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Courage to Speak, Fortitude to Listen: A Model for the Study of First-Person LD Narratives

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COURAGE TO SPEAK, FORTITUDE TO LISTEN: A MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF
FIRST-PERSON LD NARRATIVES

by

CHARLES C. HAITZ

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract
COURAGE TO SPEAK, FORTITUDE TO LISTEN: A MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF FIRST-PERSON LD NARRATIVES
by
Charles C. Haitz

Advisor: David Connor, PhD

Learning disabled (LD) is both a politically and socially contentious term. In the eyes of the public, the label is synonymous with special education (SE). SE’s vision of LD remains the dominant discourse of deficit-based understanding of human differences. This has resulted in its adherence to segregated services for many students that often result in additional behavior problems exacerbating their struggles to learn in school. A lack of student representation in school affairs is exemplified in the absence of LD pupils’ voices in the decision-making that frames how they are viewed by others. This absence of voice also influences how they ultimately regard themselves. Professional research on LD in traditional journals has also neglected the lived experiences of LD students. To counter the absence, this study examines first-person LD narratives through a framework based upon an interpretation of disability studies influenced heavily by the work of Thomas Skrtic and is designed to enable new knowledge to emerge that sheds light on how learning disabilities are experienced by individuals. Students with and without LD, parents, teachers, and policy makers can benefit from this information that presents alternative conceptions to LD monopolized within traditional special education research.
Acknowledgements

As a teacher, I constantly utilize metaphors with my students in order for them to develop a personalized understanding of the relationship between concepts. Ironically, when it was suggested a positive metaphor for learning disabled students be developed, the task initially was daunting because the learning disabled label symbolizes failure. So, after much reflection regarding the interaction between schools and LD students, the following metaphor has been developed: LD students are an unrecognized natural resource. As opposed to stressing the failings of schools, this metaphor celebrates the innate potential within students and recognizes that labels are often arbitrary descriptors placed upon natural human variations.

Regardless of cause, I believe that it is the variety of human thought and experience that allows society to evolve and respond to challenges with intellect and creativity. Although there is much debate regarding the multiple dimensions of the term LD—ranging from definition to ownership—a positive metaphor for LD students is needed because “Metaphors are sometimes held to be the essential core of human thought and creativity. Metaphoric reasoning is essential to classification and counting” (Stone, 2002, p. 138). Unfortunately, this classification has led to the real and also symbolic segregation of LD students; the development of a new metaphor is a way of combating that exclusion.

In order for the metaphor of LD students as a positive natural resource to gain a foothold on a social consciousness level, a minimum of two events must occur: LD students must relay their stories and policy makers (ranging from educators to the various agents that are intertwined with school affairs) have to demonstrate the fortitude to listen and act upon these narratives; fortitude is the elusive element that allows individuals to transcend apathy, perceived powerlessness, and fear of change or retribution.

This study would not have come to fruition without the ongoing support of a committee that regularly exceeded its expected role; I am grateful for the dedication and humanity of my committee members. My acting editor, Mr. Brian Patrick Merges, also needs to be recognized; his feedback kept this project on track. Also, my wife, Alina—my greatest collaborator—should be thanked for the years which were expended on this endeavor. Collectively, all of the individuals involved with this study acted with a selfless fortitude that contributed to the eventual completion of this academic and social quest.
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Prelude: My Personal Connection

As a child, I had severe speech impediments. My immediate family states that I received speech therapy because my mother was the only one who understood my speech; she has been described as the family interpreter. As for my overall demeanor, my brother fondly paints me as a cross between Tarzan and Bam-Bam, *The Flintstones* character. Since I grew quickly and was generally good-natured, the cartoon character of Baby Huey could be included in that mix.

In many ways, my mother was my first teacher. I recall countless hours of pronouncing the names of images on flashcards with her. In hindsight, I recognize how laborious the procedure must have been for her. Although later in my childhood, I remember her instructional approach to reading (“If you want to go outside, you’re going to read.”) may have felt harsh at the time, it probably was effective because I am currently a reading specialist. Through the eyes of a child, I may have been viewed my mother as a task master, but, in hindsight as an adult, her actions were demonstrations of faith in me.

Although my family lived on a budget of closely met financial obligations, my parents spent dearly needed funds to have me “tested” and provided with speech therapy before even stepping into school. Although second jobs, occasional side jobs, and “repair-over-buy” were a way of life in our house, money was found for a private speech therapist. To state it bluntly, I hated the speech therapist; she was the originator of the endless hours of “name this flashcard,” an at-least-once-daily ritual conducted at home that was modeled after the twice-weekly speech therapy sessions. Time has obviously softened my stance towards this effective professional. The writing of this dissertation serves as homage to her and others who continue to work with children in finding their literal, as well as figurative, voices.
Despite it appearing tangential, the one joyful detail I remember about private speech therapy is playing with superhero action figures (or, dolls, depending on your criteria) while in the waiting room. This anecdote is mentioned because I want to address the notion that these fictional characters are appealing simply because they are powerful. Instead of viewing these characters as empty, one-dimensional creations who establish unreasonable expectations akin to Barbie dolls, they are appealing because they live by a moral code. To not belabor the point, the comic superheroes of today increasingly assume mythical stature in the same manner as Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, not because of assumed power but for the ideals they represent. From my perspective, Superman’s “S” functions in the same manner as Arthur’s coat of arms. Whether the setting is Camelot or Metropolis, these tales stress an individual’s responsibility to vigilantly defend his fellow man from the constant threat that is on the horizon.

My parents view the testing they had paid for as the tangible basis for providing me with services. In the words of my mother, the testing showed “you had the receptive vocabulary of a twelve year old at the age of three…we knew you weren’t stupid.” The bluntness of the concluding part of that statement challenges any thoughts that the initial part was hyperbole due to maternal bias. Although testing may be the bane of my existence as a teacher, it may ironically have helped to save me from an academic future of lowered expectations.

Although my education at home and at private speech therapy can be described as productive work, my early experiences in traditional school are better described as ineffective and inappropriate. My mother’s decision to send me to public kindergarten because she was afraid to send me to the Catholic kindergarten foretold my experiences in the early grades (first through fourth) of Catholic elementary school. The fact that I still cringe when someone calls
me “Charles” instead of “Charlie” demonstrates the deep association of “Charles” with the
impending criticism which seemed to constantly flow from the sisters in the early grades.

At worst, the sisters disliked me. At best, the sisters did not know what to do with me.
As a trained educator reflecting upon the past, the sisters’ assessment and teaching practices
were antiquated even for that time period. Obedience and the appearance of order (ranging from
dress to hand writing) were valued over learning. Their interpretation of learning resembled
factory production—rows of desks may have well been assembly lines. For all of the reasons
just mentioned and the sisters’ assessment of reading by listening to students’ reading aloud, I
was not only assigned to the lowest possible reading group, but I was also sent for outside
services provided by the public school for speech and reading. Without condoning the
legitimacy of ability-based reading groups, judging reading by listening to a student with speech
impediments read aloud was neglectful and lazy.

Obviously, visceral reactions to my past childhood educational environments still remain.
Fortunately, my professional knowledge and experiences enable me to examine those emotions
in a thoughtful manner that ultimately provides me with insight beyond simple empathy
regarding the plight of my students. Due to past parental involvement and their accessing of
resources—especially in my early elementary years—I have been able to successfully navigate
the education system and find myself uniquely positioned to act upon that insight. This mission,
or sense of purpose, is driven by aspiration to my mother’s sense of compassion and my father’s
doggedness.

With an acknowledgment of my many faults, foibles, and eccentricities, compassion and
doggedness were definitely fostered in response to experiences in the early grades of Catholic
school and the outside reading services provided by the public schools. Since Catholic schools
did not provide additional services of speech and reading, I was sent to receive these services outside of school. A few times a week, students receiving services would take a small bus to the I.U. (intermediate unit). It is fitting that the name for the building was cold and clinical. Since I received speech services from the ages of three to twelve, I saw many such buildings through the course of my early life. To this day, independent of whether I went to the particular location, I can recognize old buildings that used to be I.U.s due to their similar architecture.

A reaction of incredulity dominates my recall of the I.U.s. Even though I begrudgingly accepted speech therapy, the reading services were resented. The frustration of correctly answering nearly all of the written reading comprehension questions combined with an awareness that missed classwork would need to be completed made me regard the reading services as both useless and punitive. Additionally, the reading classes were dominated by students with behavior issues. I remember requesting out of the I.U. reading classes upon seeing a student jump on the teacher’s desk and then proceeding to leap from desk to desk. Although I myself was described as “hyperkinetic” by our pediatrician from birth till eight or nine, I never was a behavior problem; my one detention in grade school was caused by not having my 98 test grade signed by my parents. My internal censure of “mom and dad would kill me” ruled the day.

In addition to the reading classroom being unruly, the bus rides to the I.U. were marked by disorder. Students frequently picked on one another; since I was large for my age and fairly quiet, the rides were mostly uneventful for me. However, some of the students were picked on mercilessly. There was one child, Nick, who was teased every day; he wore thick glasses and his head was misshapen. When the teasing turned to violence one day, I separated Nick from his attackers and told them to leave him alone. Later in the day, my mother got a call from Nick’s mother telling her what I had done; apparently, I gained a silent side-kick for the rest of that year.
On many occasions, I wonder what happened to Nick. By today’s criteria, he most likely would be deemed autistic.

If *The Fugitive*’s motto was, “I didn’t kill my wife,” my plea was “I can read!” In the same reaction to the I.U.’s reading service, I remember feeling misplaced in the fourth level reading group at Catholic school. While in fourth grade, after pleading with my mother, the sisters gradually increased my reading group. By the end of that year, I was in the first level group; I answered every reading comprehension question correctly that year.

As for myself being teased in school, I can only remember one particular individual, Peter, who tormented me on a daily basis. The last instance he “made fun of me” I arrived home crying. After informing my parents of the situation, my father, who stood 6’2”, weighed approximately three hundred pounds, and worked on the waterfront, replied, “Wait till after school and get him.” Before my father finished his statement, my mother looked me in the eye and uncharacteristically declared, “You don’t wait till after school. He makes fun of you, you hit him. *If he still makes fun of you, hit him harder!*” Besides being the potential title of my imagined memoir, her statement was interpreted as the child’s version of diplomatic immunity. When Peter berated me the next day, I threw him to the ground, sat cross-legged on his chest, and choked him. I can still envision his face turning red and then blue. Even though it was morally wrong, the memory still elicits a faint feeling of satisfaction. Despite being in the fourth grade, four eighth graders were required to remove me. I was sent in tears to the mother superior. On threatening to call my parents, she was rendered speechless upon hearing, “My mother told me to do it!” Surprisingly, Peter and I briefly became friends. Not surprisingly, I stopped being his friend when he started throwing stones at a neighborhood girl who had Down Syndrome.
By the time I had graduated elementary school, I had the second highest G.P.A. in my graduating class. Additionally, I won three multi-state science fairs (first place in my division every year and a second place overall followed by a first place overall the following year). Despite years of academic success throughout my life since elementary school, I still carry the feeling of having to prove myself. Although there is a tragic element to that situation, my response has been to harness it and make it a nourishing force for achieving goals.

My narrative can serve multiple purposes: cautionary tale of how schools sometimes fail students, disclosure towards my intended research, and a possible story of hope for struggling students. Those reasons are just three of the possibilities for relaying my story. I believe there is an array of similar narratives that can provide valuable knowledge which can be utilized for multiple purposes. There are perspectives—that may share common themes—that have been either repressed or ignored by the education system: those of the learning disabled (LD).

The time has arrived for me to contribute to the established—but, nascent—research focusing on first person learning disability narratives. In their book, Listening to the Experts: Students with Disabilities Speak Out, Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2006) note, “This is not a book about special education. It is not an admonition to comply with special education law, nor is it an impassioned plea for social justice. This is a book about possibilities. This is a testament to the strength of the human spirit” (p. xvii). There are a multitude of possibilities where my research may lead. Although I do believe in the power of the human spirit, knowledge can be gained from stories whose outcomes range from the tragic to the mundane to the inspirational. In the narrative of our own lives, we often gain insight when we experience, or are exposed to, true despair and struggle. In a similar vein, by listening to the stories of others we can learn that
apparently routine tasks and events may hold deep—even if at times only symbolic—meaning to individuals.

**Contesting the Flawed, Dominant Professional Understanding of Learning Disabled (LD)**

I have encountered multiple articles throughout my professional career that are ostensibly about students. One such recent article from *Educational Leadership*, “The Right Fit for Henry: How can schools help students who are twice-exceptional?”, is an example of such a work (Gould, Staff & Theiss, 2012). Sadly, the piece did not offer one direct quote from the student; that absence symbolizes both the work’s main intention (fix the problem) and that Henry is merely an afterthought. Although it may be a jaded assessment, this publication can give the impression our educational leaders either do not care about students or are simply ignorant in the truest sense of the word. Since this journal previously published a profile piece, “The Faces of Autism” (Baker, Murray, Murray-Slutsky & Paris, 2010), and this work, too, did not include a single primary quotation, these students seem to be consistently excluded. Any meaningful portraits of the students are distorted by schools’ initially focusing on—and thus placing ultimate value upon—diagnosis over the knowledge which can be gained by sincerely examining the narratives of those individuals.

My past training for administrative certification reflects the priorities of the K-12 educational system. Upon entering the administrative program, the common observation of current and past administrators was: the only two classes that are needed are School Finance and School Law. Those two classes held importance because they dealt with school budgeting and compliance with educational law. Unfortunately, the issue of instruction was a far secondary
concern and there was no interest in student representation in any decision-making. The structure of the program created “managers” as opposed to “educational leaders.”

It is within this nexus of finance and law that the recognition of learning disabled (LD) occurs. For the majority of administrators and teachers, LD is whatever the law defines it to be. Whenever issues regarding LD emerge, the modus operandi of most K-12 educators is to review the law books to determine which of a variety of laws (i.e., IDEA, Section 504, and ADA) will dictate the response. Since public education is an entity which is influenced by the local, state, and federal governments, the particular assessment used to determine the disability may vary but disability is consistently interpreted as a deficit within the individual.

The government dominates the defining of the term, learning disabled (LD). As is the case with other initiatives and measures involving the government, the interconnected and at times competing and contradictory layers of governance ranging from the federal, to the state, to the local levels obfuscates and compounds the issues of intentionality and cooptation that are interwoven into a greater theme of unintended consequences. It can be posited that the concept of learning disabled is a continuation of the chain of unintended consequences instigated by Progressives that includes I.Q. testing and tracking (Ravitch, 2001, p. 226).

It can be overwhelming for parents (and, even some professionals) to have a nuanced understanding of learning disabled (LD) as defined by the government. If only the federal level is focused upon, the IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) is the guiding document. Although schools may present this document as a list of bullet points on a page for easy consumption, the cottage industry of LD advocates based in the fields of law and education reveals the degree of subjectivity and interpretation surrounding it. The document can
easily be construed as a hundred-and-sixty-two-page puzzle that is reminiscent of personally performing tax returns.

The IDEIA is unto itself a source of potential study. In regards to discussing the term, learning disabled, excerpts from Section 602 (Definitions) and Section 614 (Evaluations, eligibility determinations, individualized education programs, and educational placements) are the most pertinent. The following information is from Section 602:

(3) CHILD WITH A DISABILITY.—
(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘child with a disability’ means a child—
(i) with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as ‘emotional disturbance’), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and
(ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

In the span of that short selection at least two broad points are seen: many of the named disabilities are concomitant, and special education’s existence is inherently intertwined, with the existence of disability. In regards to specific learning disabilities, this description is relayed:

(30) SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY.—
(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘specific learning disability’ means a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.
(B) DISORDERS INCLUDED.—Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
(C) DISORDERS NOT INCLUDED.—Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.
Two words, “imperfect ability”, dominate the description of specific learning disability. So, what constitutes perfect ability? Counterintuitively, then, it can be inferred that perfect must be equated with normal and, by extension, imperfect ability is abnormal. This idea of disability as being abnormal will be revisited shortly.

The government determines imperfect ability through the administration of evaluations. This procedure is detailed in Section 614:

(B) not use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability or determining an appropriate educational program for the child; and
(C) use technically sound instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors.

The second point shows the broad latitude that states and localities have in deciding which particular assessments are utilized. From my personal experience, on many occasions multiple measures have not been used for student assessment. Given the fact that entire districts and general education students’ fates are determined by one or more state exam(s), it should not be surprising that special education is administered in a similar manner. Multiple assessments cost money and if the federal government does not monitor closely, districts justify circumventing procedure as a rational reaction to unfunded mandates.

Harkening back to the parent, or better yet an adolescent or young adult, trying to make sense of a learning disability, imagine the frustration while trying to recognize, yet alone accept or reject, the various terms under the umbrella term of learning disability. According to IDEIA, autism is considered a separate entity from learning disability but New York State associates Asperger’s Syndrome with LD (New York State Education Department, 2013). Without
understanding professional terminology, how would an individual realize that the term “minimal brain dysfunction,” listed in IDEIA was previously neurologist code for ADD/ADHD?

It should be noted that for the sake of this study, autism (including the highly related subject of Asperger’s) will be excluded. In addition to my numerous years as a recognized teacher, my formative years as an educator in the function of a one-on-one for autistic children led me to respect the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the condition. The severe impact of the state upon families overshadows (and by comparison makes to appear secondary) the seemingly primarily academic impact of LDs. Conversely, AD(H)D will be considered as a LD in the context of this study. Besides its previously mentioned status as an LD due to its older designation of minimal brain dysfunction that was recognized as an LD by IDEIA, AD(H)D can be construed as an information processing disorder because the sometimes accompanying inattentiveness of the condition may hinder processing speed. A simple internet search query yields a plethora of sources which ponders whether the relationship between ADD and information processing is causation or correlation/comorbidity.

Instead of pondering LD strictly in terms of spectrums (political or mental functioning), this study it built upon the belief that it is advantageous to contemplate LD in regards to a societal landscape of which school (along with employment to a certain degree) is of upmost import. It is on this stage that an individual attempts to make meaning of LD. Knowledge can be gained by seeing how individuals respond to challenges during their quest for identity. Hopefully, these discoveries can be utilized for positive change that can eventually alter the trajectory of the metanarrative of LD—a long-term goal of this study.

Currently, dramatically more money is spent per pupil on the education of a SE student as opposed to a general education (GE) student (as of 2011-2012 in the NYC public schools, this
amount was $45,786 to $15,039, schools.nyc.gov). Counterintuitively, despite these additional funds, improvement on traditional quantitative assessments is not seen and classification almost inevitably becomes a permanent assignment. From my perspective, lack of perspective due to educators being so closely entwined in special education combined with the institution’s enmeshment in the greater system maintains the status quo and defines disability through legal precedents.

In a time in which most academic departments are being downsized—especially in the areas of art and music, which serve as a refuge for many LD students—special education departments continue to grow. SE departments have become so large that most general education teachers (and, some special education teachers) can’t differentiate among services provided by the department and those which are the responsibility of outside agencies/contractors. If teachers are unaware of who is providing the variety of services, it should be no surprise they do not understand the nature of and the relation among the various categories of disability that are deemed to warrant a service.

Besides personal and moral grounds, the historical failure of a system supposedly compliant with I.D.E.I.A. justifies the exploration of different conceptions and possible alternatives to the dominant view of LD presently offered by school systems. An intellectual approach which utilizes first person disability narratives as its primary source of data has the potential to provide new knowledge. These insights may make visible the spectrum of experiences of those labeled LD. What is the landscape between the traditional deficit perspective and the newly emerging advantage orientation which is demonstrative of a radical political sensibility?
Beyond the mythical state department of education, there are other groups (and, ironically, apparently including myself) that are attempting to control the definition of learning disabled; some factions are even trying to eliminate the relevance of the term. The Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) seems to recognize the missteps, contradictions, and overall poor action implementations taking place in public schools in regards to LD. Although it may list advocacy as one of its primary objectives (www.cldinternational.org), the CLD believes that “the defining characteristic of LD is difficulty with cognitive processes used to acquire and use information” (CLD, 2001, p. 3). Although its view of LD is more forgiving than what is found in the public schools, it remains a deficit-based perspective. Despite striving for improved scholarship and research, the title of one of its journals, Intervention in School & Clinic (ISC), shows that fixing the broken LD individual is of utmost importance. One promising sign of a noticeable philosophical shift is that CLD calls for “use of person-first language when referring to persons and learning disabilities, language that characterizes the context in which learning disabilities occur instead of the performance of the individual (i.e., ‘ineffective intervention’ for ‘nonresponder’) and translation of language from related sciences to language preferred by the field of education (e.g., ‘intervention’ for ‘treatment’), whenever appropriate” (CLD, p. 1). The quotation clearly demonstrates change—albeit at a glacial pace.

The promise hinted at by the CLD is actualized radically by emerging fields like Disability Studies in Education (DSE); this discipline comprises the theoretical lens of this study and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. From this orientation, disability is approached differently. Instead of focusing on defining disability and perpetuating the negative connotation of the term, the field’s dialogue highlights the issue of ability, or more precisely, ableism. Ableism can be described “as the belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than to
have one and that it is better to do things in the way that nondisabled people do. Although schools often advocate multiculturalism and acceptance of differences, disability and ableism are overlooked” (Storey, 2007, p. 56). From the DSE perspective, disability is a construct which is the result of cultural bias and context.

Even though the concept of ableism is an enlightened contrast to disability in the greater conversation regarding LD, the notion of neurodiversity contextualizes and somewhat disempowers all of those terms. Neurodiversity is both “a concept and a civil rights movement” (Griffin and Pollack, 2009, p. 25). Although the term has been credited to Judy Singer and Harvey Blume in relation to the autistic community (Armstrong, 2010), the term has been embraced by a significant number of groups including those with LDs. Neurodiversity promotes the understanding that neurodiverse individuals are not damaged but simply different and they possess strengths and preferences that help them lead productive lives (Boutot, Tincani & Travers, 2009).

