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Academic Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Young Adults with Learning Disabilities

Karin Ann Marie Coles
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Karin Coles

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Review Committee

Dr. Robin Friedman, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Mary Enright, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Keonya Booker, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2014

Abstract

Academic Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Young Adults with Learning Disabilities

by

Karin Ann Marie Coles

MSc, Walden University, 2012

MA, University of Calgary, 2000

BEd, University of Calgary, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

September 2014

Abstract

Positive academic self-efficacy beliefs are associated with increased motivation, higher levels of persistence, and overall academic success. There is a gap in the literature regarding how young adult learners with identified learning disabilities who are also enrolled in postsecondary education characterize their development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping skills. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of young adult students with learning disabilities in the development of their self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills. Social learning theory, particularly the self-efficacy belief components, was the guiding conceptual framework for the study. Ten postsecondary students with identified learning disabilities were recruited through a purposeful sampling strategy and engaged in individual, semi-structured interviews. Moustakas' steps to phenomenological analysis were employed to analyze the data. Analysis resulted in the emergence of 6 major themes in self-efficacy belief development: (a) the role of experience, (b) support systems, (c) role models, (d) adaptive coping mechanisms, (e) accommodations, and (f) effective educators. Insights from the analysis of the data may contribute to the further development of effective and supportive interventions, strategies, and accommodations for postsecondary students with learning disabilities.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my family for their ongoing support, continued encouragement and sacrifices made. I could not have completed this journey without you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Robin Friedman, for her insights, thoughtful feedback, and encouragement throughout this process. I would like to thank my dissertation committee member, Dr. Mary Enright, for her advice, contributions, and support in the completion of the dissertation. It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the importance of their roles in this learning journey.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement, patience, understanding and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank the participants for their candor, willingness to share their insights, and for allowing me the opportunity to hear and share their stories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Bandura (1977) argued that self-efficacy beliefs support or undermine individual efforts in academic performance by impacting goal setting, task approach, task persistence, and overall levels of motivation. Students with an identified learning disability and who also have positive and accurate self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to engage in challenging academic content, evidence increased sustainable effort in learning tasks, take ownership for their learning and accessing necessary supports and accommodations, and experience resultant academic success (Bandura, 1997; Firth, Frydenberg, & Greaves, 2008; Getzel, 2008; Klassen, 2010). Thus, self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in academic choice, the development of academic skills supporting achievement, and the completion of graduation requirements for learners with identified learning disabilities.

Students with disabilities are entering postsecondary institutions in increasing numbers (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics in the United States (Raue & Lewis, 2011) reported that, during the 2008-2009 academic year, 88% of 2 and 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions enrolled students, who self-disclosed that they were students with disabilities. Of these students, 31% were identified as having a specific learning disability. In Canada, education is a provincial, as opposed to a federal, responsibility. Thus, Canadian educational statistics are reported at the provincial level. Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education (2013) reported that 9,565 students with disabilities accessed support services and accommodations at Alberta postsecondary institutions in

2011-2012, a marginal decrease after steady increase rates reported from 2007 – 2011. Thus, due to a growing number of individuals with disabilities participating in advanced or postsecondary learning institutions, Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education (2013) argued it is essential that appropriate supports and services be in place to promote successful learning for this population.

Despite the increasing postsecondary enrollment numbers reported for students with identified learning disabilities (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Newman et al., 2010; Russell & Demko, 2005), students with LD are less likely to complete graduation requirements (Getzel, 2008; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012) or to graduate in a timely manner consistent with their non-learning disabled peers (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2005). As completing postsecondary educational opportunities contributes towards increased employability and positive employment outcomes (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012), further research exploring factors that support postsecondary students with identified learning disabilities to obtain postsecondary credentials is needed. Research contributing to the knowledge base in the field of learning disabilities and educational outcomes has the potential to impact positive social change through enhancing understanding of challenges or barriers to postsecondary achievement. An enhanced understanding is likely to support professionals who work with students with identified learning disabilities in increasing accessibility to services and supports. Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to understand the lived experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities regarding the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping mechanisms.

In the following sections of the chapter, I provide further background regarding available literature related to: the scope of the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study, developed research questions, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and an overall summary.

Background

Researchers in the area of learning disabilities have highlighted the importance of factors such as optimistic, supportive, and accurate academic self-efficacy beliefs (Klassen, 2010; Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Murdock, 2013; Zheng, Erickson, Kingston, & Noonan, 2012), adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy (Firth et al., 2008), and accessing resources and accommodations (Getzel, 2008) in determining academic success for those identified with learning disabilities. Researchers indicated that postsecondary students with learning disabilities may encounter further barriers to academic achievement, compared to their non-learning disabled peers, due to not accessing available learning accommodations and supports (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008; Getzel 2008; May & Stone, 2010). Self-efficacy beliefs impact an individual's approach to managing access to necessary accommodations and available supports with higher self-efficacy beliefs leading to stronger self-advocacy skills and subsequent higher academic achievement (Gerber 2012; Hen & Goroshiz, 2012; Wright et al., 2013).

Several qualitative studies have been conducted on the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding levels of academic achievement with lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs consistently evidenced by learners with learning disabilities (e.g.,

Klassen, 2010; Lakaye & Margalit, 2008; May & Stone, 2010). While quantitative studies regarding the relationship between academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding educational achievement for students with identified learning disabilities (Baird, Dearing, Hamill, & Scott, 2009; Hen & Goroshit, 2012; Klassen, 2010) were located in the literature I reviewed, only two qualitative research studies were identified attending to, or exploring, the young adult experience of developing self-efficacy for those learners identified with learning disabilities. Qualitative studies where researchers examined the phenomenon of the development of self-efficacy beliefs from the perspective of the individual with a learning disability are limited (Anctil et al., 2008; Klassen & Lynch, 2007). Thus, there is a gap in the literature regarding the voice of young adults with learning disabilities in describing their lived experience regarding the development of self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills. This lack of voice represents a gap in knowledge in the field of learning disabilities.

Given the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, self-advocacy skills, and academic success (Klassen, 2010; Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2013), how young adults with learning disabilities in postsecondary institutions characterize the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skills is an important area of study. The learners themselves may contribute critical information informing pedagogical practices and the development of appropriate supports and accommodations to promote graduation. Thus, individuals with identified learning disabilities represent an important resource that may

contribute crucial knowledge regarding self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping mechanisms.

Problem Statement

Individuals with learning disabilities are less likely to complete postsecondary education than their non-learning disabled peers (Getzel, 2008; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012). The research I reviewed summarized factors that contribute towards lower levels of completion. These factors include lower self-efficacy beliefs (Klassen, 2010), lower self-advocacy skills impacting access to available accommodations and supports (Klassen & Lynch, 2007), and increased levels of risk for school disengagement, fewer interpersonal relationships, and lower levels of hopefulness (Lackay & Margalit, 2008). Self-efficacy beliefs are foundational in supporting individuals to manage learning environments, address challenges or barriers, persist in academic goal attainment, and have a positive outlook upon future academic goal completion (Bandura, 1977; Klassen, 2010; Klassen & Lackaye, 2008; Zimmerman, 1995). Thus, increasing the academic self-efficacy beliefs of learners with learning disabilities may potentially increase levels of academic achievement.

