabled.

> "On a personal level, I still feel quite alone on the LD issue, even with unbelievable parent and family support. They still do not understand how different things are for me. They would never be able to understand what it was like not to be able to do something as simple as putting things in order (i.e. text pages). They understood the disability, but not how it felt".

He suggests that one of the reasons he has not relocated for his job is because he does not wish to be any great distance from the support of family and friends. He

described good friends who understand his disability and those who even edit some of his written work. He has relied on technological supports (i.e. Spellchecker) and office support staff, especially for challenges with time management. He finds external support when he deems it necessary (i.e. help with creating and organizing large documents).

Analytical, Creative and Practical

To briefly revisit the theory of Sternberg (2000), who suggests that successful individuals demonstrate three common attributes:

- Analytical: The ability to analyze and evaluate one's own ideas and those of others.
- Creative: The ability to generate one or more major ideas that are novel and of high quality.
- Practical: The ability to convince people of the value of ideas and to render the ideas, practical.

Sternberg also suggests that such attributes are often clustered in patterns, meaning that individuals can have varying degrees and combinations of attributes. Success and/or successful intelligence is exemplified when a balance of attributes is reached and maintain. Intellect can be expressed in a variety of ways.

Based on the participant's disclosures, all three attributes can be identified and appear to exist. As noted throughout the findings, the participant suggests that one of his greatest strengths is his analytical abilities. Others will bring their issues to him for assistance with resolutions. "I am often the problem solver, they give me a big issue and I find the solution". He also reports that he often can easily make "strategic connections" across diverse issues. From his responses, you could also surmise that he possesses a

learned creativity. He learned how to look externally for supports (i.e. office staff) and how to project competencies in a unique manner (i.e. excelling in debate). A pragmatic or practical element also appears evident in his willingness to problem solve in a step by step fashion.

Section IV: Conclusion

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that may have fostered successful life outcomes. The information gathered and presented within this study reflects the experiences of a single individual. The previously identified attributes (self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal-setting, use of effective support systems, emotional coping strategies, self-determination, self-efficacy, resiliency, and a balance of creative, analytical and pragmatic intelligence) were each, too varying degrees, depicted throughout the participant's life stories and perspectives, as illustrated in the case analysis and interpretations section. Elements of all the referenced attributes were exemplified in the responses the participant shared. His responses reveal not only the presence of such attributes/factors, but to some extent their evolution over time (i.e. sense of self-awareness).

His unique cluster and utilization of success attributes appears to be highly individualized, as suggested in the reviewed literature, patterns of factors typically differ from person to person. What he described as success and his significant turning points on his path to achieve it, is as well subjective. For example, he references being given choices as significant markers on his journey to both self-awareness and self-efficacy.

From the information and the examples provided by the participant, commonalities with the theories and findings in the literature were evident. Looking

specifically at the Frostig team's research and their resulting conceptualization and categorization of attributes that fosters success, the participant's stories were compared and categorized. This resulted in a confirmation of similar detectable attributes existing between the Frostig literature and the life experience of the participant. Frostig's research suggests that successful people with learning disabilities: are aware of their challenges and understand how they affect their lives; believe they have a degree of control over their lives; pursue their chosen path despite difficulties; set flexible and attainable goals; utilize support networks; and understand what triggers stress. All of these characteristics were encapsulated in the stories the participant revealed. The participant exemplified all of the attributes highlighted by the Frostig Center, suggesting that these attributes played an important role in his ability to achieve success.

The theoretical frameworks of Erikson, Strom, Levine and Sternberg were discussed in the literature and illustrated throughout the interpretations. Erikson's notion of identity formation ties closely with the formation of self-concept and self-awareness in the participant. A sound understanding of his disability and unique strengths profile enabled the participant to not only develop self-efficacy, but also advocacy skills. The participant displayed a striving for Strom's basic human needs. He required support from and relied on his family (rootedness); he described having a great degree of control over his life (proactive); and he wanted to be viewed by others as competent (identity). The participant encountered many of the academic obstacles described by Levine (i.e. increased difficulty in higher grades) and identified and utilized his strengths to help in an attempt to overcome such obstacles, as suggested in Sternberg's work.

Elements of the participant's narratives reflect and coincide with the literature that acted as the foundation for this study. His insights and experiences can be viewed as additional validation to the noted literature and existing research on success attributes. His narrative provides the literature with not only the perspectives of an adult with learning disabilities, but also a story of success in a realm that too frequently focuses on limitation.

Reoccurring Themes in Narrative

Within the data collected from specific questioning, reoccurring and sometimes unexpected themes emerged from the participant's narrative. The participant placed significant emphasis on:

- Importance of self-awareness and self-concept.

The effects of placement in a "special" class, early in the participant's educational experience, appears to have had lasting impact on the participant. As discussed in the findings, he remembers the negative result it had on his self-image (identity formation), knowing he was in a class with peers who were cognitively very different from himself. This would appear to be a wonderful illustration of the importance of inclusion.