Neurodiversity replaces the disability/medical paradigm with that of difference and suggests that society should embrace “the positive attitudes and beliefs that most people hold about biodiversity and cultural diversity and apply them to differences among human brains” (Armstrong, 2012, p.12). Although that proposition is not radical, great activism has been occurring to promote that mindset; the common description of neurodiversity as a movement is reflective of the ever-increasing politicking of the crusade. As seen in previous civil rights movements, there is a degree of tension over who ultimately interprets and vocalizes beliefs and desires of a representative organization. This struggle for control is reminiscent of the self-evident proverb, “Nothing about us without us.” Although the origin of the declaration is debatable, it is a founding principle of both DSE and DRM (Disability Rights Movement). The
principle demands, “political-economic and cultural systems to incorporate people with disabilities into the decision-making process and to recognize that the experiential knowledge of these people is pivotal in making decisions that affect their lives” (Charlton, 1998, p. 17).

Paradoxically, the cry, “Nothing about us without us”, has been described as militant, but that “militancy” echoes the historical sentiment of “No taxation without representation” which eventually lead to democracy. The experience of constructing this study and my awareness of DSE’s desire to acknowledge LD students’ voices allows me to confidently state that the discipline is inclusive and what may be viewed as struggle within certain organizations can be construed as a mix of cooperation and negotiation within DSE.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Problem: Three Converging Oppressive Phenomena

Although this study was constructed in the terminology and orientation of a researcher, that particular identity remains an amalgam of various held roles: student, teacher, union representative, and potential administrator. The knowledge gained through my various roles is ongoing and cumulative. Although theory and experimentation are dictated by the protocols of the researcher, my experience as a student and teacher ultimately drove my areas of interest and the eventual research questions. Ultimately, a perspective which was a fusion of many roles informed the validity and significance of findings components of the study.

Sadly, at least up to this point in my career, the traits of intelligence and creativity do not seem to be dominant descriptors of problem-solving in K-12 schools. Redundant shortsighted actions on a wide array of issues made by the multiple levels of school administration have shaken my faith in the effectiveness and morality of the overall system. Intractable thinking fuels a march towards testing and quantification which deprives both teacher and student of the joy which can be provided by education. With that phenomenon serving as a backdrop, the following observations derived from my fifteen years of work experience have been paired with the collaborating evidence/testimony/findings of additional researchers:

- Current assessments of learning are limited (Crick, 2007). Assessment on the elementary, middle, and secondary level focuses primarily on reading comprehension and mathematics.

- Behavioral issues seem to dominate a majority of special education classrooms and support service classrooms (Gage & Goran, 2011).

- The manner in which special education is conducted can lead to literal and/or symbolic segregation (Connor & Ferri, 2007).
Although those statements are based on my own judgment, they are not accusatory. Systems become so large and overwhelming that individuals feel powerless—players in a story that purports change but in reality maintains the status quo.

Since I have administrative training and interact with administrators due to my union position, I understand the complexities of school systems—which themselves are increasingly pawns of larger power brokers. Sadly, over time, teachers tend to: quit and leave the profession, stop caring, acknowledge greater deficiencies but attempt to make their classrooms safe havens, or go into academia. Those who remain and attempt to build sanctuaries gain my admiration, but, at the same time, I question whether those safe environs are for the benefit of themselves or for their students. At a certain point, an uncritical continued presence may implicitly condone a faulted system and outweigh any positive contribution.

If the previously listed three issues are examined holistically, some commonalities emerge:

- Each issue can independently warrant extensive research.
- The phenomena are not exclusive to U.S. school systems (Berhanu, 2008).
- Multiple issues are intertwined.

In regards to the last assertion, the interaction among the factors of race, economic standing, and disability (to name just a few) are difficult to parse and the relationships are contextual. Even setting the problematic concept of causation aside and using a correlation matrix, a great deal of subjectivity remains. The crossing of multiple factors such as race and socioeconomic level creates intersections that significantly contribute to an individual’s identity.

Ironically, schools find themselves in the midst of their own identity crisis. Despite the veneer created by the apparent recognition of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and the
praise heaped upon differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999), assessment remains primarily based upon state exam scores. Later research by Tomlinson declared that “Findings suggest that increases in test scores is not necessarily a result of student academic attainment but more of test preparation calling into the question the validity of such outcomes” (Callahan et al., 2003, abstract). Along the same lines, Howard Gardner’s (2004a) hope that “continuing interest in these ideas (MI) in other countries, and in American schools that are somehow able to escape the current testing pressures, suggests that the present zeal for uniform curriculum and frequent short answer examinations may not prevail” (p. 215), has not come to fruition. Sadly, MI has been presented in such a simplified manner that some teachers have equated it with learning styles. Once the terminology changed from “intelligence” to “style,” teachers who were already resistant to MI were then able to attribute students’ failure to their reluctance to abandon their optional learning style.

Viewed collectively, the three postulates show that the present condition of U.S. public education needs improvement—especially for individuals who differ from “the norm.” Overall, an examination of the norm requires a nuanced approach that recognizes context in the determination of normalcy. A nascent understanding of context could provide schools insight on identity and group relationships that would enable them to begin welcoming all of its members. As long as the terms “outlier,” “outcast,” “minority,” “Other,” etc. remain in regards to education, a humanistic vision of democratic schooling (Keiser & Michelli, 2005) cannot be attained. At best, schools function in a reactive manner that utilizes marginalized groups as “canaries in the coal mine” that alert decision-makers to systemic faults. An example is the plight of LGBTQ students and the emergence of anti-bullying measures. The framing of the
issue can mask other intentions, i.e., a focus on bullying can preemptively negate a conversation regarding LGBTQ issues.

Special education has become the home, or more precisely figurative and sometimes literal internment, for those who do not fit the norm. Although the deeming of academic inferiority upon individuals by the system receives scrutiny, even the declared elites, a.k.a., gifted, can feel a similar exclusion. As one such student noted, “Those of us who were considered gifted were forced to band together as we were alienated from the rest of the middle school cliques” (Goshon, 2006, p. 167). Besides the obvious anxiety relayed by the student, it is unfortunate when “each time we identify exceptional students and segregate them in separate classrooms, we are actually choosing to avoid opportunities to improve the regular classroom” (Sapon-Shevin as cited in Gallagher, 2004, p. 23). I agree with the sentiment of that statement and would expand upon its content by arguing that there are universal lessons in humanity that can be learned from both ends of the ability spectrum. Lastly, the veracity and utility of the labels themselves are called into question when the existence of twice exceptional students is considered. The problematic serving of that population (Leggett, Shea & Wilson, 2010) highlights how categories that are promoted as producing efficiency negatively impact students. If education has been reduced to a numbers game, the emotional impact of labels precludes even the empty pursuit of statistical student success.

**Specific Problem: Lack of Meaningful Representation of Learning Disabled Students**

At a minimalistic level, the three previously mentioned phenomena (current learning assessment is limited, behavior issues dominate special education classrooms, and segregation being a possible product of the current construction of special education) are examples of
oppression. In our present education system, a student is “simply tested to see where he or she falls on the curriculum continuum and then expected to progress in a linear, quantitative fashion (and) learners are diagnosed in terms of deficiencies, called ‘needs’” (Fosnot & Perry, 2005, p. 9). A system based on that rigid form of assessment has led to an overrepresentation of minorities in special education programs that can be construed as modern day segregation (Beratan, 2008). Although some may say students with emotional or behavioral issues are underserved (Cramer, Harry, Hart & Klinger, 2007), my professional experience leads me to believe that some of those students are provided inappropriately with special education academic services as opposed to dearly needed counseling services and negatively affect the academic goals of the program.

When those conditions intersect, they intensify each other and some groups are unfortunately caught in the epicenter of a seemingly insurmountable storm. Afflicted groups are left in an emotional and practical state of powerlessness that can lead to an internalized negative self-concept. Continued systemic exclusion and the absence of advocacy due to negative self-image maintain the status of the oppressed. Although administrative leaders and schools may say that they cannot solve greater societal problems which they cite as the cause of any problem—ranging from emotional/behavioral issues to LDs which they nonchalantly ascribe to anything from poor nutrition to parental drug use—I counter that their resignation is anything but benign.

So, an inevitable question which emerges is: what happens to individuals who occupy multiple intersection zones? Besides the personal reasons previously stated, learning disabled students are an ideal group to study extensively because disability has “value for intersecting identities” (Siebers, 2011, p. 6) and “is a minority status that anyone may assume unexpectedly
at any time” (Couser, 2012, p. 9). Although the latter quotation may initially appear problematic in regards to learning disabilities, a multitude of causes (accident, illness, trauma, etc.) could cause someone to be contextually-disabled (and, by extension, learning disabled).

At the present moment, there is little heard directly from LD students in the professional education journals of numerous organizations (The International Reading Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and The National Council of English Teachers). This omission could be an avoidance of any discussion regarding possible origins of special education. One view holds that special education “maintained segregated classrooms after Brown by placing large numbers of students of color in special education classrooms and in nonacademic tracks” (Connor & Ferri, 2007, p. 4). Supporting that story is the contention that LD is a category that was created “to explain away the academic failings of primarily white middle- and upper-class students in the wake of post-Sputnik school reform” (Sleeter, 1995, p. 160). When those two quotations are pondered in tandem, LD can be interpreted as a safeguard preventing whites from being at a disadvantage. This story is also an alternative to the dogma of SE which espouses a narrative of progress and benevolence.

The described origin story of special education seems to support the social and economic implications of correspondence theory that purport that “the relationship of authority and control between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work replicate the hierarchical division of labor which dominates the workplace” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 131). Simply stated, this theory holds that as opposed to being a resource that promotes social mobility, a school’s role is to maintain the status quo. If that assertion is true, then, ironically, special education is predicated on students’ continued poor performance—student success would be a death knell for special education. To preclude the
possibility of learning disabled students saying something critical, and, hence, “destabilizing” as viewed through correspondence theory, their voices are ignored and any possible knowledge must come from the professionals in the entrenched discipline of special education.

Since metaphor is a “way of understanding an issue by comparing it to a parallel image/expression from a different, already familiar reality” (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p. 239), schools can be seen as one of many societal chessboards that are interconnected in an even larger contest for control. Unfortunately, learning disabled students seem to be continual pawns in this struggle. LD students’ failure is simultaneously used to maintain the institution of special education and be criteria for purported educational change; they are a subgroup whose performance is closely watched under the provisions in NCLB. In the future, their projected poor performance will—rightly or wrongly—bring about reformatory action. Independent of the intentionality, comprehensiveness, or effectiveness of that change, I strongly feel that SE will remain a paternalistic institution until it begins to recognize students’ voices.
Chapter Two: The Theoretical Framework

A Holistic View: Skrtic’s *Disability and Democracy*

Because inductive reasoning (a.k.a., “the duck test”) has been applied to declare myself a disability studies proponent, the characteristics of the field will be outlined shortly. Before beginning that task, it should be recognized that the demarcations between the social sciences and their corresponding subsets can be difficult to distinguish and the field of disability studies is part of that situation. Fittingly, it is the work of Thomas Skrtic which allows a holistic understanding of both disability studies and its relationship to the other disciplines. It is an understanding of disability studies through the lens of Skrtic that underlies the theoretical framework of this study; that point is made in the spirit of disclosure with a hope for increased clarity.

Although Skrtic’s (1995) work, *Disability and Democracy*, seems to predate the concept of disability studies due to the absence of the term in the text, it can be confidently stated that he, too, is a proponent of disability studies. The following paradigm by Skrtic describing the theoretical discourse in special education is insightful (1995, p. 84):

**Figure 1**

Skrtic’s Theoretical Discourse of Special Education
An initial reaction to Skrtic’s paradigm is that, although it is focused on special education, it could easily be applicable to education in a general sense. The multiple historical and seemingly timeless arguments about the purpose of education are intertwined with the current composition of special education. Time could be dedicated depicting these purposes but the title of a recent issue of *Education Leadership* succinctly summarizes them: “College, Careers, Citizenship” (Scherer, 2012). Depending on the perspective of the particular group and/or individual, those three goals could be exclusionary; adding to the complexity of the situation is that the nature of each entity can be personally and/or locally defined.

An allure of Skrtic’s paradigm is that it allows for the placement of theorists or disciplines into the various quadrants. As analyses of those dispositions continue and the commonalities among them emerge, Skrtic’s paradigm loses utility. That phenomenon highlights both the complexity of group identity (in this case, academic philosophical orientation) and the existence of “essentially contested concepts”; Heaney (2009) describes those terms as “concepts for which there are common understandings in the abstract, but disagreements over the application of these concepts to specific instances. Contested terms are often critical in ethical dilemmas—those times when we are faced with choices based on our interpretation of what is fair or what is just” (p. 66). If just one of the three purported purposes of education, citizenship, is examined, the inclusion of social justice in its definition could trigger an emotional debate among various parties. Since disability—and by extension learning disability—is often viewed in relation to civil rights (and, hence, social justice), the obvious interconnection of the debates within both education and special education is recognized.

The true beauty of Skrtic’s paradigm is the movement along the two intersecting spectrums; it highlights how identity can be fluid and how the fluidity itself could be the result of
the ongoing interactions among various identities depending on contexts. With recognition that
the group labels exist as anchors which help to establish common language, I see myself as an
Interpretivist, a Radical Humanist, and a Radical Structuralist. My previous comment about the
segregatory nature of special education is evidence of a structuralist perspective. Although it
may be simplistic, just the act of noting segregation is a confounding mix of implicit and overt
condemnation of the practice which connotes the viewpoint of a humanist. Lastly, since an
interpretivist is “basically about letting people tell their stories” (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995, p.
105), the sharing of my personal history and my interest in first person learning disability
narratives are characteristic of that orientation.

**Interpretivists**

Interpretivists believe that storytelling is a valuable tool to gain new knowledge. In a
symbolic sense, reflection upon the narrative of the construction of this study has afforded me “a
conscious experiencing of the self as both the inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as
the one coming to know the self with the process of research itself” (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p.
278) that is representative of emergent insight sought by Interpretivists. An interpretivist
perspective would hold that the study of first person LD narratives should lead to an improved
understanding of LD. This need for better understanding is highlighted by the occasional
disconnects between LD individuals and the professional organizations that attempt to represent
them—as expressed by this autistic individual’s statement: “Whenever I hear the words ‘defeat
autism now’ I feel like one of those bugs in the Raid commercials, scurrying to hide” (Simone,
2010, para. 2). The recent controversy concerning the appointment of Ari Ne’eman, an autistic
person who frames the disorder as neurodiversity as opposed to pathology, to the National
Council on Disability highlights the complexity of both LD and the multiple categories (i.e.,
autism) that are associated with it (Harmon, 2010). Instead of being received negatively, the confirmation of LD for some individuals can be “liberating rather than stigmatizing and demeaning” because it may lead to a better understanding of themselves (Kegan, 2001, p. 194).

To simply make the suggestion of utilizing first-person learning disability narratives in the classroom does not recognize “education as an exemplary site where the crisis of representation that is outside meets the crisis of representation that is inside” (Britzman & Pitt, 2003, p. 756). Individuals with LD have been characterized on a spectrum that can range from the “super-crip” (Shapiro, 1994) to the Shakespearean fool who can “never be part of the royal court as most disabled are deprived of opportunities for full citizenship” (Kelly as cited in Ware, 2006). Since 5% of U.S. school age children have been identified as LD (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014), it can be confidently extrapolated that at least 5% of the U.S. population can be of LD status. Despite these significant percentages, there appears to be an absence (for the most part) of first-person narratives from individuals with LD who could be considered the average Joe/Joanne/José/Jamal/Jayling. Additionally, since “co-existence of disability and ethnic community may not always be harmonious” (Bunning & Steel, 2006, p. 44) and “White middle and upper-middle-class students with disabilities possess the cultural capital needed to advance their educational careers, including access to institutions of higher education” (Artiles, Arzubiaga, Harris-Murri & King, 2008, p. 313), there should be a conscious effort to gather stories that emerge from a breadth of backgrounds.

**Radical Humanists**

Broadly speaking, radical humanists ponder the dynamics of power relationships in society. Although it may be simplistic, that stance holds that there are oppressors and the oppressed in society. With recognition that the severity will vary according to societal
positionality, LD students generally “see themselves as misunderstood, as disconnected from others and self (between who they are and how they are known by others), and as under-valued” (Winn, 2010, p. 19). A radical humanist perspective would entail examining first person LD narratives to see how LD individuals may succumb to or perpetuate oppression that is thrust upon them.

In the long-term, radical humanism supports the utilization of first person LD narratives which “enable an efficacious sense of self in relation to life problems or traumas” and that this improved sense of self can ultimately be tapped for advocacy purposes (Chase, 2010, p. 216). Students may recognize that the “self is not a thing, but an active, mysterious creator, marvelously able to experience and to articulate its existence in an untold variety of ways” (Boscardin, Garrod & Rodis, 2001, p. xx). They can envision this dynamic as a journey, an evolution, an ongoing battle, etc., within the self, a dynamic in which they can and should exert control. The sharing of narrative stories of individuals with LD may give students the “courage to be responsible now for ways one can foster one’s own ongoing ‘disabling’—or refuse to—without letting others out of their responsibility” (Kegan, 2001, p. 204).

**Radical Structuralists**

Although newer disability narratives have been applied for “bibliotherapy” purposes (Smead, 1999, p. 80), older tales can be considered part of a trauma culture that “encourages personal narratives about trouble and suffering without offering a theory and politics of social change” (Chase, 2010, p. 229). Radical structuralism fills that void; it provides a much-needed theory and politics of social change that views recent first-person LD narratives as sources of information which name oppressive organizations, their philosophies, and methods. Additionally, a radical structuralist perspective contends that LD students are minorities and that
the utilization of first person LD narratives is a tool for promoting diversity. Radical structuralists may see advantage in informing and educating audiences “whose members occupy social locations different from the narrator’s (and) might be moved through empathetic listening to think and act in ways that benefit the narrator or what he or she advocates” (Chase, 2010, p. 227). Regardless of the radicalness of the approach, presenting these stories for viewing may bring about a recognition of inequalities that eventually takes a majority of blame away from students. By bringing these newer personal tales of LD individuals to as many people as possible, these stories may be “adopted by the collectivity as a whole … (and) achieve mythic status” (Levi-Strauss, 1981, pp. 64 - 65). Albeit being somewhat dramatic, mythic status can be reconceptualized as standing for the dominant discourse.

It should be noted there is a battle for ownership for the term, LD, between the Radical Humanists and Radical Structuralists. Although both groups (Radical Humanists and Radical Structuralists), may hold shared indignation towards Functionalists, Radical Structuralists frame LD as a status connected to context (mostly repressive) while Radical Humanists acknowledge the repressive structure but emphasizes the existence and importance of an eventual proactive group identity.

**Special Education’s (SE) Functionalist Existence**

I can confidently state that utilizing theory to examine the narratives of LD individuals will be beneficial because the approach has already been a benefit to me. The Prelude detailed my personal connection to the topic of LD. It has arisen that one view of my story holds that Speech and Language issues are separate from LDs. Although that point possesses merit, I would contend that the two terms function in the same manner by disguising institutional
limitations and highlight that learning disability is contextual (Sternberg, 2000). Since LD is rooted in the perversion of Alfred Binet’s work on intelligence, LD is historically associated with the misguided axiom “stupidity is for a long time” (Gould, 1996, p. 183). Knowing the negative (and, intertwined permanent conception of a learning disability), it is strategically adept to present issues as language-related; the diagnosis of language delay provides practitioners with an option that yields hope to parents that a child’s difficulty is temporary. Since it is difficult to determine between autism and communication disorders (Matson & Neal, 2010), it could be argued that a similar “lesser of two labels” dynamic could also be occurring; my professional experiences seems to confirm that observation.

It was not until later in life that it was discovered that my speech issues were caused and/or exacerbated by a severe auditory processing problem(s). Although the issue is described as difficulty “understanding spoken language, even though they (individuals) have normal hearing” (Huntington, 2007, p. 116), I have compared it to dyslexia—sounds are inaccurately perceived as opposed to visual items, i.e., letters. Since I know that auditory processing problems are considered by some to be a contributing factor to dyslexia, I may be perpetuating a faulty analogy but it is the best device at my disposal. Depending upon the receptiveness of the audience in embracing that analogy, that limited description can function as a pathway to a more nuanced conversation. My auditory processing difficulty is mentioned to stress that I do not feel constantly burdened by it. It is only in the context of large group settings that I feel at a disadvantage. If I am disabled by it, its negative impact is restricted mostly to that particular described setting.

Despite the successes which have been ascribed to special education as a specific entity, I am grateful for not having an I.E.P. (Individualized Education Plan). With a varying
combination of parental support, resources, fortitude (or, just plain stubbornness), and luck, I never became part of the institution of special education. My choice to become a reading teacher was dually a conscious choice against that system and a subconscious recognition of the challenges I might face as a teacher within a large classroom. My past and present stance is that the dominant composition of special education does not work. As the tally increases of the occasions I hear special education teachers jokingly declare, “well, I do teach special ed,” when they commit an error, those microaggressions (Sue & Rivera, 2010) are the most damning evidence against the institution.

Although I am still struggling with the fuller implications of ableism, I firmly believe that special education is an ableist institution. Since special education’s main mission seems to be quantification and remediation as opposed to discovery of strengths followed by opportunities for demonstrated success, ableist philosophy is reflected when “services provided to children focus inordinately on the characteristics of their disability to the exclusion of all else” (Hehir, 2006, p. 16). As time progresses, I question my role in the greater system because students with passions and/or abilities in areas such as the Arts are assigned to my service in a process that deprives them of one of their few areas of self-worth. The prospect of my progeny attending such an oppressive system is the feared payment of that personal Faustian dilemma.