Supporting increased self-efficacy beliefs requires an understanding of how those beliefs are developed and conditions or circumstances that are most supportive. The individuals' voices, contributing their stories, regarding the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills should provide meaningful data towards the further development of effective interventions and supports for this population. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the perspective of individuals with

learning disabilities upon their development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and resulting adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy skills. Thus, this study contributes valuable information to fill the identified gap by making a contribution to the available qualitative research regarding self-efficacy beliefs, adaptive coping skills, and learning disabilities from an emic perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities regarding the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy. The goal of the study was to develop further understanding of the role of self-efficacy beliefs as a factor in the postsecondary education of learners with learning disabilities. I undertook an exploration of 10 participants with learning disabilities and how they characterized the development of their self-efficacy beliefs, the relationship of these beliefs to the development of adaptive coping skills, to academic persistence, and to accessing available accommodations and learner supports. Their insights should help this study to contribute critical knowledge regarding appropriate interventions and supportive services for this population.

Research Questions

Within a qualitative framework, research questions are developed from a broad perspective of the topic, thus allowing the topic to be open and not limited. Working within a phenomenological framework positions the researcher to ask participants what their lived experience of the identified phenomenon has been like, and to characterize the

contexts in which the phenomenon has been experienced (Moustakas, 1994). For this phenomenological study, the central question guiding the study was: What is the experience of young adults with identified learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs? A secondary question explored within the study was: How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study was Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, particularly the self-efficacy belief elements in this theory. Within the context of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), self-efficacy beliefs are defined as the beliefs an individual has regarding their capacity to be successful within a specific situation. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) reasoned that self-efficacy beliefs impact an individual's academic motivation, level of determination, and subsequent academic choices. Individual, social, and contextual factors influence how self-efficacy beliefs evolve through interpretation of relevant experiences (Bandura, 1995).

Self-efficacy beliefs are lower in the population of those identified with learning disabilities (Baird et al., 2009; Klassen, 2010; Reed, Kennett, Lewis, & Lund-Lucas, 2011). Lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs potentially impact academic self-regulation, academic choice, disclosure of learning disability, and access to available accommodations and supports at the postsecondary level (Getzel, 2008). Specific self-efficacy skills such as self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-reflection are relevant

areas for further research in the field of learning disabilities (Anctil et al., 2008; Hen & Goroshitz, 2012; Klassen, 2010). More detailed information regarding the conceptual framework of self-efficacy beliefs within social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is provided within the review of the literature.

The conceptual framework of self-efficacy supported the research inquiry due to direct correlations between the research questions and the identified elements within the conceptual framework. Exploring with young adults identified with a learning disability their lived experience in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and experiences within postsecondary educational contexts were consistent with the tenets of this conceptual framework.

Nature of the Study

As the identified purpose of the study was to develop meaningful understanding through exploring the learner's experience of having an identified learning disability and their development of academic self-efficacy beliefs, a phenomenological approach was used (Moustakas, 1994). Further, my undertaking this study provided important information regarding how an individual with a learning disability experiences the impact of self-efficacy and the role the learners assign to significant professional adults or educational contexts in self-efficacy belief development.

For the purposes of this study, I invited university or college students between 18 and 21 years of age who have been diagnosed with a learning disability, with or without a comorbid diagnosis, to engage with myself in a semistructured interview regarding their experiences of developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills.

Adaptive coping skills are considered to include self-advocacy, self-regulation, self-reflection, and self-determination (Firth et al., 2008; Klassen, 2010). Ten participants self-identified and volunteered for the study. The determination of a diagnosis of a learning disability, with or without comorbid conditions, was assessed by asking the following screening questions:

1. Do you have a diagnosed learning disability?
2. Has your learning disability impacted or does it currently impact your academic development or progress?
3. Would you be willing to participate in an interview with a researcher to discuss your experiences as a student with a learning disability?

I transcribed the interview data from participants and organized the emergent themes through processes of hand coding. The data were analyzed by applying Moustakas' (1994) steps for data analysis. The data were analyzed for themes, detailed descriptions of the lived experience of the participants, and connections to support the development of further understanding of the essence of the experience of developing academic self-efficacy beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). Further detailed information regarding the research design, rationale, researcher role, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness will be addressed in Chapter 3.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined for clarity:

Adaptive coping skills: The skills an individual uses to compensate for a limitation that enables the individual to experience an increased likelihood of success (Klassen, 2008; Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

Accommodations: Accommodations refers to support services available for identified students within the postsecondary environment such that these students have equal access to educational opportunities (Quinlan, Bates & Angell, 2012). These may include, but are not limited to, readers, scribes, voice-to-text software, provision of extended time for assignments and exams, writing exams individually or within a small group, and assignment modifications (Quinlan et al., 2012).

Learning Disability: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) defines specific learning disorder as an impairment in functioning affecting an individual's ability to achieve academically at a level consistent with their age and intellectual functioning. For the purposes of the proposed study, a learning disability or disorder will be any learning disability identified by a registered psychologist.

Self-advocacy Skills: The discussion and collaboration skills an individual uses to access learning supports, modifications, accommodations, or to employ other compensatory strategies in support of academic achievement (Gerber, 2012).

Self-determination: An approach to learning characterized by sustained effort in the face of challenges, engaging in self-advocacy, taking ownership for learning, and demonstrating persistence (Zheng et al., 2012).

Self-disclosure: Identifying oneself as having a learning disability to an enrolling post-secondary institution (May & Stone, 2010).

Self-efficacy Beliefs: The beliefs an individual has regarding their capacity to engage in necessary behaviors to promote success within a specific context (Bandura, 1997).

Self-regulation: Engaging in processes to regulate attention and goal directed behavior such as goal setting, motivation, persistence, and structuring study environments to support academic learning (Klassen, 2010).

Assumptions

Assumptions underlying the study included access to postsecondary students willing to participate with the researcher in exploring the topic of self-efficacy beliefs, truthfulness in disclosure of identification as an individual with a learning disability, and communication of experiences characterized by trustworthiness and honesty. Within the context of the study, my first assumption was necessary as willing participants who were enrolled in a postsecondary institution were essential to the study's primary purpose. Further, as participants were not asked to provide confirmation of diagnosis as an individual with a learning disability, it was necessary to assume that any disclosure related to identification was honest. Trustworthy communication regarding the participants' lived-experiences of self-efficacy beliefs was an essential assumption as the primary purpose of the study was to further understand the meaning of the individual's lived experience.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to a small group of participants, identified with a learning disability, who attended postsecondary institutions in an urban setting in

Western Canada. The participants engaged in semistructured interviews where I explored their lived-experiences in developing self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping mechanisms for engaging in a postsecondary learning environment. Selection of the participants was based upon a purposeful sampling strategy as the study sought to contribute further understanding regarding the lived experiences of individuals who share a specific characteristic.

The individual participants and the research location bound the study. As participants were drawn from local postsecondary institutions they may not be a representative sample of the population of postsecondary students with learning disabilities. However, the identified postsecondary institutions offered a variety of programs and were located in different quadrants of a large metropolitan city. Thus, the sample was anticipated to include participants with diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The small sample size may further limit generalizability of findings; however, the stated purpose of the study was not to determine generalizability but to contribute towards an enriched understanding of the experiences of the participants' in developing self-efficacy beliefs.