Understanding the disability and identifying strengths and challenges appears to have been of significant importance to the participant. Focusing on strengths (i.e.

analytical problem solving) and seeking support in his areas of weakness (i.e. time/project management) seems to have benefited him greatly in his professional life. His need to prove himself, appear competent and accomplish what others assumed he could not do, became a driving force on his journey toward success.

- The ability to deal with reoccurring LD related frustrations.

As with any disability, frustration is a common reality. The participant described classic LD challenges (i.e. organization, writing attempts) and the strategies (i.e. hire and editor) that evolved to confront them. Such strategies and awareness appears to have assisted in elevating some of the frustrations he admits to facing on a daily basis. He reports that although some tasks may be frustrating because of his disability, he has still gained "more good than bad" because of it. Such a positive outlook/perception can only help to foster not only success, but also optimism. Researchers have suggested that individuals that change their perception of their disability, that learning disabilities do not preclude the striving for success, encounter less frustration and more realistic expectations (Gerber & Reiff, 1996).

- Inability for others to completely understand

The participant's use of support networks has been exemplified in the case analysis. He describes the unrelenting support given to him by his family and the positive impact that support had on his ability to succeed. However, and as noted, he suggests that others can not truly understand what it is like to have such a disability,

that true empathy is not possible. It is with that perception that he notes feeling most "alone" with his challenges.

- A degree of self-doubt

Although the participant described himself as successful, he provides snapshots of self-doubt throughout his narrative. It is speculative on the part of the researcher to suggest that such doubts may extent from a lifetime of facing challenges related to the participant's disabilities. The participant may even avoid situations in which he has doubts regarding his competencies/abilities. The participant described it as a fear of failure.

- Opportunity to experience success

The participant shared stories that highlighted the importance of being given the opportunity to experience success (i.e. academic success at a private school). This is a fundamental need in most individuals, a need not always satisfied in the academic realms of the learning disabled.

- Decision making, goal setting , determination

The participant described several turning points in his educational experience, that he felt were significant and marked how he perceived himself and how he assumed others perceived him. For example, he was given the choice to reenter regular academic classes in late elementary, and whether or not to attend private school.

These choices appear to have activated goal-setting behaviors and fueled his determination.

Implications

The implications for this study are varied. The study highlights the importance of continued recognition and fostering of factors that encourage success. For service providers, educators and family members of the learning disabled, the study also illustrates that success attributes exist within a unique balance or pattern within individuals.

Service Providers

Assisting such individuals to become aware of their strengths, weaknesses and existing success attributes is applicable within the domain of counseling services. Utilizing or maximizing strengths appears to promote self-efficacy, self-awareness, determination, realistic goal setting and resilience. However, even with the existence of such success factors, it appears that self-doubt can still remain and should be acknowledged, especially when working with adults.

Educators

The earlier success/strength profiles can be determined, the more effort can be placed on the development of needed skills and attributes. Teachers must continue to recognize the heterogeneous nature of LD and the potential for successful outcomes. The study highlights the need for continued sensitivities toward remediation attempts and

placement (i.e. exclusion), as such can have lasting effects on self-image. The importance of providing opportunities to experience success and inclusion in decision-making processes, within not only the classroom but also the work place has also been illustrated as significant.

Family

Providing the foundation from which a learning disabled person's support network can build appears to remain of upmost importance. Support and understanding from family can result in individuals with LD reaching their potential and ultimately their own success. However, as the participant described, true understanding of a learning disability may not be possible in the nondisabled population, but families, educators and service providers must continue to enrich their own perspectives on not only the disability, but also the individuals that are disabled.

Limitations

This study was limited to the self-reported insights of one participant. Within the realm of qualitative research, there is always a hesitancy to generalize an entire population based on the experience of just one individual. A larger participant pool may have garnered different findings.

Future Research

It is hoped the research of tomorrow will continue to:

- Support the shift from a primary focus on academic remediation to a continued focus on understanding the factors that are predictive of success.
- Place continued emphasis on the aging learning disabled population. LD research to date has been understandably focused on young children and adolescents.
- Explore how effectively both parents and educators can assist in the development of success attributes in the learning disabled population. I think the ultimate question is: can we teach success?
- It is hoped that future research will reflect and continue to acknowledge the significance of examining the experiences of the individual. Lived experiences of the individual can potentially have more of an impact than data collected from a group. It can be insightful, inspiring, empathy inducing and thought provoking.

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Websites:

- www.ldac.ca (Learning Disabilities Association Of Canada)
- www.ldans (Learning Disabilities Association Of Nova Scotia)
- www.ldnatl.org (Learning Disabilities Association Of America)

APPENDIX A-1

1. Please indicate your age _____

2. Please indicate your gender _____

3. Please indicate your educational background beginning with elementary school, junior high, secondary and all post - secondary experiences you have had

4. Please tell me your current occupation _____

5. Please tell me about the nature of your learning disability...

- When did you first become aware of it?
- How was it documented?
- Do you recall your reaction to the diagnosis?
- Do you recall the reaction of your parents/family to the diagnosis?
- Do you recall the plans that were made for dealing with your learning disability?
- How were these plans followed up?
- What types of experiences did you encounter in the various stages of your educational development after the diagnosis?