As long as learning disability is associated with “severe discrepancy” (www.idea.ed.gov), it is a condition that “cannot exist apart from one’s belief about normal versus abnormal functioning” (Gallagher, 2004, p. 12). Perversely, the application of LD to individuals ensures the normalization of the failures of both special education and public education. Regardless of the convoluted relationship between public education and special education which vacillates from symbiotic to parental, the location of the flaw within the individual absolves both systems
(or, system and subset depending on one’s stance) from responding through an equitable and humane manner characterized by flexible inclusive learning environments and diverse forms of assessment. If SE is the mechanism which diverts pressure brought about by failing students on the greater system, the static nature of assignment to SE services can exist for only a limited period of time; the current poor public perception of education and the varying calls for reform— independent of intentionality—may be the hallmarks of an impending systemic implosion. If public education is privatized, it could be argued that the remaining system is even more segregated. Even though social class and race have always been intertwined within the history of U.S. schools, it could be speculated that class will replace race as the primary sorting agent. It is already acknowledged that class is a better predictor than race in forecasting standardized test scores (DeParle, 2012).

It is advantageous to explicitly define SE’s philosophical orientation. In a manner converse to how I applied inductive reasoning to show my allegiance to DSE, Skrtic utilizes deductive reasoning to establish SE as a functionalist institution. Since deductive reasoning is known as top-down thinking, Skrtic’s (1995, p.75) main premise is that SE is a functionalist institution that believes the following criteria are true:

1. Student disability is a pathological condition.
2. Differential diagnosis is objective and useful.
3. Special education is a rationally conceived and coordinated system of services that benefits diagnosed students.
4. Progress in special education is a rational-technical process of incremental improvements in conventional diagnostic and instructional practices.
Although it can be argued that there is a sentiment throughout this entire study that is contrary to the four points, my previous observations (restated below) stand in direct opposition to the last three listed functionalist stances supporting special education:

- Current assessments of learning are limited (Crick, 2007). Assessment on the elementary, middle, and secondary level focuses primarily on reading comprehension and mathematics.

- Behavioral issues seem to dominate a majority of special education classrooms and support service classrooms (Gage & Goran, 2011).

- The manner in which special education is conducted can lead to literal and/or symbolic segregation (Connor & Ferri, 2007).

As alluded to earlier, a general recognition of the misapplication of Binet’s work provides support for my assertions.

It has been stated that there are three major schools of psychometric interpretation (Gould, 1996, p. 372): classicists (intelligence as structure), revisionists (intelligence as information processing), and radicals (the theory of multiple intelligences). The classists are those who support a “bell-curve distribution (that) allows for such concepts as acceptable rates of failure and the Average Student” (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008, p. 63); these individuals currently promote academic sorting based on the work of Herrnstein and Murray (1994). The revisionists view the human brain as a computer that runs a program “comprised of an organized system of processes and of organizations of memory contents. Some of these are quite specific to particular problem areas; others are relatively general and independent of subject matter” (Simon, 1962, p.151). Since I do not ascribe to the social predestination of the classicists or the clinical dehumanization of the revisionists, my personal standards mandate my allegiance to Gould’s radicals whose beliefs are founded on the previously discussed Howard Gardner’s concept of multiple intelligences. The examination of the narratives for this study will
demonstrate the diverse intelligences and talents of the protagonists (a protagonist is the central figure of an account). The study has the potential to provide credence to the concept of neurodiversity and can present alternative views to disability as pathology.

**Disabilities Studies: A Philosophical Alternative**

Disabilities studies is meaningful because it is not “scholarship and teaching operate(ing) exclusively on a theoretical level (that) anesthetize(s) us to human pain and suffering” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 401); the discipline’s worth is its humanistic nature. Along that line, it should be no surprise that valuing other people necessitates listening to their stories. Although the content of the stories is obviously important, the points of view of the narratives also have the potential to provide new knowledge. By informally listening to my students’ stories throughout the course of my career, I have learned about their struggles and, when possible, used that information to aid them; that action seems to be a validation of standpoint theory’s claims that “all knowledge attempts are socially situated and that some social locations are better than others for seeking knowledge” (Olesen, 2008, p. 322). Regardless of which academic group claims ownership of standpoint theory, its existence encourages the search for new knowledge.

In this study, I employ Tobin Siebers’ (2011) definition of disability as “a minority identity, one whose particular characteristics contribute to the advancement of minority studies in general” (p. 3). Using Siebers’ claim facilitates the linking of standpoint theory with disability studies. Additionally, since Siebers defines disability as the product of social injustice (p. 3), my previous observation of disability being intertwined with the greater issue of democracy and social justice in education appears logical.
Before progressing any further, it should be noted that disability studies in education (DSE) appears to be an evolution of the work begun (and, still being performed) by Skrtic. Although I support disability studies emotionally and intellectually, I feel unease at times because as disability is redefined as difference, protection under the law could potentially be lost. Since minority rights are traditionally ensured through federal civil rights laws, my apprehension is not unfounded. Although my concern may be construed as alarmist, we must be vigilant to ponder unintended consequences.

My perception of this dilemma within disability studies has been touched upon by scholars and has been framed as consisting of incrementalists vs. reconceptualists (Baglieri, Connor, Gallager & Valle, 2010). Although beneficial scholarship has been conducted to show how the real or imagined divide between the two groups can be bridged or made irrelevant, a broadened definition of incrementalist may be needed. Whereas reconceptualists have been associated with fundamental reform, incrementalists have been associated with supporting the status-quo; in reality, incrementalists can support incremental reform. By utilizing immanent critique (the criticism of a position by exploiting faults in its own logic) in the long term, incrementalists could bring about systemic change—albeit, the likelihood of that occurrence is debatable. In a nod to Skrtic’s model, it may be advantageous to think of incrementalists and reconceptualists as part of a gradual spectrum of change.

Theoretical Clarity: Taking Liberty with Skrtic’s Democracy

Narrative is utilized by a wide range of interpretive paradigms in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 32); a belief in standpoint theory would seem to necessitate its use. As my self-perception of being a teacher has evolved over the years, I have asked myself, “Was
(Am) I to treat, or was (am) I to listen carefully, record faithfully, comprehend as fully as possible?” (Coles, 1989, p. 25). Although that quotation is attributed to a young psychiatrist, it can describe an educator who adheres to a nascent disabilities studies philosophy. By focusing on student voices, other teachers/researchers have discovered that, “The superimposition of these (dominant) modes and methods on educational phenomenon is no more, and no less, than insisting it is our privilege to have control over others and over life. It has little to do with knowledge” (Gallagher, 1996, p. 41). I, too, have arrived at that conclusion.

As with other artist mediums, written narratives can be applied for multiple purposes. Besides expressing the perspective of the artist, the application of stories can range from raising social awareness to outright manipulation through propaganda. In regards to the utilization of first-person disability narratives, Skrtic’s paradigm regarding the theoretical discourse in special education once again proves beneficial (1995, p. 84):

Figure 1
Skrtic’s Theoretical Discourse of Special Education

Since I am in philosophical agreement with all of the above perspectives (obviously excluding Functionalists), the utilization of first person LD narratives can be of value for each of those
perspectives. Since Radical Humanists and Radical Structuralists are inherently defined through their opposition to the current power structure, the Functionalists and their belief in meritocracy are the present hierarchy which comprises the status quo that is rejected by the two paradigms.

When applied in the context of this particular study, Skrtic’s paradigm takes on the following form:

Figure 2

Impact of the Removal of Functionalists from Skrtic’s Paradigm

Since the Functionalists have been removed, the model collapses onto itself. Due to the issue that examined accounts are nonfiction, it seems appropriate to construe the Interpretivist paradigm as a psychological one (represented with an “X” in the diagram). Instead of applying a traditional literary analysis that seems better suited for fictional works, a psychological perspective will be utilized. It could be argued that psychology is the study (or story) of how one negotiates the tension within oneself (Radical Humanist) as well as the conflict between oneself and society (Radical Structuralist).

**Reimagined Educational Psychology: Righting Unintended Consequences**

Upon noting the inclusion of psychology in the reconceptualized Skrtic’s paradigm, one could easily succumb to the acerbic gallows humor found in schools and declare that students experience the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, and acceptance—of a lowered status) upon receiving an LD diagnosis (Kubler-Ross, 2007). I believe it is now time to reconceptualize educational psychology. Instead of holding that the discipline (or, sub-discipline
depending on one’s perspective) as a repressive force that rates and sorts through I.Q. testing and related measures, it has the potential to uplift students.

This hope for a “reimagined” educational psychology is shared by others. This assertion is supported by the following statement by Armstrong (2013): “current trends in ‘positive psychology’ seek to put more emphasis on researching values, strengths, virtues, and talents than on studying illness, damage, disorder, and dysfunction” (p. 28). This philosophy stands in contrast to an entrenched stance based on the bell curve. Gardner (2004b) adeptly describes the tenets of that position:

1. Intelligence is a single entity.
2. People are born with a certain amount of intelligence.
3. It is difficult to alter the amount of our intelligence—it’s ‘in our genes’ so to speak.
4. Psychologists can tell you how smart you are by administering IQ tests or similar kinds of instruments.

I’ll take my own satirical turn and stress how supporting the bell curve most likely correlates with glee regarding predestination and the death of social mobility; some individuals downplay the importance of schools based on the view that intelligence is simply a product of genetic inheritance

A more hopeful view for educational psychology is encompassed by the simple symbol of a house; it is the basis for a metaphor which combines educational and psychological concepts. Before delving into this construction, it is necessary to review the concepts and theorists utilized for this metaphor:

- positive niche locations (Armstrong): “within this complex culture of ours, there are many ‘subcultures,’ or microhabitats, that have different requirements for living. If an individual can only discover their particular ‘niche’…they may be able to find success on their own terms” (Armstrong, 2010, p. 17).
- hierarchy of needs (Maslow): “There is a general pattern of needs recognition and satisfaction that people follow in generally the same sequence” (Gawel, 1997, p. 3). These needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1954).

- multiple intelligences (Gardner): “information-processing capabilities—that allow them [individuals] to solve problems or to fashion products. To be considered ‘intelligent,’ these products and solutions must be valued in at least one culture or community” (Gardner, 2004b, p. 29). These intelligences are: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, intrapersonal, and interpersonal (Gardner, 1983).

It is worth noting that Gardner has speculated about the existence of an ‘eight and half’ intelligence that is centered on existential questions (2004b, p. 41). It can be reasoned how entrenched institutions could be threatened by the search for meaning posed by existential questions.

In regards to the model of the house, the entire structure represents positive niche locations; the main components of the house are comprised of the needs (love and belongingness, esteem, and cognitive) from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs which are most relevant to education. Along that line, the discovery and expression of multiple intelligences are the raw materials that allow the needs to be fulfilled. The metaphor is visualized below:

Figure 3

Conceptualization of Positive Niche Locations
It seems fitting that the house metaphor is utilized to understand the concept of niche locations—it’s an effective counterbalance of hope to the tainted legacy of SE which is characterized by segregation.

Although it may be beyond the scope of this endeavor, it is hoped that the breadth and depth of the examining lens which is formed in part by the three perspectives will allow newly discovered knowledge to contribute to a narrative accrual (Bruner, 1991, p.18) that may eventually lead to a culture, history, or tradition of success for learning disabled students. Since unforeseen social change has occurred historically, it is quite possible that the term, learning disabled, may cease to exist because of its irrelevance or the broad recognition of its oppressive nature.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This study was constructed in accordance with “the different parts of a design form an integrated whole, with each component closely tied to several others, rather than being linked in a linear or cyclic sequence” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 5). The statement implied that as this study progressed there was potential for organic reorganization with accompanying change in trajectory of the overall project. Simply stated, newly discovered knowledge dictated changes to the original design. Any preconceived notions about the narrative of the overall project was challenged.

Although in previous chapters I touched upon certain aspects and episodes of my life, I will more formally and extensively describe myself before presenting the research questions of the study. The act of providing this description is neither a response to some perceived mandate for objectivity nor a precursor for an autoethnography. Simply stated, I have provided additional information about myself so the reader/audience will have additional context to judge the merit of the study; in academic jargon, my disclosure also serves to more fully depict my standpoint. Despite the existence of multiple standpoint theorists who “are by no means identical, and in their differing versions they offer divergent approaches for qualitative researchers” (Harding, 1997, p. 389), my decision to provide further information about myself seems valid because one conception of standpoint contends it is “the combination of resources available within a specific context from which an understanding might be constructed” (Sprague, 2010, p. 85). The reference to context in the quotation is significant because the multiple factors that influence my standpoint (and, by extension my life) undoubtedly affect every component and nuance of this study.
So, it is with a degree of hesitancy—which will be explained shortly—the following biographical information:

- Age: 41
- Gender: male
- Ethnicity, race, cultural background: European ancestry, Caucasian
- Education: BA English, MS ED Literacy, Post-Masters certificate in Educational Administration, MS Phil & Doctoral Candidate in Urban Education
- Marital status: married
- Economic status: middle class
- Sexual orientation: heterosexual
- Occupation: reading teacher

Although the above data is informative, I was reluctant to share it because in isolation it can be easily construed to form a stereotype of me. Additionally, the act of describing oneself has the potential to be an uncomfortable exercise in existentialism. Can an individual’s humanity—or, identity—be defined in a bulleted-list? Compounding that question is the assertion that a person can have multiple selves/identities depending on environment (Reinharz, 1997). This study is beneficial because sociological information regarding the protagonists is provided in context and it can ultimately prove that “Access to contrasting perspectives on a phenomenon (i.e., LDs) reveals the limits and constructedness of each view” (Sprague, 2010, p.87). More importantly, the study will hopefully shed light upon the interaction among the various factors that influence identity and in the process provide alternative conceptions of disability.

As a college-educated Caucasian male, I am presumed to be positioned at the top of Western society class hierarchy. I am believed to possess the cultural capital needed for
obtaining the traditional and dominant conception of success. Each reader of this study will have to make the determination regarding my credibility.

The Benefits of an Analysis Model Influenced by Skrtic’s Democracy

Earlier in the study, Skrtic’s paradigm (represented below) describing the theoretical discourse in special education was referenced (1995, p. 84):

Figure 1

Skrtic’s Theoretical Discourse of Special Education

Besides heavily influencing the theoretical framework of this study, this paradigm was interpreted, adapted, and applied as a tool for analyzing first-person LD narratives. This adaptation and application will be described shortly.

Independent of the utilization of the paradigm in a novel way, there were many reasons for choosing to apply Skrtic’s paradigm. Some beneficial aspects of that choice is listed below:

- Comprehensive: By providing breadth and depth, the paradigm provides a context to understand how both special education and the education system functions.
• Transcendent: Due to its comprehensiveness, the paradigm seems to provide a balanced perspective when viewing education in a holistic manner. It should be noted that Skrtic is not apolitical; as noted previously, he depicts and criticizes SE as a functionalist/positivistic entity.

• Grounded: The context that the paradigm develops discusses theory but also describes how theory is applied in real world situations (practice).

Some individuals may argue that the descriptors listed above signal positive aspects of the paradigm but these characteristics fall short of justifying the application of the paradigm as an analysis tool. Although I would argue against that stance on the basis that the two purposes (strength as a theoretical paradigm and as an analysis tool) are inherently intertwined, some other benefits of the paradigm as an analysis tool are:

• Legitimacy: This benefit is tangible as well as symbolic. Every life (and, hence, account) is influenced by a myriad of forces; each individual possesses worth and importance because (s)he is inextricably connected to society. Each individual is a(n) intersection(s) of multiple factors.

• Accessibility: There exists a myriad of ways to analyze the accounts. The utilized process presents a clear and structured manner to analyze the accounts.

Overall, on a personal level, I found the analysis tool compatible with my own standpoint which straddles the line between researcher and teacher practitioner.

**Research Question**

The intended question for this study will hopefully lead to new knowledge that can be utilized in the contexts of K-12 public school curriculums, teacher education programs, and parents. Considering that a workshop concerning autism is now required by NYSED for teacher certification and that special education certification is being renamed as varying forms of “students with disabilities” (www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/teach), questioning issues regarding SP ED is timely.
Developing the question for this study required extensive reflection regarding both the audience and tone of the piece. The main research question listed below was created with those two elements in mind:

By analyzing first-person narratives of learning disabilities through a framework influenced by critical special educator Thomas Skrtic, what are the educational ramifications for students, teachers, and the institutions they comprise?

The question will hopefully appeal to its broad audience in a manner that will generate constructive conversations among the various members.

**Data Collection Procedure**

This study will utilize both commercially available texts and academic papers that either detail first person accounts of LD or directly quote LD individuals. Hence, some of the narratives can be thought of as “reconstructed first person accounts”—narratives constructed in a process that collates direct quotations from the protagonist and results in a shift of authority from the third person narrator to the protagonist. It should be noted that in our present information age (with its accompanying entrepreneur orientation) most academic papers can be easily purchased and reduced to commodities—the line between scholarship and economics can sometimes be tenuous. The data collection process was constructed to avoid implicitly endorsing damaging labels by focusing on the type of first person LD narrative as opposed to the type of LD possessed by the author, i.e. Dyslexia accounts, ADHD accounts, etc. The sorting mechanism for the process is described below:
The names of the various categories are fairly self-evident. The associated subcategories will be presented in the upcoming text list section.

While determining a structure for collection of the LD narratives, the following issues emerged:

- Many learning disabilities are concomitant. (Rief & Stern, 2010).
- Physical disabilities and learning disabilities can share similar dynamics (University of Kentucky, 2010); in the school setting, some physical disabilities and learning disabilities (i.e., blindness and dyslexia) can receive similar accommodations.
- Societal preferences can create disability or increase its impact (Shapiro, 1994).
- Internalization of negative descriptions of disability worsens its effects (Silverman, 1977).

The second point shows that LD and physical disability can share a similar negative experience, at least in the context of education. That point is supported historically by organizations, i.e. Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, which originally served individuals with physical disabilities, evolving over time to embrace people with LDs. Another example of such a LD/physical disability coupling is auditory processing disorders and hearing impairments—they both receive similar responses in the form of instructional practices and assistive technology by
The forced perceived familial relationship between LD and physical disability once again shows the paternalistic orientation of schools. Lastly, some conditions, i.e., Multiple Sclerosis, which can affect the mind and body both simultaneously and/or erratically, highlight the complexities of the relationship between physical disabilities and learning disabilities and the role of context in both the conceptual understanding and the actual ramifications of disability.

Physical disabilities and learning disabilities inhabit a shared paradox: individuals with physical disabilities are oppressed because their corporeal differences are easily visible but people with LDs are misunderstood because their perceived actions of deficiency cannot be quickly attributed to a causal physical deficit. That contradiction cannot be due simply to society being a mercurial master. At some point beyond the realm of this study, timeless philosophical questions should be revisited: Does society create arbitrary norms that are only accessible to those with resources? Is the failure of achieving norms the justification for oppression? Is there a primal urge within individuals—reflected and reinforced by society—for domination over others? Those questions are intertwined universally within the human condition and the concept of disability is relevant to a discussion of them. Although disability, and by extension learning disability, is perceived and celebrated (to a degree) relatively recently as a form of diversity, the oppressive history must be recognized and the gains made in the currently developing metanarrative have the potential for regression.

Although it is tempting to explore the connection between traditional physical disabilities and learning disabilities (i.e., sight and dyslexia or hearing impairment and auditory processing difficulties) or ponder how certain neurological disorders (i.e., Multiple Sclerosis) may present a new way of thinking about categories within disability, learning disabilities will be focused upon. It would be reasonable in the future to even study mental illness’s relationship to LD by
contrasting the first person narratives of each genre. A list of potentially related non-LD narratives from the mentioned genres can be found in Appendix A.

**Data Parameters**

As opposed to focusing simply on the theme of resiliency which is present in many disability narratives, the following quotation from Gladwell (2008) should be heeded:

> People don’t rise from nothing. We owe something to parentage and patronage. The people who stand before kings may look like they did it all by themselves. But in fact they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot. It makes a difference where and when we grew up. The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forebears shape the patterns of our achievement in ways we cannot begin to imagine (p. 19).

It is the discovery of patterns that lies at the heart of research. Knowledge is derived by exploring the possible causes of those patterns. In regards to LD, it can be experienced differently depending on a multitude of sociological factors that influence individuals.

Although data parameters are usually defined before the data collection process, these components developed concurrently in this study. In a similar manner to how patterns are slowly recognized in research, the desirable characteristics of chosen texts became apparent through the act of the sorting process. Since most of the texts utilized for this study can be found on book recommendation lists from multiple reliable sources, there was a sense of confidence in their quality (and, hence, inclusion) from the onset. The initial large pool of perceived-prescreened texts was refined by what at that moment was considered to be an undefinable “I know it when I see it” mentality—for both the selection and the exclusion of texts. The text
selection process concluded when a reasonable and representative sample of seven sources containing forty-four accounts was achieved.

Upon reflection, it is now recognized that certain factors warranted inclusion or exclusion of texts for the study. Before arriving at the late decision to exclude narratives centered upon autism/Asperger’s, two factors signaling exclusion were early date of publication (i.e., There’s a Boy in There, 1992) and apparent negative philosophical orientation (i.e., Somebody, Somewhere: Breaking Free From the World of Autism, 1994, and Messages From An Autistic Mind: I Don’t Want To Be Inside Me Anymore, 2005). Since a stated intention of this study is to provide alternative conceptions of LD, texts that declare—or, imply through their titles—LD as a negative state of being were excluded.