Limitations

As the study was a phenomenological study limitations related to design included the small sample size, the potential for researcher bias in interpretation and influence in participant responses, the assumption that participants were interested and articulate regarding their experiences, and the indirect nature of the information. Reasonable steps to address potential limitations included the use of an interview protocol, audiotaped

interviews, note taking by the researcher, ensuring valid and accurate interview data transcripts, and the application of Moustakas' (1994) procedures for analyzing qualitative data. Further steps to address limitations included the planned use of member checking and potential peer debriefing (Quinlan et al., 2012).

Significance

The study has the potential to contribute to knowledge within the fields of learning disabilities, postsecondary education, and self-efficacy beliefs. There is a gap in the literature regarding understanding and communicating the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994) of individuals with learning disabilities in developing self-efficacy beliefs. Communicating the lessons learned from the particularities of the individual experience may advance understanding for those identified with learning disabilities, family members, and those who work in various professional capacities to support this population. Developing understanding from the perspective of the individual may elaborate upon current knowledge or support the development of new questions and areas of research regarding the role of self-efficacy beliefs for those identified with learning disabilities.

This study may have implications for postsecondary institutions in program policies, planning, or support services for students with learning disabilities. Professional staff in departments of accessibility or disability services may develop a better understanding of how they can engage with students with LD in supporting them to access accommodations, modifications, or enhance communication strategies with professors. Educational psychologists working with the population of postsecondary

learners with learning disabilities may find the information communicated within the study results enhances their professional practice in counseling or in developing interventions designed to support this population. Those responsible for registration and admission policies may determine enhanced procedures that support this population to approach and utilize available supports and services leading to increased education success and subsequent vocational outcomes (Getzel, 2008).

Potential implications for positive social change included an increased awareness and knowledge of the development of self-efficacy beliefs for those identified with learning disabilities. Such an enhanced awareness and understanding may lead to changes in professional practices within educational systems, as well as enhanced professional practice for those who work to support this population. Further, these enhancements may better support the population of postsecondary learners with identified learning disabilities to complete matriculation requirements in a timely and thus, a more cost effective manner. Completing postsecondary education is likely to increase vocational opportunities and overall quality of life satisfaction (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012).

Summary

In this chapter, I presented background information for the study, in which I examined the lived-experiences of young adult learners in developing self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping skills within the postsecondary environment. There is a gap in the literature regarding the voice of individuals with identified learning disabilities in conceptualizing and expressing the development of self-efficacy beliefs (Klassen & Lynch, 2007), adaptive coping mechanisms (Anctil et al., 2008), and the

experience of postsecondary education (Getzel, 2008). The conceptual framework of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, with an emphasis upon self-efficacy beliefs, was the guiding framework for this proposed study.

The purpose of this study was to develop meaningful understanding through an exploration of the lived experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities. This exploration was considered by myself to have important potential towards the contribution of knowledge in the literature base in the area of learning disabilities. To explore the lived experience of young adult learners with learning disabilities, the central question identified for the study was: What is the experience of young adults with identified learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs? A secondary question identified was: How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy and corresponding adaptive coping skills?

In this phenomenological study, I used semistructured interview data from learners with learning disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education institutions within an urban location in Western Canada. The number of participants was 10, for saturation. The resulting data were analyzed through Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process. Assumptions underlying the study included access to willing participants, truthfulness in disclosure regarding identification as an individual with a learning disability, and communication of experiences characterized by insight and honesty. The study was limited to a small group of participants and bounded by both participants and research

locations. Thus, potential limitations included the small sample size, researcher bias in interpretation, and the indirect nature of the information.

The significance of the study was the potential to contribute to critical knowledge regarding interventions, accommodations, and supportive services for learners with identified learning disabilities. Implications for positive social change reflect an increased awareness and understanding of the development of self-efficacy beliefs for the population of learners with learning disabilities. In turn, this awareness should lead to enhanced program supports and services subsequently leading to increased completion of postsecondary education (Quinlan et al., 2012).

In Chapter 2, I will present a review of the literature related to the conceptual framework of Bandura's (1997) social learning theory with a specific focus upon self-efficacy beliefs. Chapter 2 will also include a review of the literature regarding self-efficacy beliefs and learning disabilities. In the review of the literature, I will support the assertion that there is a gap regarding the voice of those with identified learning disabilities in the development and impact of self-efficacy beliefs upon postsecondary experiences. In Chapter 3, I will present the research design and rationale, describe the methodology for the study, and address issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. In Chapter 4, I will discuss participant demographics, procedures for data collection and analysis, and describe the results of the data analysis. In Chapter 5, I will present an interpretation of the findings of the study, discuss the limitations, make recommendations based upon the results of the study, and present implications for positive social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Researchers have argued that learners with learning disabilities have lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs, which negatively impact their academic levels of success and the development of academic self-regulation skills (Klassen, 2010; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived-experience of young adult learners with learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy. The goal of the study was to develop further understanding of the role of self-efficacy beliefs as a factor in the postsecondary education of learners with learning disabilities. Exploring the lived-experience with participants may contribute to critical knowledge regarding appropriate interventions for these learners.

Current and historical literature within the field of learning disabilities highlights the importance of self-efficacy beliefs and the potential impact upon scholastic attitudes, and subsequent skills and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Hen & Goroshit, 2012; Klassen, 2010). In the literature review, I examine literature focused upon an analysis of the role of academic self-efficacy beliefs, the development of adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy skills, affective experiences of learners with identified learning disabilities and corresponding self-efficacy beliefs, and qualitative studies on the self-perceptions of students with identified learning disabilities.

Bandura (1999) defined self-efficacy beliefs as the beliefs individuals have in “their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage

prospective situations” (pg. 2). Efficacy beliefs thus impact an individual’s thinking, feelings, attitudes toward motivation, and ultimately actions. The goals that individuals set for themselves are dependent upon the level of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1999). Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs regarding an individual’s capacity to learn within various academic domains and to develop independence in attending to required academic self-regulation skills potentially will have significant impact upon incentive, persistence in goal achievement, and overall educational accomplishments (Bandura et al., 1996).

Self-efficacy beliefs for learning have been defined as “students’ beliefs about their capabilities to effectively apply their knowledge and skills to learn academic content” (Schunk, 1989, p. 15). Self-efficacy beliefs thus potentially impact the academic choices a learner makes. An individual with lower levels of self-efficacy may demonstrate avoidance behaviors when encountering more challenging academic tasks, display a lack of consistency in self-regulation, set lower levels of academic goals (Klassen, 2010), or within secondary and postsecondary learning environments enroll in courses in which they feel they will easily attain high marks and not enroll in classes they believe will present an academic challenge (May & Stone, 2010). It may be argued that engaging in goal setting, goal persistence, and scholastic choice from a limited view of academic self-efficacy thus potentially negatively limits future educational and subsequent vocational prospects. Alternatively, understanding the contributing factors towards the appropriate development of scholastic or academic self-efficacy beliefs potentially supports scholastic achievement, goal setting and attainment, and thus future

success (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012; Wright et al., 2013).

