Learning disabilities, home background, and beliefs: their impact on school, learning and achievement

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Learning Disabilities, Home Background, and Beliefs:
Their Impact on School, Learning and Achievement

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my immediate family,
Milton, my Mother, Sam, Michael and Andrew.

Although my father is deceased, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude
the influence he had in creating in me a desire for knowledge.

I also dedicate this thesis to my extended family,
my grandchildren, their mothers, my brothers, their wives,
my nieces and nephews, my aunts and cousins
and Doris and Larry.

and to my friends of many years
Ann and Sam, Carola and Ernst and Gail and Keith
who have always been there.

I would like also to dedicate this study to Reverend, Dr. Daniel O’Leary
whose encouragement has left me with an enduring desire
to become the most competent teacher I can.
Abstract

Twenty-nine students from three State High Schools within the New South Wales Department of School Education's South Coast Region were identified by teachers and school administrators as being 'learning disabled'. The major defining criteria used were that the students were:

- functioning academically at least two years behind their peers,
- of normal intelligence
- free of any other emotional and/or physical disadvantages.

The study explored the nature of the relationship between home background, prior experiences of these students, their beliefs about their own learning and schooling, and the beliefs that other major stakeholders such as parents and teachers held about their educational potential.

The main data collection technique used in the study was the 'in-depth interview' in the paradigm of naturalistic inquiry. The interviews were conducted with the 29 students, their parents, and teachers. Using a questionnaire as an instrument, the interviews explored the memories and beliefs which the different stakeholders held.

The results of the analysis revealed several factors which are related to and impact on the 'condition' known as Learning Disabilities (LD). For example Grade 2 emerged as a critical year in the LD student's academic life because this was primarily the grade level in which the students first encountered difficulties academically and with teachers.

The belief that learning disabilities are mainly due to neurological damage, genetic programming or a diet problem is not supported by the data in this study.

The learning disabilities of the kind manifested by the students who participated in this study are best explained in terms of a mismatch between the home culture and the school culture. The factors that are included in the assessment of both cultures are the values, beliefs, attitudes, habits and practices that are associated with school, education, learning and literacy and numeracy. The mismatch occurs when the values and attitudes of the home culture do not tend to lend themselves to high academic achievement and when the school culture contains beliefs and attitudes that do not lend support to those students who are without coping skills for academic achievement.

The study also showed that there are multifarious problems in the LD student's life that contribute to the inducement of learning disabilities.
# Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Chapter Contents ........................................................................................................... 2
   1.2 Purpose ......................................................................................................................... 3
   1.3 Objective and Focus ....................................................................................................... 3
   1.4 Rationale ....................................................................................................................... 3
   1.5 The Study Setting ......................................................................................................... 4
   1.6 Selection of Schools and Grades .................................................................................... 5
   1.7 Criteria Used for the Selection of Students in This Study .................................................. 5
   1.8 Relationship Between Learning Disabilities, Beliefs and Literacy ...................................... 6
   1.9 Choice of Paradigm of Inquiry ....................................................................................... 7
   1.10 Boundaries of the Study .............................................................................................. 8
   1.11 Limitations .................................................................................................................. 8
   1.12 An Overview of the Organisation of the Study ............................................................... 9

2. LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................................... 10
   2.1 Chapter Contents ......................................................................................................... 11
   2.2 Chapter Purpose and Organisation ............................................................................... 13
   2.3 Overview ..................................................................................................................... 14
   2.4 Learning Disabilities ................................................................................................... 15
      2.5 The Historical Background of Learning Disabilities ..................................................... 15
         2.5.1 Early Work in the Field of LD ............................................................................. 15
         2.5.2 The Variety of Labels Used for Learning Disabilities ............................................ 16
         2.5.3 The Search for an Accurate Definition of Learning Disabilities .......................... 17
         2.5.4 Paradigms and Theories ..................................................................................... 19
         2.5.5 Learning Disabilities: A Cultural Perspective ...................................................... 21
2.5.6 The Prevalence of Learning Disabilities ........................................... 21
2.5.7 Learning Disabilities: A Gender Perspective ..................................... 23

2.6 The 'Definitions' Debate ..................................................................... 24
  2.6.1 The LD Community Organises ....................................................... 27
  2.6.2 The Continued Search ................................................................. 31
  2.6.3 Commonalities of Definition Components .................................... 32
  2.6.4 Impact of the Definition Dispute on This Study ........................... 33