Since I am seeing an increasing number of both ADHD and autistic spectrum disorder students in my Reading classroom, it is not surprising that those conditions seem to comprise the preponderance of commercially available LD texts. At the present moment, one in eighty-eight children have been identified with an autism spectrum disorder and ADHD is seen in eleven percent of U.S. children (www.cdc.com). Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it could be argued that what initially may appear to be an increase in an individual diagnosis may be interpreted as a redistribution; one study indicates that “many children who were diagnosed with severe language disorders in the 1980s and 1990s displayed behaviors that would be regarded as meriting a diagnosis of ASD according to contemporary criteria” (Bishop, Line, Watt, & Whitehouse, 2008, p. 343). This diagnostic substitution shows how labels are influenced by and reflective of societal norms; the fact that homosexuality was not removed entirely from the DSM until 1986 shows the practice of interpreting natural human variation as pathology is entrenched and longstanding.
In opposition to the factors for text exclusion, relatively recently published texts that held a positive—or, more likely, neutral or accepting stance—of disability were chosen for this study. Additionally, texts were primarily picked in a conscious attempt to address diversity; this diversity could include race, type of diagnosis, and/or economic status.

It is natural that the texts with which I felt personal connections were selected from the compiled lists of suggested works. These connections emerged from my experiences as a student, teacher, or researcher. In a manner similar to how I declared my allegiance to a disabilities studies orientation, the application of inductive reasoning highlights the autoethnographic bent of this work. Although I consider myself “a researcher interested in using his personal narrative to locate themselves (himself) in the research” (du Preez, 2008, p. 510), it would not be far-fetched to consider my work in alignment with “The number of social scientists who are critiquing questionable legal, medical, educational, media, and corporate practices (that) seems to be exploding” (Foley and Valenzuela, 2008, p. 291). It should be of no surprise that those practices collide to form the usually traumatizing intersection encompassed by the LD experience.
**The Texts**

The following texts in chronological order by category will be analyzed throughout the course of this study:

Table 1

Selected Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commercially available</th>
<th>Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Niche Market</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Neurodiversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[13 accounts]</td>
<td>[2 accounts]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7 accounts]</td>
<td>[6 accounts]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Earlier in the study it was stated that LD should be contemplated in terms of landscape; I truly believe the selected texts list is reflective of that landscape. It was a daunting decision to choose works personally meaningful to me because I would join others who had to carefully navigate an area influenced by, “both the politics of research and the politics of their wider communities” (Ballard & Heshusius, 1996, p. 172). The tension between utilizing my already described distinct vantage point and following the principles of research—which tend to become
complicated when considering objectivity in relation to qualitative research—was a constant but fluctuating concern.

My personal involvement and attachment to the study is further clarified by the following brief descriptions of the selected texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Niche Market: Academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disabilities and Life Stories (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to the Experts (2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass Market/Popular Culture: Neurodiversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Outside the Lines (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Short Bus (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass Market/Popular Culture: Medical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driven to Distraction (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivered From Distraction (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study—conducted by a self-identified LD author—examines the past school experiences of adult LD learners. Besides my own affinity towards the researcher, this study serves as a natural contrast and a form of companion piece for this study.

Although I briefly alluded to it, I possess an ADHD diagnosis in addition to having severe auditory processing difficulties. Shame was not a cause of not discussing the issue in greater detail earlier; in relation to disability (and, more specifically, disability in the context of education), ADHD is a complicated issue. In regards to my own being, I do not consider ADHD to be disabling. With awareness and proactive measures, the condition for me is not an acceptance of flaws but simply an extension of self. I would even hesitantly declare that the condition inexplicably drives me.
Data Analysis

The chart below summarizes the components of the study and introduces the evaluative criteria utilized for the data analysis:

**Research Question:** By analyzing first-person narratives of learning disabilities through a framework influenced by critical special educator Thomas Skrtic, what are the educational ramifications for students, teachers, and the institutions they comprise?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Paradigm</th>
<th>Radical Structuralism</th>
<th>Radical Humanism</th>
<th>Psychology</th>
<th>Disability Studies in Education (DSE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value</strong></td>
<td>Depicts the oppressive organizations and the manner in which they repress.</td>
<td>Demonstrates how individuals can foster their own disabling and, possibly, their later development of meta-awareness of larger oppressive situations.</td>
<td>Examines the interplay between internal and external factors that influence an individual’s conception of LD.</td>
<td>Provides a more nuanced understanding of LD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Analysis Criteria**| • Demographic information of protagonist  
• Young’s types of oppression | • Frieren Struggle:  
  o Self-depreciation  
  o The oppressed become oppressor  
  o Identification with the oppressor | • Presence of Armstrong’s positive niche locations | • Continuum of Influence Advocacy Model |

At this point, any component is tentative and the study was designed with flexibility in order to adapt to unforeseen, but possibly advantageous, developments. Holistically, the evaluative criteria are derived from multiple disciplines and each criterion could be associated with a
particular field. From my perspective, the ability to draw from multiple disciplines provides breadth that is harmonious with the issue of intersectionality within disability. Arguing for the use of one dominant philosophy is incompatible with the practicality of the study and its methods and “is emblematic of scholarship and teaching operating exclusively on the theoretical level (that) anesthetize(s) us to human pain and suffering” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 401).

Ideally, each account was read a minimum of four times. Each account, with its specific focus related to LD in parenthesis, was read and evaluated in the following sequence: Radical Structuralists (external factors), Radical Humanists (internal factors), Psychology (interplay between internal and external factors), and DSE (political activity). Although I personally conceive of DSE as being an amalgam of the three paradigms/disciplines, paradigm specific analysis criteria was created and applied.

Each paradigm can be thought of as a tool. Some jobs (accounts) may be better suited for analysis by particular paradigms. Additionally, depending on the philosophical orientation of a work, analysis of particular accounts through certain paradigms may feel forced and ultimately be of limited value. I, the researcher, will make the decisions regarding applicability in those situations. Collectively, the varying application of the four paradigms provide the flexibility and breadth to ensure that each account will be read and analyzed deeply.

**Radical Structuralists**

It is important to isolate and detail the demographic information regarding the protagonist. At this stage, the broad categories of age, gender, race, economic status, religion, sexual orientation, geographical location, and disclosed LD will be examined. By considering the type of oppression encountered by the protagonist, external oppressors (family, peers, school, and employment) will be discovered.
After naming the oppressor, the type of oppression may be considered. Although there are a multitude of categories which vary according to the theorist, a clear and coherent model is provided by Iris Young. According to Young (2004), there are five faces or types of oppression: violence, exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and powerlessness. Powerlessness will be discussed in the next section and the remaining types are described below:

- **Violence**: The name is self-explanatory. Members of some groups are targeted simply in order to deprive them of their right to exist—their humanity.

- **Exploitation**: This type emerges from Marxist theory. There exists a systematic process in which “the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves” (Young, 2004, p. 50).

- **Marginalization**: The “marginals” are the people who are excluded from the labor force.

- **Cultural imperialism**: This form involves “the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (Young, 2004, p. 59). As that norm is established, other groups are stereotyped and marked as the Other.

Collectively, the four forms of oppression negatively impact human rights. As the reader descends the list, the forms become more abstract. Depending on the enlightenment of the particular society and, hopefully, the presence of a free press, the first form can be observed. Harder to determine, the secondary and tertiary types involve economic inequalities and how those imbalances will restrict access to resources which may allow social mobility. Obviously, the type of oppression can warrant responses that show different forms of agency and the extent of this agency tends to be heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors.

The remaining form from the list, cultural imperialism, is easily understood in theory but can be difficult to cite and delineate. In other words, individuals are so inundated with themes from the dominant culture that they lose perspective to such a point that evaluation and critique of it is nearly impossible. Their identity is so heavily influenced by the dominant culture that they cannot separate themselves from it and, in an ironic turn, criticism of the culture becomes a
criticism of them; that phenomenon is active when school reforms are mocked by educators even before a sincere evaluation of a measure can occur.

**Radical Humanists**

Young’s last form of oppression, powerlessness, demonstrates the link between self-created inner turmoil and external oppressive agents. In short, powerlessness is when individuals accept, and even perpetuate upon others, the negative conceptions of themselves. Sadly, LD students are bullied at a greater rate than their nondisabled peers (Gelser, Ne’eman & Young, 2011) and often repeat this behavior among themselves within their academic support service settings. Borrowing from education jargon, in regards to a rubric for evaluating powerlessness, the following statements from Paulo Friere’s (2007) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can be considered informal benchmarks:

- “Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressor holds of them.” (p. 63)
- “the oppressed …tend to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors.’” (p. 45)
- “the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole.” (p. 46)
- “The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility.” (p. 47)

The listed instances show how an individual internalizes negative images thrust upon him/her and then slowly becomes part of the larger oppressive structure by becoming an active aggressor against other people in similar situations. I have dubbed this loosely defined timeline as the Frieren Struggle.

Without delving too deeply into Friere’s interpretation of critical consciousness (p. 67), it is logical that self-awareness is the initial step allowing individuals to stop condemning
themselves and peers and that, over time, they may even fight back against the larger oppressive system. But it should be stressed that self-awareness is not synonymous with critical consciousness. It may be more accurate to construe self-awareness as a prerequisite for critical consciousness and, by extension, bravery may be essential for advocacy.

So, the following real life drama unfolds through a perspective that is influenced by Radical Humanist and Radical Structuralist thought:

Figure 5
Interconnectedness of Radical Humanism and Radical Structuralism

Since those elements can be broadly interpreted, a significant task of the study will be to discover evidence that is so strong that an element’s presence will be difficult to refute. Despite being true, a shortcoming of this particular storyline is that the protagonist will inevitably be cast in the role of hero and that oppressive agents will undoubtedly be the villains. Although the white hat/black hat dynamic may be advantageous for the simplicity of conflicts in Western movies, there are far more complex stories to be discovered.

**Psychology**

A direct and focused approach for analyzing the narratives is to seek out examples of positive niche locations. According to Armstrong (2010), positive niche construction holds “that instead of always having to adapt to a static, fixed, or normal environment, it’s possible for neurodiverse individuals to alter the environment to match the needs of their unique brains” (p. 17). Although there will most likely be traits that are found almost universally in successful
learning environments, the positive niche constructions discovered in the examined texts can be analyzed for commonalities that can later be the basis for future educational recommendations.

As mentioned earlier in the study, positive niche locations allow for the discovery, practice, and growth of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). The development of these intelligences is a prerequisite for satisfying the variety of needs defined by Maslow (1954). Although it is important to know what aids the construction of positive niche locations, a more significant issue may be examining the composition of one’s positionality that allows access to these locations.

**Disability Studies in Education (DSE)**

Initially, the data analysis was to include a fourth reading of each text which was to be a holistic evaluation of each particular piece; it was eventually decided to complete the fourth reading from a DSE perspective. The challenge for me, as well as for DSE in general, is differentiating the field from other disciplines and attempting to convey its uniqueness in a manner that justifies its worthiness. After reflection, I found that my specific DSE analysis lens succinctly expresses its beliefs. The following model, “Continuum of Influence,” which is ascribed to advocacy, can be applied to DSE (hdc.org.nz/resources/models-of-advocacy):
For two of the three elements, there are specific analytic criteria that can be applied to a reading for its existence; at a bare minimum, a story can be evaluated to determine whether it is an expression of protest and/or advocacy. In the case of universal design, its application as a possible problem-solving alternative can be discussed in the concluding chapter of this study. Goff and Higbee (2008) state that, “Universal Design (UD) began as an architectural concept, a proactive response to legislative mandates as well as societal and economic changes that called for providing access for people with disabilities. Universal Design promotes the consideration of the needs of all potential users in the planning and development of a space, product, or program—an approach that is equally applicable to architecture or education” (p. 1). As it is implied in the quotation, UD is not a reactionary measure used to combat perceived deficits within individuals; to be frank, its emphasis on the common good is uplifting.
Since ableism encompasses both prejudice and discrimination, the discriminatory actions representative of it can be found in the examination of the presence of the forms of oppression which will most likely be discovered during the course of the initial three readings of each text. A difficulty that remains is the exploration of the prejudice of ableism—the beliefs and thought system behind it. Although it may seem simplistic, the best route for discovering this prejudice will be recording and closely examining the protagonists’ speculation on the motivation of the perceived oppressive characters and institutions; obviously, a reader’s faith regarding the observations of a protagonist will be influenced by the judged degree of awareness, maturity, and reliability of the protagonist.

**Ecological Validity**

Although it may present as elemental, the best way to foster validity is to pay due diligence to the planning stages of the other components of the study design; in that light, retroactive measures may be avoided. Even with preventative and reactive actions, validity remains an aspiration achieved by degree because it centers around “the relationship of your conclusions to reality, and there are no methods that can completely assure that you have captured this” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 105). Since history has “a way of transforming the way you tell a story” (Winn, 2010, p. 56), reality can be seen as an elusive subject.

At this juncture, ecological validity, the approximation of the real-life situation being studied (Burns, Dean, Grialou and Varro, 2006), is of primary concern. This study strives not to provide fodder for “interventions in psychology and special education (that) are often involved with evidence obtained from ecologically invalid studies” (Cole, 2000, p. 319). Although my present employment as an educator and my personal education history were seen as a struggle
between “potentially (being) the colonizer, in her university cloak, and the colonized, as a member of the very community that is made the ‘other ’ in her research” (Villenas, 2010, p. 345) that would corrupt ecological validity, my experiences provide breadth of perspective. That perspective promotes deep problematization, i.e., “whether referring to oneself as researcher is not a colonizing act in itself” (Ballard & Heshusius, 1996, p. 174), which can lead to new knowledge.

In many ways, my perspective is an antinomy (a contradiction between two beliefs or conclusions that are in themselves reasonable). Supposedly, by my possessing the label of LD, some may feel that I am biased and lack the objectivity that many ascribe to the traditional conception of the researcher. Conversely, I contend that my positionality’s sensitivity to the interconnected concerns of the educator, researcher, subject, and insider is advantageous because it creates a holistic perspective. This vantage point supposes that by acknowledging LD students’ voices, LD may cease being mischaracterized, oversimplified, and misunderstood, and instead be seen as illustrating diverse ways of thinking. Each of the narratives intended for study has the potential to provide new knowledge which is reflective of a unique experiencing of life; this study is a manifestation of the principle: “Nothing about us without us.”
Chapter 4: Findings

It can be difficult to discover and apply meaningful analytic criteria from a paradigm; when multiple paradigms and their corresponding criteria need to be synthesized, that difficulty can be increased exponentially. Fortunately, the multiple paradigms utilized for this study can be interconnected in a process detailed below:

Figure 7

Interconnectedness of the Utilized Paradigms

An earlier form of this study interpreted loss in terms of civil or human rights. Although that intention was valid and would have been productive, a decision to frame loss in terms of needs (those outlined in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs) occurred. Focusing on the deprivation of those needs was an entryway towards examining the many factors which intersect to form an individual’s understanding and experience of the concept of LD. Whereas the Radical Humanists concentrate primarily on an individual’s eventual reaction to their oppression, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) considers the extent of that reaction to see if it possesses longer-term political consequences intertwined with a group identity.

Once confidence with the paradigms and their analytic criteria is achieved, some observations of previously hidden phenomenon can be made. Although the two mass market
genres (neurodiversity and medical) are in binary opposition philosophically, they are strikingly similar because they are both driven by an “expert” (Hallowell and Mooney) who has gained a degree of celebrity. Although both individuals’ expert status is achieved in part by their lived experience, they both possess a “legitimizing” characteristic—an MD for Hallowell and an Ivy League degree for Mooney—which stands in contrast to the negative perception of LD. The presented accounts in each work should be able to be evaluated independently and aren’t simply vehicles for promoting a particular message from each author.

**Mass Market/Popular Culture: Medical**

*Driven to Distraction*

Since most of the theoretical paradigms for this study are characterized by their opposition to functionalists/positivists, it seems appropriate to begin the analysis with the medical (deficit) genre. At first glance, it would be easy to classify and dismiss *Driven to Distraction* (1994) and *Delivered from Distraction* (2005) as functionalist texts because they are written by psychiatrists; that declaration becomes tenuous when the authors acknowledge an ADHD status at the onset of both texts. Regardless of philosophical alignment, Hallowell and Ratey are perceived as thoughtful and sincere individuals who care about their patients and their craft. The dedication of *Driven to Distraction* echoes some of the same themes which underlie this study. The authors devote the text to teachers who “taught us to go where the patient is and to sit down and listen. They taught us to connect with the patient, person-to-person. They taught us to look for the heart of the patient, to look for the sorrow and for the joy” (Hallowell & Ratey, V, 1994). Despite the term, “patient,” the authors seem to possess an interpretivist approach; they value the life stories of their patients. In a holistic sense, the pondering of Hallowell and Ratey’s philosophical position highlights both the limitations and politicization of language.
In a manner that mirrors the approach of this study, Hallowell begins *Driven to Distraction* with a preface, “A Personal Perspective,” which establishes his authenticity; his disclosure gains the intended audience’s trust. The result of his admission strengthened my decision to begin this study in a similar fashion. I can empathize with Hallowell because he too is trying to utilize a perspective that is an amalgam of expert and insider.

An analysis of just a few lines of Hallowell’s preface shows the feasibility and utility of the chosen analytic criteria. The following statements from Hallowell (1994) yield some intriguing findings:

- “I felt as if a boulder had been lifted from my back. I wasn’t all the names I had been called in grade school—a ‘daydreamer,’ ‘lazy,’ ‘underachiever,’ ‘spaceshot’—and I didn’t have some repressed unconscious conflict that made me impatient and action oriented” (p. x).

- “At last I had name for these parts of me, parts I had chalked up to temperament or neurosis. Now with a name rooted in neurobiology I could begin to make sense of, in a forgiving way, parts of myself that had often frustrated or scared me” (p. x).

The quotations clearly show that Hallowell views his diagnosis with a sense of relief. Prior to his diagnosis, Hallowell felt like an outsider during his education. From his expressed vantage point, it could be argued that the education system was a culturally imperialist institution; that position can be problematized considering that Hallowell—as a white male who still earned his MD degree—greatly benefited from the education system that he had described in negative terms. How powerless was Hallowell at any point?

If continued to be viewed from a radical structuralist position, Hallowell’s stance can be damaging; he may have found peace with his past struggles but he does not understand that the diagnosis itself can be the grounds for both literal and figurative educational exclusion and/or mediate-first responses from schools. As opposed to a position that stresses the limiting
learning environments (contexts) that are maintained by schools, Hallowell’s goal seems to be the promotion of a more nuanced understanding of the diagnosis. Despite the shortcomings of Hallowell’s stance, it would be wrong to dismiss him. At one point, he states that, “‘disorder’ puts the syndrome entirely in the domain of pathology, where it should not entirely be” (1994, p. x). He seems to recognize ADHD (which has already been defined as an LD in this study) as an interplay between external and internal factors.

Hallowell’s narrative is challenging. By “fixing” patients, Hallowell is in alignment with the remediation model practiced by schools. At least in Driven to Distraction, the author never outright criticizes schools. Although the public and schools may consider him an advocate in the vein of the professional/specialist form, Hallowell neither campaigns for change in larger institutions nor protests any particular measure or group.

In relation to the other four accounts presented in the text, the demographic information of the protagonists is listed below:

Table 2
Demographic Information of Protagonists in Driven to Distraction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Occupation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>computer consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>dissertation student mother of two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>fifth grade student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in the chart, a majority of the accounts involve adults; that fact suggests that the intended audience for the piece is adults. The race of the protagonists is never revealed. Since Jim is the only other male whose narrative is presented in the text, Hallowell’s own story ultimately becomes part of the audience’s understanding of possible differences of how ADD is experienced by males and females. Lastly, the fact that all of the adults are college educated (and have access to health care in order to see Hallowell) indicates that their economic status is not dire. In regards to Penny, her family life reflects a middle class background.

It should be noted that Hallowell and this study use the term ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) to also include ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). The accounts are an extension of Hallowell’s decision to never directly criticize the education system. Because of that choice, little is gained by the application of Radical Humanist and DSE analytic criteria. Conversely, much is gained by a Radical Structuralist analysis and a psychology-based analysis yields some ironic and intriguing results. This partial application of the analytic criteria is understandable due to the fact that Hallowell is only a philosophical step or two removed from a functionalist/positivist orientation.

It is clear from the accounts that Hallowell is more comfortable presenting the narratives of adults. The only account of a child, Penny, presents a superficial understanding of her; she barely speaks during the piece. Penny’s narrative is reminiscent of SE professional publications which purport to relay students’ stories but inexplicably neglect to allow students to speak. Unfortunately, Penny’s story seems to serve simply as an attempt to fulfill the text’s declaration of being applicable to children as well as adults. Instead of opening windows into Penny’s world, her narrative doesn’t present her uniqueness and in the process the reader doesn’t form an emotional attachment with her.
In contrast to Penny’s account, the adult accounts are unique and memorable. The protagonists are complicated individuals whose personalities reveal depth. Although each of the narratives were distinctive, there were some common themes among the stories. Whether it was expressed directly or not, each of the protagonists experienced pain associated with their academic lives.

Initially, it can be thought that Hallowell made a deliberate effort to not present individuals who are stereotypically thought of possessing ADD, i.e., artists and people whose professions are based on their physicality. Upon reflection, Hallowell may avoid individuals with those profiles because the environments/contexts they inhabit (occupations) negate or lessen the impact of ADD. An admittance of context influencing the existence of the disorder would detract from the argument that ADD comes from a neurological-based deficit.

So, it is logical that the first account presented in the text is Jim, a computer programmer. Since Jim’s field is predicated on logic and structure, it can be seen how his work environment could exacerbate the impact of his condition. When his narrative is analyzed through the lens of Young’s types of oppression, a more nuanced understanding of the types of oppression is formed. To be more precise, it is seen how violence, cultural imperialism, and powerlessness are relevant to the school environment and how exploitation and marginalization are most pertinent to the work world. Because some individuals hold that the purpose of education is to prepare people for employment, the connection between all five types of oppression becomes apparent. At this point, it can be speculated that two of Young’s forms of oppression (exploitation and marginalization) will be present in mostly adult narratives of LD due to the fact that significant employment usually does not start until after the conclusion of college.
The most pressing challenge facing Jim was his ability to maintain employment. Despite creating innovative solutions during his tenure in multiple positions, he was repeatedly fired due to his inability to conform to schedules; this theme was an old issue that was present during his schooling too. When Jim described his educational past, it was clearly seen that he endured violence. He suffered physical abuse at the hands of a father frustrated by Jim’s poor academic performance (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 11) and psychological abuse from his teachers. Jim stated that the “most satisfying moment of my educational career” was when his mother made a teacher who had accused him of lying about a missing assignment apologize to him (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 11). His narrative highlighted how violence (physical and psychological) functions as a tool of cultural imperialism that helps to maintain the status quo. Jim’s difficulties began during schooling and continued into his work career. Despite his struggles in both arenas, he never succumbed to powerlessness. In times of strife, he realized that “all I had left was tenacity. I wouldn’t give up” (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 16).