In this chapter I present a review of the literature pertaining to adolescents and young adults identified with learning disabilities and self-efficacy beliefs. I will present a review regarding the conceptual framework of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory with a specific focus upon self-efficacy beliefs. Subsequently, I will synthesize a review of the current literature regarding the role of self-efficacy beliefs and follow with a synthesis of the literature regarding characteristic self-efficacy beliefs of learners with learning disabilities. I will present a further review of the literature regarding the relationships between self-efficacy beliefs, goal setting, and self-determination. Literature regarding relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills, and the relationship of affect and self-efficacy beliefs for individuals with identified learning disabilities is also presented. In the literature review I also present a summary of the examination of the qualitative research literature reviewing the self-perceptions of youth with learning disabilities regarding self-efficacy beliefs and identified needs for successful educational experiences. The chapter also includes with an overall summary of the key themes emerging from the literature and presents a transition to the chapter regarding the proposed study research methodology.

Literature Search Strategy

To access information regarding how young adults with learning disabilities characterize the development of self-efficacy beliefs, the impact of self-efficacy beliefs upon achievement and affect, and potential interventions for youth with an identified learning disability regarding self-efficacy beliefs, I undertook a comprehensive literature

search. Peer-reviewed articles and foundational works were accessed through Walden University's online library, The Canadian Psychological Association online, The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada online, the Internet, Google Scholar, and the Calgary Public Library. Specific databases such as ProQuest, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, EBSCOhost, ERIC, and SAGE were used to gather literature for this study. Key search terms of: *self-efficacy*, *self-efficacy beliefs*, *self-determination*, *self-advocacy*, *learning disabilities*, *adolescents with learning disabilities*, *young adults with learning disabilities*, *postsecondary education and students with learning disabilities*, *social learning theory*, and *postsecondary special needs students' self-perception* were used to search the multiple databases and related information sources. All search terms were used within all databases and in combination with each other to support an in-depth literature search strategy. I used a time frame qualifier to access current research dated from 2008 and onwards. However, the limited available qualitative research studies regarding learning disabilities and self-efficacy beliefs required an extension of the time frame search. Nevertheless, even with an open-ended time frame only two articles exploring the self-efficacy beliefs of individuals with learning disabilities were identified.

Conceptual Framework

Self-efficacy beliefs are an important component of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Bandura argued that individual perceptions of self and capacity directly impact how an individual approaches each situation. Bandura argued that efficacy beliefs and expectations directly influence levels of expended effort and persistence in challenging experiences. Bandura further posited that stronger efficacy beliefs contribute

towards increased engagement and active effort. Thus, an efficacy expectation is developed through self-efficacy beliefs regarding an individual's capacity to engage in required actions to support a desired outcome.

Self-efficacy Belief Influences

Bandura (1977) argued that an individual's self-efficacy beliefs are developed and influenced through four main components. Bandura posited these components to be mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social influences, and are interpreted partly through an individual's physiological and emotional states. Mastery experiences are experiences characterized by an acquisition of needed resources, tools, and attitudes to plan and execute necessary actions to achieve success (Bandura, 1997). Thus, mastery experiences within an educational context can be argued to be those experiences in which an individual experienced academic success through goal setting, persistence, accessing necessary accommodations, and hard work. Bandura argued that easy successes may contribute towards an expectation of quick results and are therefore not conducive to developing a strong sense of efficacy. Alternatively, mastery experiences develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs as an individual engages in sustained effort and experiences success after persevering through a level of adversity (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious experiences are argued by researchers to support the development and strengthen self-efficacy beliefs due to the role of social models in social learning theory (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1987). As individuals observe role models similar to themselves engage in high effort, overcome adversity, and experience successful goal attainment, their beliefs in their own capabilities to master similar activities is enhanced. Bandura

(1997) argued that the greater the similarity between the observer and the participant the more likely the successes or failures of the participant will impact the self-efficacy beliefs of the observer. Bandura further summarized that competent role models share their knowledge and support observers to learn effective skills and strategies; however, the most important aspect of vicarious experiences in the development of self-efficacy beliefs may be the positive attitudes demonstrated by persistent role models as they cope with challenges.

Self-efficacy beliefs are further strengthened through social persuasion (Bandura, 1997). Positive encouragement together with specific feedback providing verbal evidence supporting an individual's capacity to master a given task are argued to support an individual to engage in higher levels of effort required to succeed (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, it may be surmised that when an individual encounters an academically challenging task supportive educators and peers play an important role in encouraging the individual to initiate effort and persist until they are successful.

Bandura (1997) argued that of the four factors or influences on the development of self-efficacy beliefs, social persuasion might undermine the development of an individual's beliefs. Individual's whom have been negatively persuaded that they lack necessary skills or competencies to be successful may avoid engaging in challenging tasks that would otherwise support the development of their capabilities. In this manner, by avoiding challenging tasks, giving up quickly, and developing limited motivation to persist, low levels of self-efficacy beliefs create behavioral patterns that in turn validate disbelief in one's capabilities (Bandura, 1997).

The final influence upon the development of self-efficacy beliefs was posited by Bandura (1997) to be an individual's physiological or emotion state when judging their capabilities. Bandura summarized that a positive mood contributes towards enhanced levels of perceived self-efficacy, and that high self-efficacy beliefs support an individual to perceive stress reactions or tension to energize performance levels. Thus, positive perceptions and interpretations of emotional and physical reactions to challenging tasks may facilitate task approach, persistence, and completion.

Information provided by each of the four influences on the development of self-efficacy beliefs, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states, are argued by Bandura (1997) to require cognitive processing to gain significance. The interpretation of the relevant efficacy related experience is dependent upon a multiplicity of factors including personal, social, and situational (Bandura, 1997). Thus, Bandura indicated that the extent to which the experience informs the development of self-efficacy beliefs is dependent upon preconceptions of capabilities, the perceived level of challenge of the task, level of expended effort, emotional and physical states at the time, levels of external support or assistance, and situational circumstances.

Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Academic Performance

Within the context of academic achievement, an individual's self-efficacy beliefs will impact goal setting, motivation, persistence, academic course choices, determination, and resiliency in the face of difficult tasks (Bandura, 1977; Hen & Goroshit, 2012; Klassen, 2010). Therefore, high self-efficacy beliefs are argued by researchers to support

an individual to approach and persist through a challenging task while lower self-efficacy beliefs tend to contribute towards avoidance of difficult tasks or a lack of persistence in achieving identified goals (Bandura, 1977; Klassen, 2010). Thus, students' beliefs in their efficacy to engage in self-regulation as learners and master curricula may subsequently impact their academic goal setting and attainment (Bandura, 1977). Zimmerman (1995) summarized high self-efficacy beliefs as positively impacting student engagement, persistence in learning tasks, and level of effort.

Efficacy beliefs directly contribute towards an individual's academic performance (Bandura, 1997; Klassen, 2010; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; May & Stone, 2010). For those identified with learning disabilities lower levels of efficacy beliefs potentially negatively impact academic achievement, the development of adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy and self-determination (Baird et al., 2009), affect (Klassen & Lynch, 2007), and self-perception as an individual capable of achieving academic success (Klassen, 2010; Klassen & Lynch, 2007). Consistent with Bandura (1997), the lower levels of academic self-efficacy beliefs of an individual with a learning disability may constrict their academic activities, undermine motivation, and create behavioral patterns that validate the disbelief in individual academic capacities. Alternatively, a study investigating the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement supported the tenet that higher levels of academic self-efficacy beliefs are positively related to academic achievement. Lackaye and Margalit (2008) reported a quantitatively significant relationship between high academic self-efficacy

beliefs and successful attainment of academic outcomes for individuals with identified learning disabilities.