2.7 Theories That Circumscribe Learning Disabilities .............................. 33
  2.7.1 Literacy/Numeracy: The Relationship with Learning Disabilities ...... 37
  2.7.2 Two Fundamental Theories on Teaching and Learning .................. 38
  2.7.3 Implications and Reflections of Theory Dispute on This Study .......... 39

2.8 Beliefs, Expectations, Family Interactions & Academic Results .......... 39
  2.8.1 Teacher Beliefs ........................................................................... 40
  2.8.2 Parent Beliefs ............................................................................ 45
  2.8.3 Students .................................................................................... 53
  2.8.4 Relevance to the Study ............................................................... 58

2.9 Other Factors that Interact with Learning Disabilities ....................... 58
  2.9.1 Socialisation and Friends ............................................................. 58
  2.9.2 Measurements for Psychological Assessment ............................... 62
  2.9.3 Head Injuries and Birth Problems ............................................... 66
  2.9.4 Psychostimulant Drugs and their Use in LD and Attention Deficit Disorder .... 68

2.10 Future Implications for LD ............................................................... 70

2.11 Summary ......................................................................................... 70

3. METHODOLOGY ................................................................................. 74

3.1 Chapter Contents .............................................................................. 75

3.2 Research Model .............................................................................. 77

3.3 Making Pre-Suppositions Explicit ..................................................... 77
  3.3.1 Pre-Supposition Number One ...................................................... 78
  3.3.2 Pre-Supposition Number Two ...................................................... 78
  3.3.3 Pre-Supposition Number Three ..................................................... 78
  3.3.4 Pre-Supposition Number Four ...................................................... 78
3.4 Paradigm of Inquiry ........................................................................................................ 79
  3.4.1 The Natural Setting ................................................................................................. 80
  3.4.2 The Human-as-Instrument ..................................................................................... 82
  3.4.3 The Beginnings of the Emergent Design ................................................................. 83
  3.4.4 Ethical Aspects of the Study ................................................................................... 84
  3.4.5 Trustworthiness .................................................................................................... 85
  3.4.6 Grounded Theory ................................................................................................. 87

3.5 Selection of Schools, Grades and Students .................................................................... 87

3.6 Preparation .................................................................................................................. 90
  3.6.1 Student Profile ..................................................................................................... 90
  3.6.2 Student Questionnaire .......................................................................................... 91
  3.6.3 Parent Questionnaire ........................................................................................... 92
  3.6.4 Educational Research Data Form .......................................................................... 92
  3.6.5 Questions for Special Education Teachers ............................................................ 93

3.7 Field ............................................................................................................................. 93

3.8 Interviews .................................................................................................................... 94
  3.8.1 Student Profile ..................................................................................................... 94
  3.8.2 Student Interviews ............................................................................................... 94
  3.8.3 Student Questionnaire .......................................................................................... 95
  3.8.4 Parent Interviews .................................................................................................. 95
  3.8.5 Parent Questionnaire ........................................................................................... 96
  3.8.6 Teacher Interviews ............................................................................................... 96
  3.8.7 Questions for Teachers Form ................................................................................ 97
  3.8.8 Educational Research Data Form .......................................................................... 97
  3.8.9 Principals ............................................................................................................... 97

3.9 Collection, Analysis and Coding of Data ..................................................................... 98
  3.9.1 Student Profile Database ...................................................................................... 100
  3.9.2 Student and Parent Questionnaires - Assessment and Classification of Questions .... 100
  3.9.3 Educational Research Data Form .......................................................................... 102
  3.9.4 Questions for Teacher Form .................................................................................. 102
  3.9.5 Principal Interviews .............................................................................................. 102

3.10 Summary ..................................................................................................................... 102
List of Charts