At least in terms of past K-12 educational experiences, the second adult account, Carolyn, echoes some of the themes from Jim’s account. In a similar vein to Jim, Carolyn possessed a quality that seemed to protect a positive sense of self. She relayed that, “I’ve always been happy. I think it’s temperament, and it’s the luckiest thing in the world. Even when I had every right not to be, I was always happy. I always found a way” (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 23). Carolyn admitted that, “The hardest thing about it (school) was getting teased so much” (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 24). One item that differentiates Carolyn’s narrative from Jim’s story was that she had a thriving career as a psychologist and went to Hallowell so he could “tell me I’d done a good job. That sounds infantile, I’m sure, but you can’t imagine what an effort it’s
been” (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 24). As opposed to seeking assistance, Carolyn went to Hallowell for confirmation.

The remaining adult account, Maria, was not an engaging story. Reading the narrative was frustrating because it seems like a lost opportunity to explore the concept of twice exceptional. Maria’s unique position is seen when she stated, “You see, my problem is that I don’t know if I am smart or stupid…I’ve been told that I am gifted and I’ve been told that I am slow. I don’t know what I am” (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 28). Unfortunately, Maria’s statement is prophetic—the audience is never able to gain a detailed image of her.

Although Hallowell may have wanted to give his patients “a framework to understand yourself and move on,” it could be argued that what he actually did for his adult patients was to help them develop positive niche locations (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 14). In the case of both Jim and Maria, they became entrepreneurs who started their own businesses; Jim created a software company and Maria began a specialized health club. While it could be argued that a successful resolution was fostered for each individual, Maria’s story could be interpreted as lost potential because she originally sought treatment because she was having difficulty finishing her dissertation. In regards to Carolyn, she had already created her positive niche location before encountering Hallowell. Her outgoing and empathetic nature easily translated into a career as a psychologist.

Hallowell can be viewed as a professional who is making a sincere effort to help individuals find areas where they can be successful. It is ironic that all of the adult accounts in Driven to Distraction contain protagonists who are entrepreneurs. In short, Hallowell is helping these individuals work around more established work systems. A disadvantage of that approach
is individuals have to have resources and/or social capital to mount such efforts. What happens to people who are located in less enviable social positions?

At this point, some preliminary findings from *Driven to Distraction* can be presented:

Table 3

Findings from *Driven to Distraction*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>None of the protagonists permanently succumb to powerlessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>The protagonists seem to have access to resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Violence can take both physical and psychological forms. School was the site of ongoing psychological violence for the adult protagonists.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Delivered from Distraction*

Eleven years had passed between the publication of *Driven to Distraction* and *Delivered from Distraction*. In regards to that time period, two questions emerge: Has Hallowell evolved as an artist/writer? Has his philosophical orientation evolved? In relation to the former question, the answer is sadly no. As for the latter query, the answer is encouragingly—yet frustratingly—yes. That frustration occurs because an affirmative answer to the second question most likely results in a similar response to the first question.

Before delving into those two questions, the demographic information of the protagonists is listed below:
### Table 4

Demographic Information of Protagonists in *Delivered from Distraction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob Lobel</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>sports anchor for WBZ-TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Neelman</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>CEO of JetBlue Airways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Edward Hallowell</td>
<td>undetermined</td>
<td>psychiatrist and activist?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since Hallowell’s own story of transformation is the hallmark of *Delivered from Distraction*, he is listed as one of the primary protagonists. As opposed to the three narratives (two of which were families) which Hallowell purports as being “Three Stories That Tell The Story,” the only narratives that evidence heavy direct quotation of the protagonist are that of Bob Lobel and David Neelman.

Before discussing the narratives of the non-fictional figures of Lobel and Neelman, a previous issue needs to be revisited. As was the case in his preceding text, Hallowell does not capture the authentic voices of children—even when he speaks about his own offspring. He rarely allows children to speak and filters narratives through parents’ or his own perspective. The infrequency of child protagonists speaking is even seen in a chapter dedicated to one child, Jeb. Hallowell’s approach reduces the boy to a one-dimensional character and it reinforces the notion that he writes primarily for adult audiences.

Since there was concern expressed earlier in this study about Hallowell’s celebrity-expert status, it was deemed ironic (but understandable) that he utilized well known current figures (Bob Lobel and David Neelman) to serve as his examples of individuals living with ADD. As
opposed to the entrepreneurs presented in *Driven to Distraction*, it was beneficial to see that the two men, Bob Lobel and David Neelman, were presently successfully working in large organizations. Since both men were framed as examples of success, their stories were somewhat anticlimactic; they were both examples of the super-crip image of disability which depicts individuals as "courageous or heroic super achievers" (Shapiro, 1994, p. 16). Overall, their narratives did not contain the same degree of tension and flavor which made the stories of Jim and Carolyn engaging.

Bob Lobel’s narrative can be best described as innocuous. In the context of the accounts examined in this study up this point, his most noteworthy statement was: “I love to ad-lib. I think outside the box. That’s why I think of ADD as a gift, not as a liability” (Hallowell, 2005, p. 30). Although his stance of ADD being a positive trait is somewhat radical, his successful career, relatively unchallenging past academic life, and jovial personality makes application of the paradigms unnecessary. Bob’s uncritical nature combined with lack of strife would make the application of the analysis criteria an unnecessary exercise.

In contrast to Bob Lobel’s narrative, David Neelman’s story is more enlightening. When viewed from a radical structuralist perspective, school was an oppressive force. He stated, “I grew up thinking I was the biggest idiot in the planet…By the time I got to high school I was getting pretty good grades but I wasn’t taking anything hard. I was basically BS-ing my teachers. I felt inferior” (Hallowell, 2005, pp. 24 – 25). His poor self-concept shows both his temporary powerlessness and his belief of his deviation from the norm (cultural imperialism). The conclusion to Neelman’s story is even more surprising considering he eventually dropped out of college.
Although Neelman was working at a large corporation by the end of his account, his success is primarily due to his entrepreneurial beginning. At this juncture, the entrepreneurial spirit (seen in four of five adult accounts or five of six accounts considering Hallowell’s multifaceted career) can be construed constructively as a positive niche location or negatively as a reaction to marginalization. That issue is personally relevant to me and will be revisited later in the study.

Despite his withdrawal from college, Neelman never criticizes schools. In the same vein as Lobel, he views ADD as having some positive aspects. At one point, he states, “My ability to know what’s important…this is the thing we have to focus on…that’s my greatest talent today. I think it goes with ADD” (Hallowell, 2005, p. 34). It would be difficult to say he reaches a self-awareness that allows him to serve as an advocate.

If Driven to Distraction and Delivered from Distraction are considered one work, the truly dynamic character would be Hallowell. His growth and change are evident and his narrative demonstrates that all four paradigms can be successfully applied for analysis purposes. The following quotations from Delivered from Distraction demonstrate Hallowell’s evolution:

- “The best way to think of ADD is not as a mental disorder but as a collection of traits and tendencies that define a way of being in the world” (p. XXX).
- “I call it Attention Surplus Disorder. They did exactly what they were told as children, told on others who did not, and now make a living doing what they’re told, telling others what to do, and telling on those who don’t” (p. 22).
- “But the intervention I needed most I got. It was Mrs. Eldredge’s arm. Her arm took fear out of my learning to read. Her arm made it so I felt no shame in having the kind of brain I have” (p. 145).
- “People build joyful, fulfilling lives not on remediated weaknesses but on developed strengths” (p. 187).
“No matter what the age of a child, or the learning style or so-called disability, the first priority in this school system is to look for talents and strengths” (p. 190).

At this point, it is advantageous to return to our previous model:

Figure 7
Interconnectedness of the Utilized Paradigms

Although Hallowell presents instances of oppression from the accounts throughout both texts, he never directly stated the cause of the repression in his first text. The last two bullets demonstrate that he is aware and willing to acknowledge the failings of schools. The two comments are a direct, yet respectful and tactful, admonishment of current K–12 school philosophy. At the conclusion of the text, it could be argued that he presents a relatively developed radical structuralist critique.

When Hallowell states that ADD is a “way of being in the world,” he shows a sense of self-awareness that indicates his personal Frieren struggle; according to the parameters of this study, he is a radical humanist. Besides the applicability of radical structuralist critique and radical humanist critique being feasible components of disability studies in education, DSE is defined by its unique characteristic of political action. Part of DSE’s political action is the reframing of terms, i.e., disability arguments become conversations regarding ableism. Although there is a high degree of sarcasm when Hallowell mentions, “Attention Surplus Disorder,” there
is a tangible element of truth to it. More importantly, his statement shows his willingness to view the world in a new way and is reminiscent of a DSE mindset.

The findings from *Delivered from Distraction* not only echo the previous discoveries from *Driven to Distraction* but also add some additional findings:

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings from <em>Delivered from Distractions</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.  An entrepreneurial spirit is demonstrated by nearly all of the adult protagonists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The actions of just one person can serve as a life-altering and life-affirming positive niche location for a student.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hallowell’s praise and admiration for Mrs. Eldredge is the evidence for the second finding from the above list. Mrs. Eldredge had created a lasting and internalized effect upon Hallowell. As he succinctly states it, “That (Mrs. Eldredge’s) arm has stayed around me ever since first grade” (2005, p. 145). Her assistance eventually enabled him to flourish and evolve. In fact, a chapter from the text, “An Evil, an Illness, or a Kind of Mind? From Stigma to Science,” describes his developing understanding of ADD. While recounting the historical context for ADD, Hallowell states, “With the help of the lens of science, a medical diagnosis could take the place of the moral diagnosis (evil), but only if people were willing to use the new lens” (2005, p. 53). Hallowell’s philosophical evolution proves his willingness to try new lenses.
Mass Market/Popular Culture: Neurodiversity

*Learning Outside the Lines*

I can now laugh when reflecting upon the fact that *Learning Outside the Lines: Two Ivy League Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD Give You the Tools for Academic Success and Educational Revolution* (Cole & Mooney, 2000) was initially considered as being in binary opposition to Hallowell’s texts. Besides the ironic fact that Hallowell wrote the introduction for *Learning Outside the Lines*, when this text is considered in conjunction with *The Short Bus* (Mooney, 2007), it becomes another example of personal growth. Whereas Hallowell’s growth was seen in the previous analysis, Mooney’s evolution is witnessed in the analysis of his two texts. Both authors begin their journeys by sharing their own origin narratives; they ultimately continue their narratives by presenting the stories of others in a manner that allows them the opportunity to contemplate their lives in relation to those stories.

At this point, it is appropriate to examine the two protagonists of *Learning Outside the Lines*:

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Race:</th>
<th>Learning Disability:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Mooney</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Cole</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the two Hallowell texts dealt exclusively with ADD, Mooney’s story adds another dimension to the study. It should be noted that Hallowell and David Neelman are most likely
dyslexic; their status was never directly stated. As is the case with the texts examined up to point, the protagonists are most likely Caucasian and of middle class status.

An intriguing dilemma, or more precisely challenge, presented by *Learning Outside the Lines* was its structure. It can be described broadly as a work divided into three parts: an educational philosophy comprised of a jointly written introduction and conclusion/epilogue, a study skills/academic advice section, and the individual personal narrative of each protagonist. Since each of the sections can stand mostly independently, I felt comfortable excluding the study skills/academic advice section from this study. In the same vein as Hallowell, it can be argued that Cole and Mooney were able to have this book published because their status as Ivy League students granted them leverage that allowed them to minimize the impact of the stigma attached with being LD.

Even though there are purportedly jointly written sections of the work, the voice of those chapters is distinctively Mooney’s. For that reason, David Cole’s account is examined first. It should be acknowledged that while the personal narratives (Mooney and Cole) yield results when analyzed by all of the paradigms, it is the jointly written sections which demonstrate the political ramifications of the work. Although their personal educational philosophies are present in their narratives, it is in the jointly written sections that those stances are codified.

Whereas there was some trepidation of the application of the analysis rubrics in Hallowell’s accounts, David Cole’s narrative makes that concern unfounded. As for the types of depicted oppression, they are listed with their corresponding evidence:

- Violence: “In-school suspension happened in a small cubicle of a room. . . .Five feet wide and eight feet long, no natural light, no door. . . .And a desk and a chair. . . .All day. Six hours sitting still. Hate” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 56).
• Powerlessness: “I was embarrassed because of me” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 53). The first bullet describes Cole’s experiences at in-school suspensions at his public school; the description is reminiscent of jail. His physical exclusion from his classes is school’s equivalent of solitary confinement. As is the case with jail, this isolation rarely has a calming effect and only destabilizes an individual’s psychological welfare. There was no educational motive for Cole’s in-school suspensions—they were simply punishments that only increased his rage. Over time, Cole’s many academic failures led him to being an itinerant student that viewed himself as an embarrassment.

As for radical humanist analysis of Cole’s account, his sense of self-awareness seems to have occurred at his positive niche location (Landmark College). While reflecting upon the institution, he states, “I live with a different perception but now, after twenty-four-plus years, it sure is a different way of beingthinkingacting” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 58). Cole was able to arrive at that state because of his success at Landmark College. The project-laden curriculum of the college let him express his intelligence in novel ways, i.e., a steel sculpture for his English final project.

At least in Learning Outside the Lines, Mooney never seems to find his positive niche location. He may describe situations that approach that status, but they are fleeting. I would argue that The Short Bus is his figurative continuation of that search. When his narrative from Learning Outside the Lines is examined, some of the same themes seen in Cole’s story appear. Physical exclusion from the traditional classroom—in Mooney’s case reading services during his elementary years—resulted in verbal abuse. Mooney stated that when he had to leave the regular classroom for reading support services in elementary school, the students from the gifted and talented program (GATE) “just laughed [at me] and called me stupid” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p.
Also, the issue of student grouping came to light in Mooney’s story. Student grouping, i.e., reading groups based on judged ability and that required oral reading, can have the same negative effect as physical exclusion from the classroom. Mooney states, “During reading I was so angry and ashamed I could taste my stomach acid...I used to imagine killing the teacher” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 31). So, by witnessing their reflections upon their K-12 experiences, it can be seen that Cole was at times filled with hate and Mooney on occasion wanted to kill his teacher. Besides the lost individual potential, what violent tragedies can befall society when suffering students like these meet during the height of their struggles?

In some of the previous narratives, it was seen that one individual could constitute the positive difference in an individual’s life. Mooney’s narrative highlights a converse to that idea; one individual can be a destroyer of a student’s life. The object of Mooney’s imagined murderous intentions, Mrs. C (second grade teacher), broke his spirit. Mooney states, “I learned that year to hide in the bathroom to escape reading out loud. In the bathroom, I would stare at the mirror, hoping to God that no one walked in on me crying” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 31). Mrs. C’s insistence that students read aloud is representative of the inflexibility of some educators and, by extension, schools. As opposed to being an empowering activity, reading became associated with trauma.

Mooney, like Cole, struggled with substance abuse problems and changed schools multiple times throughout his K–12 experience. Unlike Cole, Mooney seems to have achieved a greater self-awareness at a relatively early age. During his high school years Mooney aspired to be an AP student and admitted, “I wanted to be like them, but I simultaneously hated them with a passion” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 41). It was not until late in high school that he truly understood how schools are structured and function. This discovery is expressed when Mooney
relays, “But the most frightening thing that I grew to understand that year is how intelligence is a construct, and the rules of that environment, where form is the gatekeeper to content, did make them smarter than I was” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 42). Although the description applies to an AP English class, it is easily applicable to schools as a whole.

In regards to viewing Mooney through a DSE lens, the book itself can serve as an example of protest. The epilogue of the book, “Project Eye-to-Eye,” confirms Mooney’s status as an advocate. Project Eye-to-Eye is a mentoring group whose mission is “to empower the LD/ADHD community by challenging the pathological social and institutional ideology that surrounds LD/ADHD. Our method is to bring LD/ADHD college students into the lives of LD/ADHD elementary school students as role models, tutors, and mentors” (Cole & Mooney, 2000, p. 269). As opposed to Learning Outside the Lines’ goal of enabling students to survive in schools, Project Eye-to-Eye attempts to change schools and societal perception. As an aside, it should be noted that Edward Hallowell is presently on the advisory board of the group. I would surmise that his philosophical evolution continues.

At this juncture, the findings for Learning Outside the Lines is listed below:

Table 7

Findings from Learning Outside the Lines

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Physical isolation from the regular classroom—whether it be disciplinary or instructional—can function as a form of oppression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>If done improperly, instructional grouping can be damaging to the psyche.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Education is a health issue. The emotional components of LDs can lead individuals to substance abuse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. LD students can benefit from a project-based curriculum.

V. A single individual can traumatize a student’s educational expectations.

Although the significance of findings will be discussed in Chapter 5, the last listed finding is personally moving and requires immediate response. At this point of the analysis, the potentially hugely positive or negative impact of a teacher has been seen. Those findings can allow the teacher to be reframed as a collaborator; in one context, a teacher can be an ally pursuing a common goal, and in another, a teacher can be a conspiring agent of an oppressive system.

_The Short Bus_

Mooney’s second work is a complex text that is difficult to categorize. As opposed to focusing simply on LDs as he did in his first text, _The Short Bus_ examines disability broadly under the inclusive umbrella of difference. Besides providing the narratives of many individuals, the book accomplishes the following items: depth is given to Mooney’s personal education narrative, a number of disabilities are defined, a clear and accessible historical context for some disabilities are provided, the major tenets of the disability rights (and studies) movements are described and commentary is provided regarding the communities in which many of the accounts occur.

Although I commend Mooney for his writing, some reservations remain in regards to the intended audience for the piece and the degree of fictionalization that may have occurred. Regardless of the undetermined audience of the work, does the text reach young readers who may be in the midst of their own personal crisis? As for fictionalization, Mooney undergoes a great change after meeting nearly every protagonist in the text; on a personal level, I hope Mooney’s transformations occurred as described, but my skepticism remains. Mooney’s
personal *Travels with Charley* (Steinbeck, 1962) is insightful and engaging, but it must be remembered that Steinbeck was primarily a novelist.

Since this study is structured around the narratives of LD individuals, many of the stories presented in *The Short Bus* needed to be excluded. Some of those excluded stories contain tales of: physical disabilities, development disorders, autism/Asperger’s Syndrome, and even mental illness. Collectively, those stories (including the LD accounts) question the nature and ownership of pathology designations as well as the fundamental philosophical question of human worth. The freedom of the book format allowed Mooney the opportunity to ponder these and other immense questions and the stream of consciousness approach of the text stands in contrast with the formal structure of the academic study.

When the accounts are narrowed down to simply LDs, there exists a total of five tales (excluding Mooney). The demographic information of the protagonists is listed below:

Table 8

Demographic Information of Protagonists in *The Short Bus*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Race:</th>
<th>Learning Disability:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kent Roberts</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>ADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby Glass</td>
<td>teenager</td>
<td>undetermined</td>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>undetermined</td>
<td>unspecified LD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>undetermined</td>
<td>Dyslexia and LD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles “Alec” Davis</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>LD/ADD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

("half black, half Jewish", p. 221)
Out of the texts examined up this point in the study, *The Short Bus* is noteworthy because of the youth of the protagonists. It should be noted the one adult’s name (Kent Roberts) is not an alias. Conversely, the identities of the remaining protagonists have been maintained by using false names.

In many ways, Kent Roberts is representative of the individuals who were excluded from this study. Although he is described as having ADD, his unique nature makes him a candidate for possessing Asperger’s or even being mentally ill. The dilemma surrounding Roberts’s status demonstrates the arbitrariness (and temporality) of labels; if Roberts were a child today, my professional experiences would lead me to believe he would be diagnosed as having Asperger’s. His Bohemian/nonconventional lifestyle makes the reader ponder whether Roberts’s inability to achieve the dominant societal definition of a successful life is the true grounds for his being labeled.

Kent Roberts is a performance artist, author, and comedian. He failed out of Brown University. When he is seen in the text he is close to destitute and is on the verge of a divorce. He had mostly negative elementary school experiences which are highlighted with the description of the following two teachers:

- **Mrs. M** (second grade teacher): “the devil creature…[had] a good heart locked inside her, solidly locked up, so it wouldn’t distract her when she needed to scream her lungs out at the eight-year-olds” (Mooney, 2007, p. 80).

- **Mrs. C** (elementary school teacher): “One day she told the class that everyone thought they were so special, but everyone in there was just like some other student she’d had before” (Mooney, 2007, p. 80).

Obviously, Roberts regards his teachers as destroyers of students’ self-concept. Overall, he expresses, “What a sad, sad place a school can be” (Mooney, 2007, p. 81). His account provides the impression that he is a perpetual outsider in the education system.
In regards to a radical humanist perspective, Roberts possess a great deal of self-awareness. Through his art he protests both conventional customs and society. In relation to a disabilities studies perspective, it is difficult to deem him a DSE supporter because he seems to protest on behalf of an unlimited number of issues. Even the designation of anarchist would not encapsulate his core being. Roberts’s art is a double-edged sword; it serves as his positive niche location but at the same time it contributes to his isolation. Regardless, it should be his right to decide the role art plays in his life.