Within the field of learning disabilities, literature supports the importance of understanding the role of academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping mechanisms to support learners in achieving success (Baird et al., 2009; Getzel, 2008; Klassen, 2010). Researchers have demonstrated a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding academic progress (Klassen, 2010) and school completion (Gerber, 2012; Wright et al., 2013). Thus, the study examining the lived experiences of learners identified with learning disabilities in developing self-efficacy beliefs benefited from self-efficacy theory, as I examined the development of key constructs of beliefs, motivation, self-perception, adaptive coping mechanisms, and affect with participants.

Exploring research questions of: How do young adults with identified learning disabilities describe their experiences of developing academic self-efficacy? and How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics of individuals who contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy and corresponding adaptive coping skills? with individuals with learning disabilities provided the opportunity to contribute towards understanding the individual perspective. Further, enhanced understanding in this area provided the opportunity to build upon existing knowledge within the field of learning disabilities and the role of self-efficacy beliefs. Additionally, such knowledge and understanding may contribute towards appropriate interventions such as program development specific to enhancing self-

efficacy beliefs and developing academic self-regulation skills, development in teaching strategies, and knowledge of supportive techniques for all professionals who work with individuals with learning disabilities.

Review of the Literature

In the following literature review, I present studies from within the discipline of learning disabilities that examined the characteristic academic self-efficacy beliefs of individuals identified with learning disabilities, relationships between self-efficacy beliefs, goal setting, and self-determination, relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills, relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and emotional affect, and self-efficacy beliefs from a qualitative research approach.

Characteristic Academic Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Individuals with LD

Individuals with identified learning disabilities often evidence lower levels of academic self-efficacy beliefs than peers who do not have a learning disability (Hen & Goroshit, 2012). Klassen (2010) summarized that individuals with learning disabilities reported decreased levels of self-efficacy beliefs specifically in regards to their ability to learn academic content. Similarly, Reed, Kennett, Lewis, and Lund-Lucas (2011) summarized research indicating that students with learning disabilities in college evidence lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs than their non-LD peers. In the study results, the researchers' highlighted students with learning disabilities in higher education reported less confidence in their capabilities to meet academic demands, questioned their overall academic competencies, and demonstrated increased pessimistic attitudes towards completing higher education requirements (Reed et al., 2011). Lower levels of academic

self-efficacy beliefs are argued by researchers to translate into a diminished sense of capacity for learning challenging academic curricula (Baird et al., 2009). Thus, it may be argued that individuals with identified learning disabilities are significantly more likely to encounter challenges with performance and motivation due to lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs.

In contrast to peers with learning disabilities who express lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs, individuals with LD who have positive and accurate self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to achieve independence and autonomy within postsecondary learning environments (Gerber, 2012). In a similar study Wright et al. (2013) found that a positive relationship existed for college students with learning disabilities between positive academic self-efficacy beliefs, continued enrollment, and academic achievement levels. Research results indicated that reported level of self-efficacy beliefs at the end of the first semester of college were related to college graduation (Wright et al., 2013). Thus, developing further knowledge of how self-efficacy beliefs are developed to inform interventions designed to support individuals in academic achievement were argued to be critical areas for further research and incorporation in educational practice (Wright et al., 2013).

Alternative to research highlighting lower levels of academic self-efficacy beliefs for students with identified learning disabilities, Klassen (2008) posited that elevated inaccurate self-efficacy beliefs might be an issue for this population. Klassen presented an overview of studies considering the accuracy of self-efficacy beliefs for adolescents with an identified learning disability, and argued that an overly positive view of self-

efficacy, termed optimistic bias, is potentially present for these learners. Optimistic bias was argued to potentially interfere with academic progress, persistence, and success as students with optimistic bias in their academic self-efficacy beliefs may have an overestimate of their levels of preparation for academic assessment, subject specific academic capacity, and overall levels of both content knowledge and application skills.

Kim and Chiu (2011) further argued that an excessive positive self-perception might lead to negative psychological impact, as individuals with overly optimistic self-perceptions are more vulnerable to depression. Kim and Chiu posited that excessively positive self-efficacy beliefs might place an individual at risk when their achievements do not meet personal expectations and difficulties are subsequently viewed as failures and not as opportunities for learning. Therefore, further studies contributing knowledge towards the phenomenon of the development of positive and accurate self-efficacy beliefs were argued to be an important consideration and undertaking (Kim & Chiu, 2011; Klassen, 2008).

Relationships Between Self-Efficacy Beliefs, Goal Setting, and Self-Determination

Researchers argued that youth with learning disabilities will engage in setting goals based upon lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs and therefore potentially limit their academic choices and progress (Baird et al., 2009). Baird et al. (2009) further posited that individuals with identified learning disabilities set goals based upon expectations for set performance levels and not with an expectation for growth or learning outcomes. Thus, they more often respond to an academic task with an expectation for performance based upon expertise or ineffectiveness (Baird et al., 2009) or may view their learning disability

as an insurmountable obstacle to academic achievement (May & Stone, 2010). In relation, research literature reviewed indicated that students with learning disabilities who evidenced lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs related to learning academic content set lower goals for achievement, put forth less effort, experience higher levels of inattention to task, demonstrate increased academic procrastination, and lower levels of academic persistence (Baird et al., 2009; Klassen, 2010; May & Stone, 2010).

Characteristics of attention to task, setting moderately challenging academic achievement goals, accessing available supports and accommodations, and taking ownership for learning are consistent with self-determination (Zheng, et al., 2012) or self-regulation (Klassen, 2010). The literature I reviewed highlighted the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and self-determined behavioral characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities (Baird et al., 2009; Klassen, 2010; May & Stone, 2010; Zheng et al., 2012). Individuals with identified learning disabilities with lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs also evidenced lower levels of self-determined behavior in relation to academic achievement (Zheng et al., 2012). Consistent with Bandura (1997) research studies support self-efficacy beliefs as being influenced by mastery or non-mastery experiences (Feldman, Kim & Elliott, 2011; Klassen, 2010), which in turn influence the development of appropriate self-determination or self-regulation skills.

Klassen (2010) engaged in a quantitative study that examined the role of self-efficacy beliefs in relationship to self-regulation or self-determined behavior. Klassen identified a significant relationship between the self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation skills of learners and both predicted and final achievement in English. Klassen also

highlighted that the students with learning disabilities evidenced decreased self-efficacy beliefs specifically in regards to their academic self-regulation skills comparative to peers without learning disabilities.

Similarly, Zheng et al. (2012) determined a causal relationship between the academic levels of achievement for students with a learning disability and their self-determination. Zheng et al. (2012) reported a significant relationship between self-determination and level of academic success. Mediating and moderating variables of level of income, gender, and city location were subsequently examined to explore whether they influenced outcomes with results indicating that students who engaged in self-determined behavior were able to set and achieve appropriate academic goals. For young adult learners with learning disabilities critical components of self-determined behavior are self-knowledge of specific challenges, ability to discuss and collaborate with others to access accommodations and an awareness of compensatory strategies that promote individual success (Gerber, 2012). Therefore, it may be argued that self-determination skills become crucial skills to support the educational success of young adult students with learning disabilities.