6. Please share with me a little of the story of your life? Here I'm interested in knowing of your early development, your overall health, others in your family who might have had a learning disability ... Let's start with your birth...

Based on your memory were you a full term baby and were there any complications that you know of?

During the first three years of life, do you recall or have others told you about any serious illnesses or injuries that might have happened? For example, any falls, broken bones, head injuries, high fevers, hospitalizations ...

During the next three years of life, do you recall or have others told you about any serious illnesses or injuries that might have happened? Do you recall or have others told you about your talking, walking, readiness for school ...

During your first five years of school, did you encounter difficulties, have to repeat a grade, receive special help, have any serious illnesses or injuries...how did you fit into school, did you have opportunities to fit into sports or other activities ...

During your next seven years of school, did you encounter difficulties, have to repeat a grade, receive special help, have any serious illnesses or injuries .... how did you fit into school, did you have opportunities to participated in sports or other activities .... what type of graduation did you achieve ....

After school, what are some of the significant events you encountered about further education, work, friends, partners ...

Please share with me your perceptions of success in the area of career ... education ... social relationships ... are there other areas you believe exemplify success for you ... how do you define success ...

APPENDIX A - 2

1. Please share with me your thoughts on your strengths.

2. What are your thoughts on any areas you might want to improve?

3. What are your thoughts on any special talents or abilities you might have?

4. What are your thoughts on your acceptance of your disability and how has this evolved?

5. What are your thoughts on your level of self-awareness generally? How has this evolved?

6. Please think about a problem you have encountered in your life and share with me how you may have dealt with that challenging situation.

7. Please think about your levels of self-confidence and assertiveness. Please share with me how you have come to have those levels. Follow up question ... To what degree do you feel you have control over your life.

8. Think about a decision you have made recently that has some significance to you. How did you go about making that decision? Has this process of decision making evolved over time and what might have been some of the influences on that.

9. How do you deal with obstacles and/or setbacks?

10. Please share with me how you deal with a problem or a life situation that is relatively challenging and appears not to have a solution.

11. How do deal with changes in life and your plans as they arise?

12. Tell me about some of the supports you have had early in life and in the past five years...these can be of a personal nature and/or some type of logistical or technical support. When you face a challenging situation, do you have significant others with whom you can "reach out to".

13. Do you encounter or have you encountered high levels of stress in your life? Tell me how you define stress and what counts as stress for you. How do you deal with this?

14. Do you encounter or have you encountered high levels of frustration in your life? Tell me how you define a frustrating situation and what counts as frustrating for you. How do you deal with this?

15. Relative to self-determination, how would you characterize yourself?

16. How would you describe yourself relative to the accomplishment of your goals?

17. Do you have any questions of me or is there anything you might want to add that I may not have asked you?

APPENDIX A-3
Letter of Consent

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Educational Psychology program at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am conducting a study of persons with learning disabilities who are experiencing success in adult life to determine their perceptions of factors that led to their success.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of adults with learning disabilities relative to their insights into their coping strategies that enabled them to address their learning disability and achieve success. I am inviting you to participate in the study. Your responses will provide valuable information abut the unique challenges faced by persons with learning disabilities as well as critical insight into how individuals learn how to cope with their learning disability and move forward with success in adult life.

Participants will be asked to engage in three interviews. The first interview will serve to screen potential participants for inclusion in the study and will gather general information on their perception of their learning disability, school history and current life history. It can be conducted on the phone and should take 30 - 45 minutes. Interview two for those selected following interview one will be more in depth, dealing with more details on your school, life history and current coping strategies. Included will be information on your current work/activity situation as well as a variety of information on your school experiences, work/activity experience and coping strategies, interests and problem solving. This should be completed in person/or by phone and will take from 2 to 3 hours. The final interview will be an opportunity to share a summary of your information with you to clarify any outstanding issues and perception check with you the accuracy of the information. It should take about 1 - 2 hours. Interview three will be conducted by phone or in a meeting room at Mount Saint Vincent University or in a private room at a local library or some other publically available but professional and private site.

To ensure your privacy all identifying information will be removed. As well, all the data will be stored and secured at the researchers home in secure locked files with only the researcher or her thesis supervisors having access to the data. Upon completion of the research an executive summary of the results will be developed and will be available to you. You may request a copy of this summary should you wish at the last meeting and a copy will be mailed to you upon its completion. As well, you should be aware that the results of the study will be published in a thesis and may be published in some follow up articles. No identifying information about you or your individual situation will be contained in the summary or in any publication that may follow the study. All data will

I _____ have been asked to participate in the follow up itnerviews and consent to participate in these as conducted by Angela Devoe (Graduate Student in School Psychology, Mount Saint Vincent University). I realize that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw or discontinue the interview at any time.

Signature ----------

Date _____