As for the young protagonists presented by Mooney, they collectively represent a complete personal journey. Each of them can represent a different stage (or trajectory) of one’s personal journey towards a critical consciousness. In the beginning of the text, Mooney states that he is taking his trip for Bobby and Clay, two students he had previously met during a promotional tour. Bobby is a sixth grade dyslexic student who once declared, “You know I snapped once. I had had enough” (Mooney, 2007, p. 4); he had unsuccessfully attempted suicide. On the other hand there was Clay, an LD student who seemed to be struggling with his SE placement and had mockingly reworded the lyrics of the song, “The Wheels on the Bus,” to include the “short bus.” His act is undoubtedly intertwined with the title of the text. In contrast to Bobby, Clay can be considered as a more hopeful figure because he is rejecting his status, but what tangible results does he achieve?

Brent’s narrative is more detailed than that of Bobby or Clay. When his story is presented, his family is in the process of suing the local school district so he can continue his Orton Gillingham instruction (a multisensory reading program). As Mooney succinctly stated, “Brent was at the point in his life where he would have to decide whether they (school) were right about him” (2007, p. 56). Symbolically, he is at the turning point of one’s journey. As is
the case with most of the individuals whose stories have been presented in this study up to this point, he feels excluded and is oppressed in school. Brent states, “The other kids make fun of me…You know I’m way in the back of the classroom with the book and the teacher is reading to the other kids. I just feel left out” (Mooney, 2007, p. 52). At no point in his narrative does Brent accept others’ negative perception of him.

Although Mooney describes soccer as Brent’s passion, it can be argued that paintball is his true love; paintball can be considered Brent’s positive niche location. I concur with and will restate the following statement by Mooney: “In all the literature on LD and in all the stories from kids like Brent that I’ve heard, the kids who survive have something that they care about, some place they go where all the talk of deficits and disorders disappears” (2007, p. 51). Mooney seems to have described positive niche locations; it is regrettable that Brent does not encounter a positive niche location that occurs in the school environment.

The last adolescent figure in the text, Miles/Alec, provides closure to the metanarrative that began with Bobby and Clay. Miles is the last person to accompany Mooney on his journey. He is described in terms of being a twice exceptional student; his extremely high IQ causes him to be considered lazy by school. His sense of isolation is school is tangible. Although he has the option to attend community college and avoid the assaults and intimidation he endures in high school, he doesn’t pursue that option because, “I don’t want to be the freak kid in college, you know” (Mooney, 2007, p. 225). Miles is caught between multiple worlds.

Just like Mooney, Miles feels more secure in himself because of his interaction with other unique individuals encountered during the trip. Near the end of the text, Mooney declared, “Miles was not Miles anymore. He had changed his name to Alec. I had forgotten, ignoring his most courageous act of self-invention” (2007, p. 260). Miles’s transformation to Alec is a
positive event that may have begun before his journey with Mooney. His evolution shows that LD students can create a new sense of self even if they endured a negative beginning at school. It could be speculated that the young protagonists presented by Mooney are representative of certain aspects of himself at various stages—not necessarily linear—of his life.

The findings for *The Short Bus* are listed below:

Table 9

Findings from *The Short Bus*

| I. | Diagnostic labels are constantly evolving; an individual’s label could be changed if judged by current criteria. |
| II. | Besides being a health issue, education can also be considered as a short term and long term safety issue. |
| III. | Arts and sports programs can serve as positive niche locations for students; this phenomenon is most likely even more pertinent to LD students. |

**Research**

*All Kinds of Minds*

As the second half of this study begins, it is worth highlighting that the findings up to this point accomplish multiple purposes: they confirm many of the unsubstantiated truths bandied about by educators regarding schools or LD students and serve as a form of invention because it utilized texts in a new manner. Additionally, the study itself is a manifestation of DSE that is essentially an act of protest against the traditional configuration of the K-12 education system.
Just as Hallowell and Mooney experienced transformations, I find myself undergoing a similar heightened awareness. It is appropriate that the next examined text will be the dissertation, *All Kinds of Minds*, a work by a self-identified LD author (James Winn); the similarity of goals between my study and Winn’s is undeniable. In fact, Winn’s findings mirror many of mine up to this point; the findings from both works will be presented shortly. The ramifications of those similar findings are listed below:

- Since many of Winn’s findings replicate my findings, the approach of my study can be viewed with confidence.
- Even if this study is viewed as redundant by some individuals, my study’s larger sample size/number of accounts only reinforces Winn’s findings and vice-versa.

Since DSE is a relatively new discipline, it would be difficult to deem a study as not growing the field. As compared to traditional qualitative studies that utilized questionnaires and interviews but only had a few subjects, the breadth of this study is *by comparison* more quantitative in nature; the larger number of accounts allows for greater argumentation of the findings as grounds for policy measures. Although I personally find Winn’s study to be insightful, the number of subjects—six—may be deemed as irrelevant by some because they may construe those individuals’ experiences as isolated instances instead of institutional injustices; a tenet of quantitative research is that larger sample sizes increase the likelihood of valid results.

The findings between the two studies are listed below:
Table 10

Shared Findings between *Courage to Speak, Fortitude to Listen* and *All Kinds of Minds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings (to date) in <em>Courage to Speak, Fortitude to Listen:</em></th>
<th>Five Themes Observed in <em>All Kinds of Minds</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. None of the protagonists permanently succumb to powerlessness.</td>
<td>1) labeling is disabling [The received LD designations caused damage to self-concept and lowered the expectations of others].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The protagonists seem to have access to resources.</td>
<td>2) the emotional side revealed [LD individuals’ status within schools caused immense emotional distress].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Violence can take both physical and psychological forms. School was the site of ongoing psychological violence for the adult protagonists.</td>
<td>3) exclusion and marginalization [Physical isolation for instruction often led to social isolation that created and worsened marginalization].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. An entrepreneurial spirit is demonstrated by nearly all of the adult protagonists.</td>
<td>4) the relevance of context [An individual’s learning difference could be advantageous or disabling depending on the context/environment].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The actions of just one person can serve as a life-altering and life-affirming positive niche location for a student.</td>
<td>5) reframing and redefining self [At some point, individuals reject the LD label and develop a more positive sense of self-concept].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Physical isolation from the regular classroom—whether it be disciplinary or instructional—can function as a form of oppression.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. If done improperly, instructional grouping can be damaging to the psyche.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Education is a health issue. The emotional components of LDs can lead individuals to substance abuse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. LD students can benefit from a project-based curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. A single individual can traumatize a student’s educational expectations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
XI. Diagnostic labels are constantly evolving; an individual’s label could be changed if judged by current criteria.

XII. Besides being a health issue, education can also be considered as a short-term and long-term safety issue.

XIII. Arts and sports programs can serve as positive niche locations for students; this phenomenon is most likely even more pertinent to LD students.

None of the findings are contradictory. In fact, many of the findings could be considered subsections or restatements of the other. Instead of proceeding with exercises of matching or hierarchy-making among all of the findings, it may be more productive to acknowledge that the five themes discovered by Winn are reflective of the theoretical paradigms utilized for my study.

As has been the process for most of this study, the demographic information of the protagonists of the particular text would be presented at this point. It should be established from the onset that the protagonists presented in *All Kinds of Minds* are predominantly male, middle class, highly educated (two of the individuals possess Ph.Ds.), and established authors and speakers. Although race is not explicitly presented, Caucasian seems to be represented most frequently. *All Kinds of Minds* presents demographic information in muted watercolors as opposed to the vivid oils which are used to complete the remaining details in the portraits of the protagonists.

So, with the challenges deriving and the general inherent limitations described, the demographic information of the protagonists of *All Kinds of Minds* is presented below:
Table 11

Demographic Information of Protagonists in *All Kinds of Minds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>university department chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>author and speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>entrepreneur/university lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodney</td>
<td>author and speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>master’s degree student/corporate worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously, most of the individuals chose professions in which communication skills, albeit speaking as well as written, are valued. It can be reasoned that Winn strategically selected traditionally successful individuals who are established storytellers as the subjects of his study; he chose individuals who are perceived as being vocal.

The one exception to the above description of the protagonists, Christine, forces to the forefront the intertwined issues of diversity and intersectionality. If the demographic information of the protagonists in *All Kinds of Minds* is consolidated within this study, it is seen that 18 of the 24 accounts are centered on white males who declare an ADD and/or dyslexic status and are from mostly middle class backgrounds; broadly, 75 percent of the accounts are from white males. Due to some combination of the requirements of particular genres and the
directive to maintain anonymity, the demographic information obtained so far has to be considered judiciously.

An uneasy feeling occurs when examining Winn’s study; due to its structure, there is a sense that his findings overshadow the presented individuals. More precisely, because the accounts are presented through interviews, the reader has more difficulty piecing together an individual’s representative narrative as compared to the works examined earlier in this study. Another uneasiness posed by analyzing Winn’s study was the felt dilemma of trying to prove correct Winn’s findings, or conversely, my findings up to this point. Any attempt at direct verification—of Winn’s findings or my findings—seemed redundant and awkward and possibly even unethical.

Instead of being forced into a tenuous situation, a decision was made to partake in a more advantageous and grounded-in-research-methods approach that looked beyond the themes discovered by Winn; the direct “admonitions” from the protagonists and the flashes of Winn’s own narrative were compelling pieces which held the potential to provide many insights. In regards to the admonitions, the proper term was used. The protagonists’ statements are edicts because these individuals can be considered expert learners because of their unique positions and life experiences. It was laudable that they were given the opportunity to go beyond simply describing their experiences and that their recommendations were solicited.

Just a few words from each protagonist’s admonition encapsulates their hopes as well as their philosophical positions. These declarations are listed below:

- Benjamin: “You have to have hope. I was a victim and now I’m the master of my own destiny” (p. 83).
• Rodney: “And that you should invest in figuring out what can be the gatekeeper to creating a new niche for yourself… school often doesn't do a good job of valuing skill sets that translate to life success” (p. 84).

• Christine: “I choose not to think of it as a disability, but as a difference… And when that teacher beat me… I now understand [the beating] was profound human rights abuse and pathological” (p. 84).

• Robert: “Students don't really care how much a teacher knows until they know how much a teacher cares” (p. 84).

• David: “And you quit listening to and accepting what people are telling you” (p. 85).

In a broad sense, all of the protagonists demonstrate a well-developed sense of awareness of either themselves and/or their environments. The protagonists recognize both how they are being oppressed by the institution of school and the need to reject school’s definition of them. Collectively, the group members are advocates because they go beyond simply protest or agency for themselves but contribute to the proverbial “common good.” At one point, Richard states, “For me that is the real key now is to help other people see their own gifts, because I know if they do they will start seeing it in other people around them as well. Goodness begets goodness” (Winn, 2010, p. 84). It is heartening to know that Richard is an educator.

Like all of the authors mentioned so far in this study, Winn’s personal narrative is present in All Kinds of Minds but it is challenging to discern. Glimpses of his humanity are present when he speaks about “my feelings of guilt that my children struggle in school and with preconceptions that genetics play a part” (Winn, 2010, p. 51) and describing “Tears slowly rolling down cheeks, anger emerging in voice, and frustration gleaming from participant’s eyes [that] allowed me to begin to see and understand the extent of how profoundly emotional this experience [LD] is” (Winn, 2010, p. 67). In the research struggle of “authenticity vs. objectivity,” he chose the ideal of objectivity. At one point, Winn stated, “I reflected on these experiences [my schooling] again and again until I was able to disconnect myself from those
memories and set aside any application they might have to this study” (2010, p. 51). Winn’s action truly can only be achieved partially. Setting the issues of research protocols and theory aside, Winn asks more of his subjects (at least narrowly defined to the context of this study) than he himself apparently provided. I constructively offer that statement in the hopes of having learned more of his story. Was his voice obfuscated in the quest for objectivity?

Harkening back to the demographic information of the protagonists encountered up to this point, there exists a clear need to focus upon LD narratives of individuals from the following demographic categories: females, racial minorities, and LDs other than dyslexia and/or ADHD. I hesitantly make that declaration because everyone’s story has worth. When individuals are seen only in terms of categories, unique and surprising elements of their stories are overlooked. In regards to my own narrative, I lost a parent to an aggressive and brutal cancer when I was seventeen. Just for the sake of argument, let’s say that experience may lead me to define a situation as inconvenient or unpleasant as opposed to disabling; my conception of disabling may require a higher degree of strife than others. Since a person can be considered to be the exact accumulation and intersection of a lifetime’s worth of memories and experiences, there is a uniqueness inherent in everyone that cannot be replicated.

Although an ample amount of analysis has been spent comparing the results of All Kinds of Minds to the results of this study so far, the accounts within Winn’s work allow for the refinement of one finding and the discovery of another for this study. Those new findings are listed below:
Table 12

Findings from *All Kinds of Minds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XI.</th>
<th>Diagnostic labels are constantly evolving; an individual’s label could be changed if judged by current criteria. Depending on the particular environment, the application of the label can have dire consequence. (revised)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XIV.</td>
<td>Independence is most likely the commonality between entrepreneurial enterprises for adults and the arts for children serving as positive niche locations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Niche Market: Academics

If the findings of the study so far are integrated into larger categories, a fairly consistent pattern emerges:

Figure 8

The Impact of Context upon Experiencing LDs

An individual’s unique experiencing of a LD depends upon the context in which it is occurring. The above diagram depicts three factors (location, teacher(s), and learner disposition) seen in this study that help to construct context. Understandably, this overall structure is reflective of the theoretical paradigms of the study: learner disposition (radical humanism), encountered teacher(s)—the daily direct representative of schools (radical structuralism), and location (whose
subcomponent, positive niche location, stresses a psychological stance that has already been stated). Hence, an analysis that utilizes the above structure is consistent with the approach that has been applied throughout this study; the structure is an evolved and more succinct visual representation of the analysis process. As previously stated in the methodology section of this study (p. 42), there is potential for organic reorganization with accompanying change in trajectory of the overall project; the above diagram is an example of such a natural reorganization.

Since it has been stated a goal of research may be the development of improved research questions (N. Michelli, CUNY GSE Urban Education Exam II, 2013), it seems appropriate that the question of what constitutes context in relation to experiencing LD should remain in the forefront of the analysis of the remaining texts, the anthologies *Learning Disabilities and Life Stories* (2001) and *Listening to the Experts* (2006). Although this study has focused on the school environment, a cursory consideration of the narratives seems to show a similar dynamic of oppression present in the school and work environments for some LD individuals.

In regards to demographic diversity, the two anthologies significantly add to the study. Both genders are equally represented in the works. In regards to the types of LDs, the anthologies go beyond simply ADD and dyslexia. It should be noted that expressive language (written and/or oral) seems to be the commonality among all the encountered LDs in both this study and the anthologies; it was surprising that a narrative involving dyscalculia (“a wide range of lifelong learning disabilities involving math,” www.nclld.org) never materialized for analysis. That phenomenon highlights the importance of traditional literacy in schools.

Excluding the young protagonists presented by Mooney in *The Short Bus*, nearly all of the accounts possess a reflective quality; the protagonists are years removed from their LD
diagnosis and/or their struggles in school. *Learning Disabilities and Life Stories* is unique because there is a sense of immediacy to the works. Half of the narratives pertain to recently diagnosed college students who are coming to terms with the recent revelation. Since the high school age protagonists in *Listening to the Experts* were diagnosed in elementary school, there is a degree of reflection to the work. As opposed to dealing with the short-term shock of a diagnosis, the students are in the midst of navigating the ramifications of LD status in school. Although it may be better described as adding to variety, the real time aspect of the storytelling in the anthologies indirectly contributes to age diversity within the overall pool of protagonists of the study.

*Learning Disabilities and Life Stories*

Since the editors of *Listening to the Experts* admitted that, “After reading the anthology’s [Learning Disabilities and Life Stories] accounts of adults with learning disabilities as they reflected on their high school years, we were eager to hear from high school students themselves” (Duff, Keefe, Moore, 2006, p. xvii), it is appropriate to take a chronological approach and begin with an analysis of *Learning Disabilities and Life Stories*. In contrast to the other texts analyzed up to this point, an exact age of LD diagnosis of the protagonists was consistently provided. The demographic information regarding the protagonists is listed below:
Table 13
Demographic Information of Protagonists in *Learning Disabilities and Life Stories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title of Account</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Queen</td>
<td>“Blake Academy and the Green Arrow”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13 dyslexia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Pelkey</td>
<td>“In the LD Bubble”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Elementary school &amp; early 20s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Piziali</td>
<td>“Revolution”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13 Sequencing of thought and words</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie Jackson</td>
<td>“Look in the Mirror and See What I See”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19/20 Undefined</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Sanders</td>
<td>“Trusting My Strengths”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19/20 Undefined</td>
<td>African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gretchen O’Connor</td>
<td>“Bad”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13 ADHD</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Green</td>
<td>“ADHD: Window, Weapon, or Support”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20/21</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Auditory processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velvet Cunningham</td>
<td>“Lovelet”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>dyslexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garett Day</td>
<td>“Finally Saying What I Mean”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>partial diagnosis at very young age &amp; college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>auditory and linguistic processing deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Marshall, Jr.</td>
<td>“I Will Not Succumb to Obstacles”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19/20</td>
<td>dyslexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Miskell</td>
<td>“Learning to Raise My Hand”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>language-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Vee</td>
<td>“Riding the Drug and Alcohol Train”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>auditory discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison May</td>
<td>“Figuring Out My World”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18/19</td>
<td>visual and auditory dyslexia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It should be noted that aliases were used for some of the individuals and demographic information was excluded for one individual, Garett Day. Additionally, the economic status of each individual was presented in broad strokes. In relation to this study, the early age of diagnosis is intriguing; if diagnosis is considered synonymous with labeling, an analysis of those diagnosed at an early age may provide insights regarding the effects of labeling. The term, “diagnosis,” is used hesitantly; its utilization is not an endorsement of the pathology view of disability.

An LD diagnosis (and hence being labeled) is the institutional entrance to the LD experience. In *Learning Disabilities and Life Stories*, there are six protagonists (three males and three females) who were diagnosed with a LD at a young age (ranging from 4-years-old to 16-years-old). Collectively, the early diagnosis corresponded with later drug abuse for four of the six individuals and diminished self-concept for nearly all of them. Instead of being an assistance, the diagnosis seemed to be a hindrance to the protagonists; the internalized negative conception of themselves may have made drugs seem like an escape from the daily struggles that were at least partly due to their LD status.

The narrative, “Riding the Drug and Alcohol Train,” causes the reader to ponder the relationship between LD and other factors such as parental involvement and drug abuse—to name only a few. At one point, the protagonist, Nelson, relays, “My parents never entered my world and I barely entered theirs,” and “Pot was my lover, friend, mother, and companion” (Boscardin, et al., 2001, p. 138 & p. 140). Were drugs a substitute for love and support from his parents? Where does LD fit into his narrative? On the first page of his narrative, the protagonist (Nelson) states, “I’m fucking 33 years old. I’ve been fighting this shit all my life…At 33, I don’t
understand my LD” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 135). Without being facetious, I agree with Nelson’s assessment of himself in regards to his LD.

On the other hand, two female protagonists of these accounts (Velvet Cunningham of “Lovelet” and Gretchen O’Connor of “Bad”) provide accounts that are beneficial because they highlight how LD can be an experience that encompasses the interaction between the actions taken by schools and students’ reaction to those measures. In regards to the emotional impact of LD, Velvet relayed that in her local public school, she was “always five minutes late, so the smart kids would not see me going into the SPED class” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 88). Sadly, when Velvet later attended a specialized SE school, she described it as making her “feel like all the horrible feelings I had about myself were true: dumb, stupid, incompetent, ignorant, lazy, useless-as-a-human-being, ugly, mental, etc” (Boscardin, et al., 2001, p. 89). Velvet’s narrative clearly expresses the shame and self-loathing that can be experienced by LD students.

In contrast to Velvet, Gretchen’s account succinctly describes how some schools mistreat LD students. Over the course of her story, Gretchen relays, “My teachers overlooked my learning problems and focused on my behaviors...everyone wanted to know what was wrong with me rather than just seeing the energy and passion that I had for so many things” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 66 & 72). Instead of simply casting aspersions because of her situation, Gretchen insightfully commented that a majority of schools have “a set curriculum and routine method of teaching, but it is ridiculous to believe that all children will be stimulated by the same things. The problem is that not all classroom settings incorporate a multimodal form of teaching” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 71). There is an underlying general sense of rigidity on the part of schools in both Gretchen’s and Velvet’s narratives. School’s apparent innate inflexibility led to an exclusion of Gretchen and Velvet that they eventually internalized and was manifested by
either their seclusion or self-segregation. It wasn’t until later in life that these women were able to positively negotiate the challenges (i.e., drug abuse and abusive relationships) that were indiscernibly intertwined within identities that were greatly influenced by LDs.

While Velvet and Gretchen described the self-segregation which is relevant to a radical humanist critique, Oliver Queen’s account portrayed real and tangible degrees of systematic institutional segregation. During the course of his narrative, Oliver describes the following three schools in what can be interpreted as an unwitting radical structuralist assessment:

- **Local Springfield school**: The in-school SE program was a “standard practice for the district, locking their embarrassing students away so as not to be embarrassed by them and tossing enough food down so they’d survive, but not so much that they might grow and thrive” (p. 4).

- **Blake Academy (private SE school)**: Oliver spent a majority of his time with five students “who traveled as a pack, going to each class together, eating lunch at the same table, even wandering about the playground in loosely knit circle… Despite sharing the pain of alienation and ridicule that went with being LD, we were not drawn together and made stronger—quite the opposite was the case” (p. 8 & p. 11).

- **Greenfield (Springfield District school for LD students with anger issues)**: Oliver understood the school was “a specialized version of Blake… All of the students who were in need of LD schooling, but dangerously violent, controlled by mood-altering medication, or had known discipline problems, were pulled out of the LD mainstream at Blake and put in Greenfield” (p. 7).