Relationships Between Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Adaptive Coping Skills

Adaptive coping skills for students with learning disabilities are argued by researchers to support the development of positive academic self-concept, enhanced academic self-efficacy beliefs, and subsequent achievement (Gerber, 2012; Klassen, 2010; Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Critical adaptive coping skills argued by researchers to increase academic achievement for learners identified with learning disabilities include

self-advocacy, becoming knowledgeable about and accessing available supports, and being able to clearly articulate learning needs in regards to a learning disability identification (Klassen, 2010; Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

Consistent with self-efficacy beliefs, researchers have posited that adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy are essential elements for learners with identified learning disabilities in achieving postsecondary success (Gerber, 2012; Getzel, 2008; May & Stone, 2010; Walker & Test, 2011). Adaptive coping skills are enhanced when specific interventions directed at teaching essential skills are provided to students with learning disabilities. The research I reviewed indicated the need for intervention supports in learning self-determination and adaptive coping skills for those identified with a learning disability as these skills are linked to increased academic and positive social-emotional outcomes (Firth et al., 2008; Wehmeyer et al., 2013).

In a recent study, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm and Soukup (2013) examined the role of participation within an intervention designed to enhance self-determination and subsequent adaptive coping skills of students identified with a learning disability. Study results indicated that students who participated in the intervention expressed increased confidence in advocating for their learning needs and subsequently levels of self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement increased. Similarly, Reed et al. (2011) sought to examine if participation in an integrated university preparation course would support students with LD to improve their academic and general resourcefulness. Students with LD evidenced an increase in their adaptive coping skills post intervention and an increased overall positive attitude towards themselves as college capable learners.

In a related study, Firth, Frydenberg, and Greaves (2008) studied the effect of completing various programs developed to support students identified with a learning disability to develop successful academic self-advocacy skills. Students who participated in interventions reported increased self-advocacy skills, increased independence in academic task completion, and higher overall positive efficacy beliefs (Firth et al., 2009). Therefore it may be argued that self-efficacy beliefs and adaptive coping skills form a reciprocal relationship with each impacting the other; positive self-efficacy beliefs support the development of adaptive coping mechanisms and successfully engaging in adaptive coping skills positively impacts the development of self-efficacy skills. Experiencing successful self-advocacy may be likened to a mastery experience (Bandura, 1997) that influences the continued development of positive self-efficacy beliefs.

Relationships between Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Emotional Affect

Individuals with learning disabilities may experience additional challenges, beyond learning deficits specific to their disability, which include affective disorders such as anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, lower levels of social competence, and negative attitudes towards self as a student (Hen & Goroshit, 2012; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010). Leichtentritt and Shechtman (2010) argued that there is an increased presence of affective disorders within the student population of those with learning disabilities, particularly higher levels of academic and social anxiety. Lackaye and Margalit (2008) argued that hopefulness and positive social connections are related to self-efficacy beliefs for learners with learning disabilities. Students with lower levels of self-efficacy beliefs communicated lower levels of hopefulness regarding their academic

successes and interpersonal connections with peers. Thus, increased feelings of loneliness and isolation were reported amongst students whom had been identified with a learning disability in comparison to peers. Therefore, Leichtentritt and Shechtman argued for expressive-supportive therapies to be considered among interventions designed to support students with an identified learning disability, as lowered levels of anxiety may be a positive outcome. Further, supportive counseling may contribute to the development of higher levels of insight leading to enhanced adaptive coping skills and increased positive self-efficacy beliefs (Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010).

Bandura (1997) argued that despondent mood negatively impacts the development of self-efficacy beliefs as affective disorders enhance the likelihood that challenges will be perceived as insurmountable barriers to achievement. Given the increased rates of reported negative affect for individuals with learning disabilities attention to affect in relationship to self-efficacy beliefs for this population is an important consideration in further research (Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010).

Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Qualitative Research

While research studies regarding the relationships between self-efficacy beliefs, academic achievement, affect, and adaptive coping skills are available within the literature significantly less prevalent are studies exploring these concepts from a qualitative perspective. Within the timeframe of the last six years, two qualitative research studies pertaining to self-efficacy beliefs and learning disabilities were identified by myself through the literature search (Anctil et al., 2008; Klassen & Lynch, 2007).

Both studies I reviewed sought to explore the concept of the development of self-efficacy beliefs, adaptive coping skills, and relationship to academic success for learners with identified learning disabilities to further understand and inform pedagogical practices to support success for these learners.

In the two identified qualitative phenomenological studies, researchers explored the self-perspectives of individuals with learning disabilities in regards to self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement. Both were phenomenological studies, in which the researchers utilized interviews to gather detailed descriptions of the experiences of the participants regarding the impact of self-efficacy beliefs upon academic progress.

Interview data was subsequently transcribed verbatim and analyzed for the emergence of common themes in the shared experiences.

Themes specific to college students within the Anctil et al. (2008) study included specific implications of the identified learning disability, acquired training and support that fostered independence in self-advocacy, and specific skills in conflict resolution to support accessing required academic accommodations within the post-secondary setting. The adolescents within the Klassen and Lynch (2007) study emphasized the role of verbal feedback from their specialist educators, classmates, and parents in supporting their development of self-efficacy beliefs and in improving their levels of incentive for academic achievement. Differences in the specific themes may be argued to reflect developmental stages and educational contexts.

College students are required to engage in self-advocacy to access required accommodations and may need to understand and be prepared to use conflict resolution

skills should they encounter resistant professors or personnel within departments of accessibility services (Getzel, 2008). Additionally, students enrolled in postsecondary learning independently decide whether or not to disclose their identification as a student with a learning disability (Getzel, 2008). Therefore, there is a further potential element of self-consciousness or desire for privacy of information that impacts a young adult's decision to self-disclose (Getzel, 2008). In contrast, adolescents with learning disabilities are more likely to have support structured through their schooling experiences with an identified specialist teacher, developmentally place a higher level of regard for peer support, and are still legally under parental responsibility (Klassen & Lynch, 2007).

Consistent themes identified in both studies included the relationship between positive self-efficacy beliefs and academic success, self-awareness, and problems and solutions related to motivation reflecting adaptive coping skills (Anctil et al., 2008; Klassen & Lynch, 2007). These themes are reflective of the positive relationships identified within the quantitative literature I reviewed; self-efficacy and academic achievement, self-efficacy and adaptive coping skills, and self-efficacy and self-determination. Additionally, in the qualitative studies researchers presented an understanding of self-efficacy beliefs from an emic, or insider, perspective and referenced the limited available literature from a qualitative tradition regarding self-efficacy beliefs within the discipline of learning disabilities. Subsequently, both Anctil et al. (2008) and Klassen and Lynch (2007) highlighted the need for further research regarding self-efficacy beliefs from a qualitative perspective to contribute to the

knowledge base and inform potential interventions and pedagogical practices and processes with the population of learners with learning disabilities.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented a review of the foundational literature related to self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Current literature within the discipline of learning disabilities in relationship to self-efficacy beliefs was reviewed. Research supports the role of self-efficacy beliefs in relationship to academic achievement (Gerber, 2012; Klassen, 2010). The research I reviewed also supports the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, goal setting, and self-determined behavior (Baird et al., 2009; Klassen, 2010; May & Stone, 2010; Zheng et al., 2012), developing adaptive coping skills (Gerber, 2012; Klassen, 2010; Parker & Boutelle, 2009), and affect (Hen & Goroshit, 2012; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; Leichtenritt & Shechtman, 2010). Self-efficacy beliefs have the potential for significant impact upon the attainment and completion of further educational opportunities and thus for future life success (Getzel, 2008).