Chart 4-1 Students Living With Parents .................................................................107
Chart 4-2 Fathers' Occupations ..................................................................................107
Chart 4-3 Mothers' Occupations ..............................................................................108
Chart 4-4 Students' Feelings on School ....................................................................113
Chart 4-5 Number of Primary Schools Attended by Students ..............................115
Chart 4-6 Level of Schooling of Parents .................................................................116
Chart 4-7 Whether Parents were Shy or Nervous as Children ..............................116
Chart 4-8 Overall Academic Achievement of Parents ...........................................117
Chart 4-9 Parents' Feelings About Early Years at School ......................................118
Chart 4-10 Parents' Feelings About School ..............................................................119
Chart 4-11 Parents' Assessment of Their Enjoyment or Lack Thereof of School ....120
Chart 4-12 Areas Wherein Students Feel Successful ..............................................124
Chart 4-13 How Students Learned a Skill ...............................................................125
Chart 4-14 Students' Ease of Learning ................................................................. 126
Chart 4-15 Years at Which Students Become Aware of Their Academic Problems 128
Chart 4-16 Year Parent First Became Aware of Child's School Problems .........131
Chart 4-17 Parents' Suggestions of Negative Experiences That May Have Affected the Child .................................................................132
Chart 4-18 Parents' View of Their Child's Enjoyment of School ......................133
Chart 4-19 Best Year at School ..............................................................................135
Chart 4-20 Reasons for Students' Choice of Best Year ...........................................136
Chart 4-21 Worst Year at School .........................................................................137
Chart 4-22 Reasons for Students' Choice of Worst Year .......................................137
Chart 4-23 Teacher Rating By Students .................................................................138
Chart 4-24 Worst Teachers as Reported by Students ............................................140
Chart 4-25 Reasons for Students' Choice of Worst Teachers .................................141
Chart 4-26 Parents' Rememberance of Their Teachers .........................................141
Chart 4-27 How Students Felt With a Learning Disability ..................................142
Chart 4-28 Parents Knowledge of Children's Career Intentions .......................143
Chart 4-29 Difficulty Obtaining a Job ................................................................. 144
Chart 4-30 Use of Reading and Writing After Leaving School ............................144
Chart 4-31 Students' Anticipated School Leaving Year ........................................145
Chart 4-32 Parents' Responses to Reading ..............................................................148
Chart 4-33 Year in Which Parents Learned to Read ..............................................149
Chart 4-34 The Years in which the Students Recalled Learning to Read .........152
List of Figures

Figure 1-1 Structure of Chapter 1 ................................................................. 1
Figure 2-1 Flowchart for Literature Review Chapter ............................... 10
Figure 2-2 Flowchart of Literature Review That Led to Methodology ....... 73
Figure 3-1 Flowchart of Methodology Chapter ........................................ 74
Figure 3-2 The Flow of Naturalistic Inquiry - (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) ...... 80
Figure 3-3 Willem's Two Dimensional Space (1969) ............................... 81
Figure 3-4 Flowchart of Emergent Design .............................................. 84
Figure 3-5 Flowchart of Data Collection Instruments ............................. 90
Figure 3-6 Analysis Procedures ............................................................... 99
Figure 4-1 Flowchart of Results Chapter ................................................ 103
Figure 4-2 Best Things About School ...................................................... 121
Figure 4-3 Worst Things About School ................................................... 122
Figure 4-4 Reasons for the Worst Things About School ......................... 122
Figure 4-5 Students' Overall Impressions of School ............................... 123
Figure 4-6 Student Views on Mathematics ............................................ 162
Figure 4-7 Nutrition as Reported by Students ........................................ 175
Figure 4-8 Hours of Sleep as Reported by Students and Parents ............. 176
Figure 4-9 Discipline Problems As Reported by Parents ........................ 183
Figure 5-1 Flowchart of Discussion Chapter .......................................... 184
Figure 5-2 Diagram of Relationships ...................................................... 214
List of Tables

Table 4-1 Basic Information on Study Population ................................................................. 106
Table 4-2 General Information on Families of Students in Study ...................................... 108
Table 4-3 Students' Academic Status in Reading and Writing ........................................... 109
Table 4-4 Organisation of Question Responses on Beliefs .................................................. 111
Table 4-5 Parent's Beliefs on Child's Ability to Cope With School .................................... 126
Table 4-6 Parent's Beliefs on Child's Functioning in Everyday Life .................................. 127
Table 4-7 Parents' Beliefs on Academic Standing of Child .................................................... 129
Table 4-8 Beliefs of Students with Learning Disabilities ...................................................... 133
Table 4-9 Chances of Child Growing Out of Learning Problem as Viewed by Parent ......... 133
Table 4-10 Students' Evaluations of Teachers ................................................................. 139
Table 4-11 Organisation of Question Responses on Literacy ............................................. 146
Table 4-12 Parents' Beliefs on Students' Reading Problem ................................................. 147
Table 4-13 Students on Reading ....................................................................................... 156
Table 4-14 Parents' Opinion of Their Own Mathematical Ability ........................................ 161
Table 4-15 Teachers' Assessment of Students School 30 ................................................. 164
Table 4-16 Teachers' Assessment of Students, School 45 ................................................. 165
Table 4-17 Teachers' Assessment of Students, School 59 .................................................. 166
Table 4-18 Organisation of Question Responses Under Nutrition ..................................... 174