Regretfully, I can confirm the regularity of the first situation described by Oliver. In the course of my career, I have seen a similar dynamic exist; when students are placed into a school’s SE program, they often feel stigmatized. Occasionally, in the past, I have granted students permission to leave my class a few minutes early so they could—in their eyes—maintain their anonymity and dignity. On a personally disturbing level, I have also observed LD African-American students that have been deemed behavior problems placed into alternative settings
similar to Greenfield. Ironically, the decision to place these students is not educationally based but instead is an extension of the pathology view of LD; these students are considered malignancies that require being cut out of schools with surgical precision.

Since Oliver’s mother had to sue the local school in order for him to attend Blake Academy, it is not a surprise that he was able to find a positive niche location in the school. Oliver proudly recalled, “I was never bored in Mr. Hoffman’s class, and everyday I learned something new. That did not happen again until I went to college thirteen years later” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 9). What happens to families that do not possess either the social or monetary capital to pursue an option along the lines of Blake Academy?

Another narrative which can be easily viewed through a radical structuralist lens, Kelly Miskell’s account provides nuance and complexity to the issue of access and resources. During the course of her high school years, Kelly suffered from institutional injustices; both a brutal rape by a fellow student and verbal abuse/intimidation by a teacher were allowed by her school. Although it could be shamefully argued that the rape was beyond the jurisdiction of the school because it did not occur on school grounds, Kelly tellingly relayed the principal’s reaction upon being informed of the incident with the teacher: “I am not clear as to whether he was pissed off that a student was treated that way, or he was pissed off that the high school could get bad publicity from it” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 125). Sadly, the politicized world of education inherently provides more credence to the latter. It should be noted that Kelly’s rapist was a recruited athlete. Her plight demonstrates that someone with relatively abundant resources can still be victimized by an individual with comparatively more social capital (male and an athlete).
The only account that reaches or demonstrates the degree of political awareness to be considered as emerging from a DSE perspective was “Revolution.” The protagonist of the narrative, Aaron, articulated a possible deep and nuanced understanding of LD:

Learning disabilities exist, but they may be nothing more than the accumulation of various culturally determined blocks and flows—flows being the states in which educational production is in tune/touch with the individual and blocks being the crisis points in which the individual is unable to produce what the education world requires (Boscardin et al., 2001).

Aaron offered a very insightful holistic interpretation of LD that demonstrates intellectual worth.

In many ways, the remaining accounts in Learning Disabilities and Life Stories fall into either of these two categories: accounts that portray a supportive family and depict a protagonist who was diagnosed relatively later in life (predominately during college) or the outliers. Holistically, the following phenomena are seen among the former category:

- Protagonists experienced general academic success highlighted by strengths in certain disciplines. This initial period is followed by a specific area of struggle (i.e., foreign language) that threatened academic survival.

- An eventual diagnosis is determined. The determination is followed by a sometimes much later personal acceptance/understanding of the diagnosis. That period of personal negotiation is typically followed with an awkwardly experienced disclosure to friends and family.

- On occasion, protagonists experienced difficult interactions with professors regarding the granting/enforcement of accommodations.

- Most of the accounts concluded with the protagonists pledging commitment towards issues directly or indirectly related to LDs.

Although never directly stated, it can be inferred that the majority of these protagonists were at least from middle class backgrounds.
Despite these remaining accounts (Christie Jackson, Michael Sanders, Joshua Green, and Alison May) initially being viewed as formulaic because they shared phenomena, the narratives collectively have value because they present descriptions of positive niche locations. These specific niche locations are listed below:

- Christie Jackson: A biology research program in Costa Rica had “rejuvenated a soul that yearned to be held and embraced. I slowly regained hope and assurance that all would work out” (p. 47).

- Michael Sanders: A debate club was able to “feed my insatiable appetite for knowledge and provided a medium through which I could profit intellectually and competitively” (p. 57).

- Joshua Green: Lacrosse was a sport that gave “me an outlet for my energy and frustration and is among the few arenas where I never feel unequal to other people” (p. 80).

- Alison May: A college’s LD services coordinator (Mary Fox), who admitted having learning and hearing disabilities, knew “that just because I’d been able to compensate for my disabilities didn’t mean that I hadn’t suffered in the process. She also realized that being at college meant a lot less to me than actually being happy with myself for one moment in my life, and she thought these values were in the right place” (p. 152).

The first two bullets are ironic because both the research program and debate club are initiatives that are not typically associated with SE; the degree of independent thinking and creative problem-solving necessary for both programs rarely occurs in SE programs. Unfortunately, nonacademic niche locations (i.e., athletics) are slowly being dismantled—or reduced in such a fashion that only elite players can participate—in some schools due to economic downturn. If sports are being affected, it is undeniable that less popular outlets like art and music are also being decimated.

Obviously, from Alison May’s perspective, Mary Fox embodied her college’s LD student services program; Fox was the positive niche location. In regards to policy makers, Fox’s
existence is a reminder that teacher disposition can never be overlooked and, in fact, it may in certain contexts be more important than education program design. Professional disposition is defined as, “Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development” (NCATE, 2008). Although I believe teacher disposition can and should be influenced to a certain degree, it is mostly an innate quality. An issue for quiet contemplation is whether Fox’s teacher disposition would be the same if she herself did not possess any disabilities.

On a personal level, the figure of Mary Fox complicates Lynn Pelky’s observation that “Being LD must be similar to how some gay people feel. You spend so much time and energy trying to hide who you really are. You are ashamed of what you are, and at times you long to be like others, but you are who you are, and so you lead this double life” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 25). Although there is a great deal of truth to Lynn’s statement, I would argue that silence is not always due to shame; silence about one’s identity can be interpreted as a slow march toward acquiring additional social capital—in the form of money, academic degrees, or job hierarchy—that enables one to disclose her/his identity in a manner that mitigates potential harm to herself/himself while placing one in a position to help other people. Change can occur openly or covertly; whether a member of the French Revolution or the French Resistance, one must make her/his own decisions.

The stories of the three designated outliers (Kevin Marshall, Jr., Garett Day, and Lynn Pelkey) are unique. While Kevin is considered an outlier due to his racial background and extremely unstable family life, Garett and Lynn have been construed as outliers because their LD
diagnosis occurred both in their early childhood and adulthood. They professed to not have a meaningful understanding of their LD(s) until much later in life.

Although Kevin—one of two African-American protagonists in the text—had an abusive father and limited contact with the rest of his family during his late teens, his story concluded with him effectively attending college. With his troubled family life and limited resources, Kevin’s story seems like it would most likely end tragically. What enabled Kevin to remain buoyant?

I would argue that Kevin’s academic survival was due to the fact that his athletic ability was a tangible commodity that offset some of his obstacles; his story reframes tales of success into a larger narrative of access. Bluntly stated, Kevin’s athletic ability granted him access to resources that allowed navigation of most academic challenges. Tangentially, he echoed one of the beliefs underlying this study: “I believe that being diagnosed learning disabled earlier in my life could have been more harmful than helpful” (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 120).

In the same manner as Alison of “Figuring Out My World,” Garett Day provides valuable knowledge. Garett’s story demonstrates the importance of positive niche locations. It is poignant when Garett describes Amelia (a staffer at his college’s Learning Disabled Student Services department) as “Giving me meaning. She was the first person to stop worrying about what classes I took, and simply concentrated on me as an individual” (Boscardin, et al., 2001, p. 108). His story shows that the education field’s ongoing quest for improved theory and method will be for naught if the human element is neglected.

The last remaining outlier’s account, that of Lynn Pelkey, was unique because she unintentionally described her diagnosis as occurring twice. Although it can be inferred that the
following statement by Lynn was intended to show her personal growth and maturity (and it does), it better serves as a critique of her school:

In junior high school, being LD was a big part of my life. At that time, the universe revolved around me. I was my biggest concern. I was self-centered. My world consisted of very little, and so being LD was a big part of who I was. But as I became older, I grew out of the self-centered mode and into a more complex way of being. As my life evolved, being LD became a smaller piece of the whole (Boscardin et al., 2001, p. 28).

Instead of placing blame completely on herself, Lynn could just as easily have named her school an absent and neglectful presence; it was the school that provided Lynn with a poor understanding of herself and her LD. Lynn’s diagnosis held no personal meaning until as an adult she pursued an improved understanding of her LD in consultation with a psychologist.

As was the case with the analysis of All Kinds of Minds, the analysis of Learning Disabilities and Life Stories has led to a refinement of this study’s findings. The revised findings are listed below:

Table 14

Findings from Learning Disabilities and Life Stories

VI. Physical isolation from the regular classroom—whether it be disciplinary or instructional—can function as a form of oppression. This exclusion can often extend to the school building itself. A student’s eventual placement can be in an alternative setting that is part of a hierarchy of locations that often relegates minorities to the least enviable environments.

X. A single individual can traumatize a student’s educational expectations. In most cases, teachers who focus primarily on behavior, as opposed to learning, ultimately function as oppressive agents.
Listening to the Experts

Although there is structure and philosophy in the anthologies, there is not an overarching sense of one voice in each text; it was expected that a dominant voice would emerge due to framing on the part of the editors. The study so far had been a journey that began with Hallowell, evolved with Mooney, and was codified by Winn. In contrast to those works, the anthologies are open for interpretation. Whereas the theme of the long-term negative consequences of an early LD diagnosis became apparent in Learning Disabilities and Life Stories, Listening to the Experts is remarkable because it vividly depicts the segregated world of “portables,” and the ironically named IEPs (individualized education plan) which seem to result in the denial of a humane education as opposed to ensuring it.

From the onset of the text, the authors declared, “We cannot be satisfied with the world as it is if it does not meet the demands of justice and equity that our children deserve” (Duff, et al., 2006, p. xxi). They collected stories from high school students over a 3 year period in order to construct the anthology. I am in agreement with the authors because it was advantageous to encounter narratives that were not “retrospective accounts tempered by wisdom and the distance of years” (Duff, et al., 2006, p. xxi). From my years of experience as an educator, the protagonists’ voices can confidently be deemed authentic.

Mirroring the approach used with the analysis for Learning Disabilities and Life Stories (2001), the following table presents the demographic information of the protagonists in Listening to the Experts:
Table 15

Demographic Information of Protagonists in *Listening to the Experts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title of Account</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>SE Terms</th>
<th>Authorship/Diagnosis</th>
<th>Portables/IEPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elliot Shelton</td>
<td>“Why Can’t They Figure It Out?”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>twelfth grade</td>
<td>third grade dyslexia</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Hartzog</td>
<td>“Live to Ride”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>twelfth grade</td>
<td>second grade ADHD/Neuro-logical trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather Curan</td>
<td>“This is Why!”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>tenth grade</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad Schrimpf</td>
<td>“This is Me”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>ninth grade</td>
<td>fifth grade</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Weatherland</td>
<td>“It Has Nothing to Do with Being Smart”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>twelfth grade</td>
<td>fifth grade ADD</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breanna Ortiz</td>
<td>“Struggling to Succeed”</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>twelfth grade</td>
<td>third grade</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Mallak</td>
<td>“It’s More than Just Paragraphs”</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>third grade ADD and specific learning disability</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Duff, Keefe, and Moore (2006) provide limited demographic information regarding their protagonists. Due to the age of the protagonists, it is understandable, even expected, that SE should dominate their accounts. For the very same reason, the critique is from a radical humanist perspective that immediately criticizes the institution of SE but lacks the demonstrated self-awareness that comes from age that is a characteristic of a radical humanist position. As opposed to relaying their own tales, these individuals collectively expound upon their constant companion, SE. The student accounts present in *Listening to the Experts* (2006) provides either an outright damning of SE or, at the bare minimum, demonstrates the paternalist nature of the institution.

On a personal level, the narratives in *Listening to the Experts* (2006) jarringly brought back memories of my early teaching career. I was once a “portables” teacher, or, to state it in Pennsylvania vernacular, I was a “trailer” teacher. Regardless of the colloquialism, the stigma that is attached to these locations can apply to both student and teacher. The existence of these classrooms—separated from the main school and often in severe disrepair because they usually have doubled or tripled their intended term of use—are by definition tangible examples of segregation. The fact that my current Reading classroom is a cobbled together location with unreliable heating that is still listed as “storage” on the school map is a daily reminder of the inequities that occur in schools.

I have not brought up my past experiences to commiserate with the authors but to validate their accounts. Descriptions of “portables” are listed below:

- Elliot Shelton: “I was never too outgoing or anything like that, especially in middle school because I was always stuck in the portables” (p. 3).
• Heather Curan: “I have not had the opportunity to be in classes with them [special needs students] before because the teachers shelter us so much that it’s as if there is a wall between us” (p. 85).

• Chad Schrimpf: “They put me back into classes that were out in the portables, away from everybody else” (p. 87).

• Breanna Ortiz: “Only the special ed. kids had classes in the barracks away from everybody else…Not only was the building atrocious, but the teachers were just horrible” (p. 154).

Negative psychological effects of the portables upon the narrators are seen in all of the descriptions of the portables. While Elliot and Chad describe a feeling of being marooned, Heather insightfully conveys the metaphorical wall between general education and special education. Whether intentional or not, Breanna’s use of the word, “barracks,” compares attendance in the portables to conscription; instead of security and learning, the portables generate a reaction of dread and futility on the part of students.

Although the portables are a visible sign of segregation, this type of physical exclusion can occur within schools. As briefly alluded to by Alex Weatherland, self-contained classrooms are located in schools but serve the same exclusionary function as portables. Students attending these classroom are in actuality attending a separate school within a school. For all the publicity surrounding RTI (Response to Intervention), “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (Batsche et al., 2005), there are few options in regards to supporting students who are struggling academically. Beyond a period of resource room, most classroom teachers are faced with the scenario of continuing to work with struggling students who will most likely negatively impact a teacher’s performance rating, or requesting that students be reassigned to self-contained classrooms that do not consistently reintegrate students into general education classrooms.
Beyond being exclusionary, SE—as evidenced through the descriptions of IEPs and their related meeting in *Listening to the Experts*—a sense of permanence is prevalent. Since a reintegration plan is not a component of most IEPs, it draws into question the philosophy (if there is one) underlying SE. Out of the eight LD accounts in the text, four (three in detail) specifically mention the IEP meeting and/or process. These descriptions are listed below:

- Elliot Shelton: “The teachers always ruled the meetings…They didn’t want to go anywhere or do anything with me” (p. 6).
- Gary Hartzog: “The funny thing is even at all my IEP meetings, they never moved me even though the teachers always said I was doing good” (p. 44).
- Breanna Ortiz: “I had a great teacher who actually wanted to work with me and give me the support I needed to do well in school” (p. 155).

Although the IEP process is usually presented as a partnership, Elliot’s account shows both an insular and adversarial tone underlying educators’ implementation of the measure. Gary’s comment substantiates the fear that once someone is placed in a SE setting it is a lifelong “sentence”. Even though Breanna’s account could be cited as an example of success for the IEP practice, it could be equally argued that her comments reinforce the importance of teacher dispositions and positive niche locations. If not for that one teacher, Breanna could have stayed “with kids who were destructive and had behavior issues [in an environment] where fights would break out in the middle of class” (Duff, et al., 2006, p. 154).

At this point in the analysis, every protagonist except Jeremy Mallak has been cited. In the spirit of inclusiveness and representation, Jeremy has been given the final comment:

One of the bad things about special ed. classes is that I don't really feel ready for some of the things I have to do to graduate. The classes do not give us what we need to know to
understand the ACT test and other tests as well. Teachers in special ed. classes teach the
same things over and over again. It seemed as if I never learned anything new (p.158).

Jeremy’s comment shows that paternalistic can be added to the list of descriptors for SE; he feels
unprepared for the future. As for an understanding of his schooling, his comment proves that he
is indeed an expert.

Absent from this study up to this point, the role of the IEPs was a dominant theme in the
text. Regardless of its intent, the document often served to segregate students into educationally
inferior settings; at least from the perspective of the protagonists, the measure was a tool of
oppression. Although it did not reach the status of a finding, the accounts promoted
contemplation of the complicated issue of educational segregation; inclusion needs to be
considered beyond the issue of location—which itself is a multilayered topic. The finding from
the anthology is listed below:

Table 16

Findings from Listening to the Experts

XV. Depending on construction and implementation, an IEP has the potential to preclude—as
opposed to ensure—a meaningful education.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

How do you conclude an effort that is a culmination of twenty years of university coursework, nearly seven years of doctoral training, and fifteen years of teaching in the K-12 public school system? As with most endeavors in life, an honest and hopeful approach seems to be the best course of action. Along that line, the fifteen finalized individual findings are listed below:

Table 17
Finalized Individual Findings

I. None of the protagonists permanently succumb to powerlessness.

II. The protagonists seem to have access to resources.

III. Violence can take both physical and psychological forms. School was the site of ongoing psychological violence for the protagonists.

IV. An entrepreneurial spirit is demonstrated by nearly all of the adult protagonists.

V. The actions of just one person can serve as a life-altering and life-affirming positive niche location for a student.

VI. Physical isolation from the regular classroom—whether it be disciplinary or instructional—can function as a form of oppression. This exclusion can often extend to the school building itself. A student’s eventual placement can be in an alternative setting that is part of a hierarchy of locations that often relegates minorities to the least enviable environments.

VII. If done improperly, instructional grouping can be damaging to the psyche.

VIII. Education is a health issue. The emotional components of LDs can lead individuals to substance abuse.
IX. LD students can benefit from a project-based curriculum.

X. A single individual can traumatize a student’s educational expectations. In most cases, teachers who focus primarily on behavior, as opposed to learning, ultimately function as oppressive agents.

XI. Diagnostic labels are constantly evolving; an individual’s label could be changed if judged by current criteria. Depending on the particular environment, the application of the label can have dire consequences.

XII. Besides being a health issue, education can also be considered as a short-term and long-term safety issue.

XIII. Arts and sports programs can serve as positive niche locations for students; this phenomenon is most likely even more pertinent for LD students.

XIV. Independence is most likely the commonality between entrepreneurial enterprises for adults and the arts for children serving as positive niche locations.

XV. Depending on construction and implementation, an IEP has the potential to preclude—as opposed to ensure—a meaningful education.

As already stated, when these fifteen findings are viewed holistically, it is seen that LDs can be experienced in a particular process (Figure 8). The importance of that finding is that it demonstrates how multiple factors influence the manner in which an individual experiences a(n) LD(s); there is no common LD experience.
Discussion of Findings

The last leg of this journey is determining how the sixteen findings (fifteen individual and one holistic) are relevant to the original research question:

By analyzing first-person narratives of learning disabilities through a framework influenced by critical special educator Thomas Skrtic, what are the educational ramifications for students, teachers, and the institutions they comprise?

When the fifteen individual findings are examined for commonalities, they tend to broadly fall into two categories: positive niche location construction and characteristics of oppressive educational environments. These two categories are complicated constructions. Are positive niche locations created/fostered by schools or are they discovered by students? Along that line, maybe schools at times simply need to step aside and allow individuals freedom and independence to explore their interests and passions. As for oppressive educational environments, there is a nuanced process to understand their actions.

Personal

On a personal level, the findings regarding educational oppression mostly confirm what I have witnessed and pondered throughout the course of my teaching career. Both sadly and reassuringly, the findings related to positive niche locations reaffirm a realization which has been fermenting for quite some time: it is now time for me to leave the K-12 public education system. Now is the moment to assume another role—one of my own envisioning. Morality (or ethics, depending on your parameters) and some sense of professional relevance dictate my actions. Like many of the protagonists encountered for this study, I have not been able to find a position that has allowed me to be heard and empowered. A decade and a half has been spent working within a flawed system; positive impact on individual students allows that time to be viewed as
meaningful but every passing season makes it more difficult to swim against the ceaseless tide pulling me into an ocean of institutional malaise. Now is the time to chart a new course.

Adherence to protocol dictates that the findings be discussed in light of other pertinent groups. At least in the context of my educational employment experiences, it can be difficult delineating among various groups. Since schools are a reflection of society, differentiating between the two can be challenging. Due to the construction of much high-stakes testing, principal and staff ratings are often intertwined. The traditionally antagonistic administration/staff dynamic has become much more complicated when the entire system is perceived to be under attack; atypical relationships have formed in these unprecedented times. When conversing about schooling on an institutional level, there are so many more layers other than the rote “federal, state, local” mantra instilled during social studies classes. Regional tensions over education issues can run so high that ludicrous conversations about secession occur, i.e., Long Island as the 51st state due to the NYC school system receiving more funding seems to occur every election cycle.

**Societal/School**

Society’s relationship towards LD has been in the background of this study but it has not been directly broached; that omission is addressed now. When contemplating the societal implications of the findings, the dominant theme that emerges is judgment of human worth. The majority of protagonists are oppressed because they perform poorly on academic testing measures and/or they demonstrate an inability to perform the deemed markers of typical academic behavior, i.e., reading aloud (especially in the younger grades) and/or memorization tasks. If the idea of performance is replaced with conformity, then only those who conform to the established standards (assessment scores) and can outwardly demonstrate typical—normal—
tasks are deemed to have worth. Unfortunately, most people possess ingrained images of what constitutes learning (reading aloud and memorization); any deviation from this script constitutes failure.

It is tempting to equate schools with society and simply move forward. For the purpose of this discussion, that decision would be a lost opportunity. Schools need to understand the significant ongoing amount of power that they wield over students. Personnel on every level—especially administrative—have to understand that much of what they describe as “privileges” for students are indeed rights and that these rights are inherent and do not begin when an individual turns eighteen.