While I reviewed studies that reported the crucial nature of self-efficacy beliefs in impacting multiple skill domains supporting educational achievement, limited literature is available regarding qualitative studies attending to the lived experience of developing self-efficacy beliefs for learners with identified learning disabilities (Anctil et al., 2009; Klassen & Lynch, 2007). The qualitative studies I reviewed highlighted the role of self-efficacy beliefs in academic achievement and successful educational experiences (Anctil et al., 2009; Klassen & Lynch, 2007); however, there is a gap in the literature seeking to

understand the lived experiences of individuals with learning disabilities in developing self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping skills.

In this study, I used a phenomenological approach to gain insight and understanding of the lived experiences of learners identified with learning disabilities in developing self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping skills. Thus, the study addressed a gap in the literature regarding the perspective of young adults with learning disabilities in their development of self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skills. Further, the results of the study should provide important information for educators, parents, school psychologists, and other personnel working with this population. This information may positively impact the development of pedagogical practices, intervention services, transition services between high school and postsecondary learning institutions, and subsequently contribute towards positive social change for the population of learners identified with learning disabilities. In Chapter 3 I will describe the identified research methodology for the study and will provide information related to the design, role of the researcher, detailed methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summative information.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy. There is a gap in the literature regarding the voice of young adults with learning disabilities in characterizing their experiences regarding the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and self-advocacy skills (Anctil et al., 2008; Klassen & Lynch, 2007). Thus, a goal of the study was to develop additional understanding of the role of self-efficacy beliefs as a factor in the postsecondary education of learners with learning disabilities. Exploring with participants how they characterized the development of their self-efficacy beliefs, the relationship of these beliefs to the development of adaptive coping skills, to academic persistence, and to accessing available accommodations and learner supports may contribute critical knowledge regarding appropriate interventions and supportive services for this population.

In this chapter, I present a roadmap for the proposed study. I will reiterate the central and secondary guiding questions for the research, identify the research design and clarify the rationale underlying the phenomenological approach. The role of the researcher and details of the methodology, including participant selection, recruitment, data collection, and the data analysis plan will be presented. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures will also be discussed. I will conclude the chapter with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The central question guiding the study was: What is the experience of young adults with identified learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs? A secondary question explored within the study was: How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy and corresponding adaptive coping skills? As highlighted in the central guiding question, the central phenomenon of the study was the development of self-efficacy beliefs for young adults with learning disabilities. Self-efficacy beliefs are defined as the beliefs individuals have regarding their capacity to successfully engage in or accomplish specific goals or tasks with specific contexts or situations (Bandura, 1997). Thus, academic self-efficacy beliefs are an individual's beliefs regarding their capacity to achieve academic goals within an educational context (Bandura et al., 1996).

In this qualitative study, I used a phenomenological research tradition. Moustakas (1994) argued that using an empirical phenomenological approach to research is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to understand the meaning of an experience for those individuals who have had it and subsequently derive more general or universal essences of the experience. Thus, phenomenology requires an investigation of the experience of the identified phenomenon to obtain rich and detailed descriptions. These rich, detailed, complex descriptions are elicited from participants who have direct experience of the identified research phenomenon and subsequently analyzed to identify the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological researchers view data of experience as a critical source of information in understanding human behavior (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, as the identified purpose of the study was to develop meaningful understanding of the lived experience of developing academic self-efficacy beliefs, and corresponding adaptive coping mechanisms, for young adults with learning disabilities a phenomenological approach was an appropriate research tradition.

Moustakas (1994) indicated that the word phenomenology has its roots in the Greek word of *Phaenesthai*, meaning to show up, to appear (p. 26). In phenomenology, the researcher has a connection, a reason for interest in seeking understanding of the meaning of the lived-experiences of the participants. Being aware of one's own connections to and reasons for research, and thus potential biases and presuppositions requires researchers to be self-reflective, to be aware of how their interest in the phenomenon arose (Moustakas, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

My interest in the field of learning disabilities began during the middle years of my teaching career. As I moved from teaching kindergarten children to teaching children in the upper elementary grades I began to take on specialist roles in the area of literacy. These roles required participation in further training as a teacher, particularly in working with children at-risk of, or identified as, having a learning disability. In my professional capacity, I began to spend significant time working with children and adolescents with identified learning disabilities, collaboratively establishing intervention plans, educating

colleagues on best practices, and working in partnership with families to access resources to support academic achievement.

As my educational career moved into administrative roles, I continued to advocate for those in our schools with learning disabilities. I found myself questioning and questing to find information regarding how to identify learning disabilities, how to best teach those with learning disabilities in our inclusive classrooms, and how to best support those with identified learning disabilities to set academic goals and commit to achievements. In 2009, this area of passion led to embarking upon further education and a career change into the field of educational psychology. At the time I was unaware that my passion for the field of learning disabilities was soon to have personal as well as professional relevance.

In 2012, a psychologist with a specialization in school psychology assessed our 12-year-old daughter to determine if there were underlying causes that could explain her academic struggles in the areas of mathematics and the sciences. The result of the psychoeducational assessment was that an underlying severe learning disability impacting all visual perceptual reasoning skills was a significant factor in her barriers to academic achievement and understanding in mathematics and science. Discussions regarding program modifications, accommodations, self-advocacy, self-esteem, and self-efficacy beliefs suddenly became both personal and professional and my interest in the field of learning disabilities was intensified.

In phenomenology, the role of the researcher is that of a participant, a coresearcher in community with other participants. The researcher's role is to engage

with the participants, to be fully present with them in the exploration of the meaning of the experiences of the identified phenomenon. Moustakas' (1994) argued that this copresence between researcher and participant is reflective of the intersubjective and requires an intentional empathy. Empathy is the method through which the researcher accesses understanding of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Empathy, as a method, requires that a researcher be aware of their own intentionality, potential biases, presuppositions, and any pre-relationships such that they may be fully open to being present with the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Given my personal and professional experiences, I am aware of my biases in regards to the field of learning disabilities. I have an intimate connection (Moustakas, 1994) with the topic of self-efficacy beliefs and learning disabilities. This connection is what has allowed the phenomenon to show up in my consciousness and to become the phenomenon of interest in the proposed study. However, as Moustakas (1994) argued the connection to the phenomenon also requires the researcher to engage in epoche. Epoche requires the researcher to bracket their preconceived biases and judgments, to look with preconceptions suspended, and attend fully to the participant description of the experience from within his or her specific perspective or context (Moustakas, 1994).

Engaging in the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994) supported me in bracketing or setting aside my biases. I attended to being fully present with the participants, to being fully open to their experiences, and receptive to their ideas, understandings, and the creation of new knowledge. The research interview questions (Appendix A) were structured such that a rich and detailed sharing of the experience for the participant was

the topic of the semistructured interview. Participants were unfamiliar to me, thereby eliminating any concerns regarding preexisting relationships. Throughout each interview, during the data analysis, and in the reporting of findings, I documented and reviewed potential biases.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In this study I focused on the lived experiences of postsecondary students with identified learning disabilities. As the focus of the inquiry was specific to learning disabilities, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. I selected participants based upon their willingness to participate in a semistructured interview and having the following characteristics: (a) identification as an individual with a learning disability, (b) enrolled in postsecondary education, (c) at least 18 years of age. These criteria for participation were included in the Letter of Informed Consent and were reviewed prior to engagement in the interview process. Screening questions were asked of potential participants. The screening questions were:

1. Do you have a diagnosed and documented learning disability?
2. Has your learning disability impacted or does it currently impact your academic development or progress?
3. Would you be willing to participate in an interview with this researcher to discuss your experiences as a student with a learning disability?

