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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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
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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.
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