Luckasson (2006) provides an excellent model which schools can utilize to understand how they suppress the human rights of students. All of the findings of this study that show oppression can be interpreted through this model (Luckasson, 2006, pp. 16-17) which is listed below:

Table 18

Human Rights, Typical Violations, Possible Violations in School Policies and Environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Rights</th>
<th>Typical Violation</th>
<th>Possible violations in school policies and environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Government-imposed death</td>
<td>Denial or delay of lifesaving supports such as ventilator assistance or clean intermittent catheterization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition as a human being in the world</td>
<td>Dehumanization</td>
<td>Sanctioned name-calling and bullying (e.g., vegetable, retard), discrimination based on disability, or stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the human conversation</td>
<td>Isolation, exclusion</td>
<td>Isolation rooms, segregated buildings, lack of access to common areas, denial of supports necessary for participation, or denial of augmentative communication systems or supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td>Political indoctrination</td>
<td>Convincing students to think in a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Preventing or denying feelings</td>
<td>Pushing students to feel a certain way or to deny their true feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience</td>
<td>Forcing one to take actions against one's beliefs</td>
<td>Forcing students to take actions contrary to their beliefs or imposing a system of segregation on students when they believe it is unfair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal autonomy</td>
<td>Preventing personal choices</td>
<td>Preventing student choices, not teaching choice-making skills, or not providing opportunities to safely practice choice making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily integrity</td>
<td>Intruding on a person's body without consent</td>
<td>Doing things to students' bodies without their consent (e.g., imposing toilet assistance without asking permission)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>Deprivation of freedom</td>
<td>&quot;Programming&quot; a student's days without his or her input, making individualized education program decisions that the student is not a part of, or &quot;sending&quot; a student somewhere else for education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Invading a person's thoughts, beliefs, or individual space</td>
<td>Broadcasting students' assessment information, leaving students' toilet doors open, arranging space so that students undress in front of others, or forcing students to make private requests in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>Removing possessions</td>
<td>Removing possessions, adding students' clothes or possessions to the &quot;common pile&quot; without their permission, or randomly taking away students' property as &quot;punishment&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>Prohibiting speech and free ideas</td>
<td>Denying students the means to develop communication and to convey ideas or limiting safe opportunities to express beliefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Security of one's person | Attacking a person, a family, or a possession | Hitting, yelling at, pushing, or maliciously teasing students; locking students in or out of a room; gossiping about families in school; or destroying student property to "teach everyone a lesson"

| Association | Prohibiting meeting with others | Preventing participation in school or extracurricular activities

| Intimacy and marriage | Forbidding relationships and the personal closeness that an individual desires | Keeping students separate from each other, creating separate dances or proms based on disability, reporting to disciplinary authorities the handholding of friends with disabilities, or denying sexuality education

| Health | Denying health care. | Denying school nurse or community health supports, refusing to teach students how to care for their own health, or neglecting education necessary to avoid victimization

| Education | Denying learning opportunities | Not teaching academic skills, preventing access to the general curriculum and necessary supports, not providing education needed to exercise citizenship, not preparing students to be adults (e.g., to take their place as adults in society), imposing shorter days on certain students, or "pushing out" certain students so that they drop out

| Work | Preventing work contributions | Denying students access to academic and social learning and community connections that lead to employment, giving students meaningless work, making unemployment a condition of receiving care

| Social security | Withholding food, shelter, health care, or long-term security from those in need | Withholding food, shelter, health care, or long-term security from students
Although education is described as a separate right in this model, there is much overlap among various listed human rights, and many of those rights can be considered subsets of the right of education. Due to Luckasson’s model, it is not far-fetched to consider schools as governments. On an institutional level, schools have to decide if they want to function as repressive dictatorships or at least partially representative democracies. The DRM’s slogan, “Nothing about us without us,” emerges from feelings of alienation and is a response to the exclusionary practices of schools.

**Teacher**

Just as schools need to recognize the extent of their power over students, teachers need to acknowledge the magnitude of their influence upon students. In the majority of the narratives, teachers were portrayed in either of two extremes: positive niche location (co)constructors or dream-breakers. Simply stated, teachers need to be reflective upon their roles. Multiple issues emerge in relation to this contemplation:

- teacher of children vs. discipline/content area knowledge expert
- obedient employee vs. contemplative citizen
- equality vs. equity

The three tensions described above are fairly self-evident. From my perspective, the last issue is the cause of many of the humiliating situations described by the protagonists. Although there are sophisticated definitions (and debates) surrounding the concepts of “equality” and “equity”, equality is typically presented as sameness while equity is usually interpreted as the characteristic/goal of social justice for an oppressed group. Whether the mindset of an antagonist in a studied narrative was an ignorant “one size fits all” perspective or a sadistic “this
is how I learned” fraternity pledging stance, those educators could not embrace flexibility and innovation in their instruction.

It is bewildering how educational hurdles, i.e., a lack of bilingual education options for some students, are sometimes claimed as badges of honor as opposed to injustices by groups that historically had to endure them. These same groups often react to any attempts of remedying similar current situations for other groups as unnecessary or even unpatriotic. Compounding this phenomenon is the observation that it is “debatable whether we can have ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ in a society that prioritizes efficiency in resource management over social justice” (Espinoza, 2007, p. 343).

Since many educators became teachers because of their academic prowess and success, questioning the system in which they work seemingly undermines their own self-worth; they have been the beneficiaries of a flawed system. Compounding this situation is the current practice of linking teachers’ performance to student scores. For many teachers, poorly performing students can cause them to receive the first negative score of their academic life (which is defined here as encompassing their student and teacher career). How will these teachers most likely feel towards the students who are detrimental to their professional rating? Many teachers respond to the challenge presented by these students by devising ways to have them officially removed from their class; these teachers “game” the system. Depending on the scruples of the educator, gamesmanship often leads to outright manipulation quickly followed by deceit.

**Parent/Student**

The findings of this study should reinforce to parents their responsibility for their children’s education. Parents are the first teachers and (unfortunately for most LD students) the
initial advocates for their children. The narratives demonstrate that parents have to actively monitor and intervene on behalf of their children. Ironically, those parents who possess the skills that are fostered by schools (problem solving, communication, and researching) are in the best position to fight—or negotiate, depending on perspective—with schools for their children. It is within this system that parents of students with LDs are indirectly pitted against parents of non-LD students in a struggle for resources; that struggle once again highlights the pervasiveness of the “equity vs. equality” dynamic.

As for LD students, the findings of the study inform them that they are not alone. Individuals with similar struggles have survived and, in some cases, flourished. Obviously, depending on the age of the children, the narratives allow students to see their disability/difference in the context of a greater system; that knowledge should enable students to absolve themselves—at least partially—of blame for their struggles. Along with the positive and negative points derived from them, the narratives offer students hope.

Antinomies and Unintended Consequences

The concept of an antinomy has been mentioned multiple times throughout this study. Without a doubt, the LD diagnosis is an antinomy: self-loathing followed by diminished expectations for some and self-understanding proceeded by opportunity for others. The holistic finding (Figure 8) allows for a better understanding of how that phenomenon occurs.

In addition to the evidence of racial minorities being detrimentally impacted by the LD diagnosis, there are other possible factors involved in the negative experiencing of an LD diagnosis. Since money is often correlated with power in our society, I would argue that wealth is “The Great Equalizer”; it may not eliminate prejudice but provides individuals with recourse if they experience discrimination. Since college costs are becoming unbearable and even state
university systems are under duress (Trombell, 2011), a line of research focusing on LD and income is pertinent as well as timely.

In many ways, civil rights seem to eventually become intertwined with monetary issues. Along that line, LD is a civil rights issue. An LD diagnosis is the prerequisite for protection—at least theoretically and publicly—under federal law. As with other civil rights issues, it is the federal government that keeps society from devolving into a simple majority rule mindset. If the public’s reaction to the common core is any indicator, the federal government’s intervention is an unwelcomed presence. If the concept of learning differences is co-opted with negative intentions, it can be seen how protection under the law could be threatened.

**My New Role and Possible Divergence from DSE**

The present construction of this study parallels some of the past tensions within the DSE field. I contend that my previous use of inductive reasoning to declare myself a DSE proponent is similar to the ‘negative space’ argument (an art concept in which a shape is viewed through its absence in a larger background) that was present early in the field’s inception (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher & Morton, 2008, p. 446); the field was conceptualized by what it stood against. Respectfully stated, my belief—the concept of learning differences has the potential to be co-opted with the purpose of removing protection under the law—seems to possibly render me as not radical enough to be considered a DSE supporter. If the law is presently considered an oppressive force by the field, then I would reluctantly consider myself as in philosophical disagreement with DSE. Ironically, it was the fear of the “encroaching threat of cooption or appropriation by those who did not understand the radical nature of DSE” (Connor etc. al., 2008, p.448) that had historically led to its codification.
Bureaucracy should not be confused with “the Law”. Bureaucracy may misinterpret and misrepresent the law but the law—at least in regards to the federal level—lies at the heart of civil rights matters and often serves as the only protection for minorities. Setting the complicated nature of disability aside, during the course of my teaching career I increasingly saw little recourse other than moving to another district or attending a private school for LD students who were not obtaining a positive school experience. Although some educators may think of change in terms of larger scale cultural shifts in perception—and of which this study could arguably be reflective of—my preference for the foreseeable future is to aid LD students and their parents who are currently overwhelmed by the bureaucracy of schools.

Procedural knowledge and familiarity with terminology allow schools to operate with a tactical advantage over families. With a goal of management instead of improved learning, the overall academic welfare of children is an afterthought. At this point in my life, my knowledge of the K-12 public education allows me to aid parents/students who feel lost. Besides having taught at every grade level, my administrative training and my experience advising individuals in my role as a union representative uniquely position me to help these struggling people.

Education (and society as a whole) may be a slanted game but the law at least provides some semblance of rules to this competition. In the short-term present arena in which school is situated, the law—and/or the threat of resistance in the form of litigation—seems to be the only force preventing schools from functioning as fiefdoms.

**Experientially-influenced Recommendations**

I cannot help but to make recommendations from the findings that are strategic in nature; it is difficult to work in a vacuum and offer suggestions that do not take into account implementation hurdles. Collectively, the findings support some measures which I have
unsuccessfully attempted to have implemented; very often, school administrators will respond to new initiatives by citing implementation issues to divert attention from their fear of possible political pushback. One such rejected measure was a proposed advocacy course which would have stressed research skills and persuasive writing. Despite being grounded in C.C.S.S. (Common Core State Standards) and tailored to address multiple styles, the class was not run; intriguingly, the course obtained endorsement on a department level. The class could have been denied because it was viewed as subversive. It is saddening on a personal and professional level that students were denied the opportunity to struggle with a multitude of issues that all active citizens should contemplate.

In relation to the study’s findings, LD students in the K-12 public education system would seem to benefit from the direct teaching of advocacy skills to them. At the present time, when LD student advocacy is discussed, it is usually in the context of the college setting. In a 2005 survey of high school students with IEPs, it was found that 78% reported that they wanted to go to college yet only 13% knew if disability services were available to them (Hatch et al., 2009, p. 7); those statistics are disturbing. As this study has contended from the beginning—regardless of the particular advocacy skills taught—those abilities will be negated if students are not encouraged to develop a tangible sense of self. In the same vein, some have even speculated that self-advocacy and self-awareness are the true subsets of self-determination (Algozzine, 2001).

On a few occasions, the protagonists in Learning Disabilities and Life Stories mentioned instances of college professors who were hesitant to grant documented academic accommodations. Although learning advocacy skills would undoubtedly help students enforce their accommodations, it is important on a policy level to remember that for some of those
professors, “the most difficult part of change is not learning new things, but shedding old ones” (Poplin, 1996, p. 69).

It is problematic for an LD advocacy course to be taught in K-12 public schools. Unless the class functions more like a self-help forum or a support group overseen by a guidance department, it will most likely touch upon themes present in Luckasson’s (2006) human rights violations in schools. A meaningful LD advocacy course would inevitably highlight flaws and/or limitations of the education provided to LD students. Considering that schools innately try to avoid conflict in order to maintain a positive public perception, there is little incentive for them to create classes which cast doubt on the status quo and the standard modus operandi. Besides union ramifications, few school personnel would want to oversee a class which could openly, and ultimately officially, lead to the reprimand of another educator. From the perspective of administration/management, it is not in the best interest of schools to openly critique itself.

In general, the public school climate is one which is resistant to change.

Recommendations from this study take that characteristic into consideration. Along that line, the following issues—with their inherent complications in parentheses—need to be recognized. Any recommendation must weigh these issues to a certain degree. The issues are listed below:

- Incremental or fundamental/conceptualized change (The nature of change is often contested).
- Top-down or collaborative measure (Top-down measures often do not garner ownership and collaborative measures often stall due to inaction).
- Short-term or long-term measure (The yearly budgets of schools often promote a short-term perspective).
- Definition/understanding of disability (Due to the issue of context, there can be multiple valid concurrent definitions/understandings of disability; it can be argued that the concept of LD can be an antimony).
The purpose of education (This issue, too, is a contested subject). Debatably, the last bullet presents an issue that can supersede the topic of learning disabilities. School’s overconfidence in quantitative assessments and the current shortfall of psychological services for schools (Phillips, 2012), could also be considered more pressing concerns for reforms. It should be noted that for the sake of this study, “incremental” retains it prominent definition of “small.” Stone (2002) states that incremental change consists of “very small goals” (p. 377).

**Two Possibilities for Incremental Change**

Incremental reforms are easier to promote but there seems—especially now—a lack of institutional conscience because of the short-term mindset of schools. So, it is with a degree of confliction that the following recommendations are framed as small changes under the guise of immanent critique:

Table 19

Two Recommendations for Incremental Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution</strong> Utilize first-person LD narratives as part of the development of teacher disposition under CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) accreditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong> Integrate first-person LD stories into ELA and SS curriculums because they are in alignment and seem necessitated by CCSSs in both ELA and SS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two measures are feasible because they can be achieved within the existing educational infrastructure and resources. They are carefully offered suggestions constructed with the cognizance that recommendations can help to form mandates that can have ramifications that are
“more like that of missile strikes than the dropping of care packages” (Keiser and Michelli, 2005, p. XV).

CAEP’s mission is to advance “excellent educator preparation through evidence-based accreditation that assures quality and supports continuous improvement to strengthen P-12 student learning” (http://caepnet.org/about/strategicplan/). According to its first standard (Content and Pedagogical Knowledge), teacher candidates must possess knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions that can be demonstrated through understanding of the 10 inTASC (New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) standards. The organization defines dispositions as “the habits of professional and moral commitments that underlie an educator’s performance” (CAEP, 2014, p. 8). The 10 inTASC standards are listed below (CAEP, 2013, p. 4):

- **Standard #1: Learner Development.** The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.

- **Standard #2: Learning Differences.** The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.

- **Standard #3: Learning Environments.** The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

- **Standard #4: Content Knowledge.** The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content.

- **Standard #5: Application of Content.** The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.
• Standard #6: Assessment. The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making.

• Standard #7: Planning for Instruction. The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.

• Standard #8: Instructional Strategies. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

• Standard #9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice. The teacher engages in ongoing professional learning and uses evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapts practice to meet the needs of each learner.

• Standard #10: Leadership and Collaboration. The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning and development, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession.

Holistically, the exposure of students to first-person LD narratives is consistent with all of the listed inTASC standards. Specifically, Standard 2 (Learning Differences), Standard 3 (Learning Environments), Standard 6 (Assessment), and Standard 9 (Professional Learning and Ethical Practice) could be better understood by potential teachers through contemplation of the narratives. The utilization of the tales would be evidence of CAEP’s admission that, “America’s classrooms are increasingly diverse…Increasing numbers of students are classified as having disabilities” (CAEP, 2013, p. 20). The reading of the narratives would not be an onerous moral or professional commitment on the part of teacher candidates.

Besides being part of teacher training, first-person LD narratives can be integrated into existing curriculums for students. Since the Common Core State Standards now places greater emphasis on nonfictional texts (with ongoing debate regarding the interpretation of the subgenre informational texts), the use of these narratives is feasible. Even if the issue of diversity is set
aside, this new emphasis on nonfiction in the ELA classroom (combined with the preexisting use of primary documents in the SS classroom) presents exciting opportunities for the seamless use of first-person LD narratives.

In regards to the common core standards, the following college and career readiness anchor standards (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy) show the utility of first-person LD narratives for instruction:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Collectively, these new standards stress the importance of the recognition of others’ points of view. These narratives could allow LD students and their peers the opportunity to not only learn about some LD individuals’ perspectives but could also serve as an exercise for examining the conditions that affect the existence and nature of LDs.

On a practical level, I firmly believe that first-person LD narratives can be utilized in classrooms. The final year of my K-12 public school teaching career was spent navigating a general education English 7 class through a challenging curriculum. Throughout the course, we explored the commonalities among injustices experienced by oppressed groups encountered in the literature. When needed, we conducted additional research to better understand the historical contexts of the studied authors; the classroom dynamic was one in which discoveries were made cooperatively. The read-and-discussed first person accounts highlighted the plight and perspectives of oppressed groups and served as a pragmatic launching point for the acquisition of important research skills. There is no reason why first-person LD accounts cannot be interwoven
into such a curriculum. Unfortunately, struggle seems to be a universal theme experienced by nearly all groups at least at some point in their existence. Reassuringly, it is the discovery and analysis of information that enables individuals to make thoughtful decisions which empowers either themselves and/or others to combat injustices.

**Conclusion**

This study was constructed because I saw students’ potential squandered or crushed on a daily basis. The idealism that began my teaching career was slowly being whittled away by rationalizations that were in reality the cutting edge of cynicism. Luckily, experience and contemplation—not fatigue and apathy—fueled my belief in the study of narratives of individuals with LDs. These tales of lives that exist off-script provide the reader with the ability to reflect and examine the institution of education from a new perspective.

At this juncture, two incremental recommendations have been offered. Those recommendations have been posited on the assumption that the K-12 public education system can be improved for LD students. What about a fundamental—even a radical—plan of action that could negate or severely lessen the impact of the concept of LD? That question is difficult for me to address. Most of the examples I can cite are either philosophical in nature (see “The Principles of the Network of Progressive Educators” and “Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teachers” in Appendix B) or are private institutions serving LD students (i.e., Landmark College); the mentioning of private institutions inevitably ignites conversations regarding economic access. Morally, my main reservation with offering radical recommendations/alternatives is that they ultimately require extended implementation time. I am more concerned—and feel a great deal of sustaining satisfaction—alleviating the difficulty I
presently see in front of me; my previously described quickly solidifying role as advisor to parents of LD students is a manifestation of those sentiments.

In addition to the analytic model utilized for this study being a possible tool for future researchers, the holistic finding, “The Impact of Context upon Experiencing LDs” (Figure 8), may itself rise to the level of analytic model. At the minimum, the finding could serve as an abridged version or entryway that makes the analytic model (and Skrtic’s paradigm) more accessible to aspiring researchers. The prospect of my model being reinterpreted is intriguing and, more importantly, would be a continued evolution of Skrtic’s initial vision.

**Future Considerations**

This study is occurring in a unique point in history. Just like the contentions regarding the nature of LD, similar debates are on the horizon regarding the nature of literacy. Couser (2009) succinctly describes these converging phenomena:

> Contemporary life writing should be seen not just against the background of related civil rights movements; it also needs to [be] seen in the context of a vast expansion in the venues (genres, media, and "platforms") available to life writers and the consequent diversity of contemporary life writing practices (p. 12).

In the near future, it is quite possible that uploaded digital film could replace the printed (or digital) word as the dominant—or, more precisely, academically recognized—form for relaying first-person LD narratives. This prediction is not without irony. The emergence of this relatively nascent technology could ultimately highlight the contextual nature of LD by lessening the significance of traditional reading and writing. Doubly ironic is the fact that this new medium revives the old medium of oral storytelling by pervading it with a sense of permanence.
Without sounding trite, maybe some LD individuals are truly ahead of their time; what is interpreted as deficit in one time period may be valued as strength in a new era. A finding of this study—the presence of an entrepreneurial spirit in many individuals with LD—is a theme seen in numerous documentaries: *Ennis’s Gift* (Seftel, 2000), *Journey into Dyslexia* (Raymond, 2011) and *The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia* (Redford, 2012). Since school’s tendency is to classify and sort students in order to meet short-term pressures, these entrepreneurial individuals had to actively circumvent schools to create a positive vision for their future.
Appendix A

First-Person Physical and Sensory Disabilities Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blindsight:</th>
<th>Multiple Sclerosis and related nervous system disorders:</th>
<th>Polio:</th>
<th>Paraplegic:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix B

“Principals of the Network of Progressive Educators” and “Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teachers”

Principles of the Network of Progressive Educators (Sadovnick & Semel, 1996, p. 18):

1. Education is best accomplished where relationships are personal and teachers design programs which honor the linguistic and cultural diversity of the local community.

2. Teachers, as respected professionals, are crucial sources of knowledge about teaching and learning.

3. Curriculum balance is maintained by commitment to children's individual interests and developmental needs, as well as a commitment to community within and beyond the school's walls.

4. Schools embrace the home cultures of children and their families. Classroom practices reflect these values and bring multiple cultural perspectives to bear.

5. Students are active constructors of knowledge and learn through direct experience and primary sources.

6. All disciplines—the arts, sciences, humanities and physical development—are valued equally in an interdisciplinary curriculum.

7. Decision-making within schools is inclusive of children, parents and staff.

8. The school is a model of democracy and humane relationships, confronting issues of racism, classism and sexism.


• have sociocultural consciousness; that is, those who recognize that the ways people perceive the world, interact with one another, and approach learning, among other things, are deeply influenced by such factors as race, ethnicity, social class, and language. This understanding enables teachers to cross the cultural boundaries that separate them from their students.

• have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be solved.

• have a sense that they are both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schooling more responsive to students from diverse backgrounds.

• embrace constructivist views of teaching and learning. That is, they see learning as an active process by which learners give meaning to new information, ideas, principles, and other stimuli; and they see teaching largely as a process of inducing change in students' knowledge and belief systems.

• are familiar with their students' prior knowledge derived from both personal and cultural experiences.
9. Schools actively support critical inquiry into the complexities of global issues. Children can thus assume the powerful responsibilities of world citizenship. • design instruction that builds on what students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar.
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