Positive responses to the screening questions indicated eligibility for participation. Thus, participants were known to meet criteria based upon both verbal and written consent processes.

In phenomenological inquiry, comprehensive descriptions of experience provide the basis for analysis. Descriptions of the meanings and the essences of the phenomenon requires that each experience to be considered in singularity and with respect for the variations in perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (Moustakas, 1994). Subsequently, a synthesis is created through the phenomenological process that describes the essences and meanings of the lived experiences of participants in relation to the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the number of participants required for data saturation in phenomenology may be smaller.

For this study, the number of participants was expected to range between 10 and 15. The proposed range of 10 – 15 participants was identified as an appropriate size to provide a multiplicity of perspectives upon the experience of being a learner with a learning disability and the development of self-efficacy beliefs. Interviewing identified participants allowed for comprehensive descriptions, with various horizons (Gadamer, 1997), of the phenomenon of interest in the identified inquiry. The identified sample size of 10 – 15 students was therefore considered appropriate for data saturation.

Potential participants for the study were recruited through the accessibility departments in their respective postsecondary institutions. I delivered flyers in person to accessibility services departments in the postsecondary institutions located in my home city. The flyers included the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation,

participation requirements, confidentiality issues, and the researcher's contact information. Department personnel in accessibility services also referred potential participants directly to me as the researcher. Interested participants were contacted by phone, encouraged to ask any questions, confirmed their eligibility to participate based upon the identified criteria by answering screening questions, and a mutually agreeable meeting time and date was established.

Data Collection

I collected the data for the study through semi-structured in-person interviews with each participant. Central questions guided the interview; however, emerging questions were attended to in each interview. Through the emerging questions I attempted to capture the rich description of the perception of the participant, as individual perception was considered essential to horizontalization in Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process. All interviews took place in a neutral location, separate from the postsecondary institution in which the participant was enrolled, and that attended to issues of confidentiality and privacy.

Participants engaged in one interview of approximately one hour. Each interview was anticipated to be approximately one hour long. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently member checked for accuracy. Upon completion of member checking, a follow up phone interview or in-person interview was scheduled when necessary to attend to any issues of miscommunication or misunderstanding. For the purposes of confidentiality, I replaced all participant names with assigned codes such as P1, P2, P3, in an ongoing manner until each participant had a corresponding code. I am

the only one to know a participant's name and matching code. As recruitment procedures resulted in too few participants, I subsequently employed a snowball sampling procedure. In this manner participants referred others whom were eligible and interested in participation and the minimum number of participants for the study was achieved. Upon completion of the semistructured interview and required follow up phone calls, I offered to provide participants a copy of the findings of the study. Upon completion of the data collection, each participant was thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis Plan

All collected interview data was specific to the central research question of: what is the experience of young adults with identified learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs, and the secondary research question of: how do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy and adaptive coping skills? Moustakas' (1994) processes and steps in phenomenological research were used to organize and analyze the data collected through the semi-structured interviews.

Moustakas (1994) identified the major processes in phenomenological research as: (a) epoche, (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) imaginative variation, and (d) synthesis. While engaging in these major processes, several steps are undertaken to analyze the phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). As I described earlier in this chapter, the process of epoche requires the researcher to engage in ongoing self-reflection to ensure openness to the participants, an awareness of being fully present, listening with care, and remaining unbiased (Moustakas, 1994). The process of epoche allows the

researcher to view the phenomenon from a fresh perspective, to set aside pre-conceptions, and to come to know the phenomenon through the experiences of others (Moustakas, 1994). Palmer (1993) highlighted characteristics consistent with epoche as a truthful way of knowing, a way of interacting with others from a place of genuine care, attentiveness, and honor.

The second process identified by Moustakas (1994) in phenomenological research is identified as phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to first engage in bracketing. Bracketing involves attending to ensuring that our focus, attention, and concentration are specifically addressed to the phenomenon of inquiry. This requires the research to engage with care to hear and be open to what others have perceived, felt, and thought in regards to their lived experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Palmer, 1993).

Horizontalization is another critical step in phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization is a never-ending process and reflects that discovery is always possible (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, each participant interview presents a view of the phenomenon from their horizon, from inside their perspective of the experience, and has equal value to all others. Horizontalization requires the researcher to identify the statements in the interview data that speak to the lived experience of the phenomenon. All interview data is reviewed for these relevant statements, while irrelevant statements, repetitive, or overlapping statements are disregarded. The relevant, non-repetitive statements are considered to be the horizons of the phenomenon or alternatively the units of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The horizons are subsequently clustered into themes

based upon commonalities and utilized to create an individual textual description followed by a composite textual description of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) referred to the third phenomenological process as imaginative variation. Imaginative variation requires the researcher to engage imaginatively in reviewing, re-seeing, re-reading the possible meanings and perspectives from the textual descriptions developed through the phenomenological reduction. Subsequently the researcher engages in identifying the essential structural qualities of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Once the essential structural qualities are determined these are clustered into themes and compared with each individual transcript to create an individual structural description. A creation of a composite structural description is then created from an analysis of the individual structural descriptions. This composite structural description is reflective of an integration of all individual descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

The fourth process in Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological research method is to engage in creating a synthesis of the composite textual and structural descriptions. This synthesis highlights the universals in the descriptions of the lived experiences shared by the participants. The synthesis is contextualized by the particularities of time, place, and perspective of the researcher and participants; therefore, it is not considered definitive and exhaustive but representative of knowing the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

I organized and completed all data analysis through hand coding and engaging in the phenomenological process for data analysis. Discrepant research data identified through the use of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process was not disregarded but noted and then considered for the insights and perspectives offered from the individual participant's perspective of their lived experience.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In a qualitative research tradition, credibility is established through strategies such as triangulation, member checks, saturation, reflexivity, and peer review (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Phenomenological research is concerned with credibility and meaningfulness; transferability is not an objective of this research tradition (Fisher & Stenner, 2011). To address issues of credibility in this research study, I incorporated triangulation, member checks, reflexivity strategies, and saturation. Triangulation of the data was addressed by using self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) and a review of the literature in the analysis of the data. Member checking was utilized and each participant received a summarized transcript of his or her interview for review. Reflexivity was a component of the study. Individuals were contacted for follow up phone or face-to-face interviews to ensure that I captured the essence of their descriptions of the phenomenon.

I addressed saturation of data by ensuring a minimum number of participants were involved in the study. Saturation was also addressed by ensuring varied and rich descriptions of the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon. Through the semistructured interview I attended the use of guiding questions together with engaging in tangential questions which arose in response to the participants described experiences.

In this manner, I attended to providing a space, time, and respectful context that supported participants to engage in full descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Palmer, 1993). Inviting participants from multiple postsecondary locations contributed towards diverse and rich descriptions as the identified postsecondary locations were in various quadrants of a large metropolitan city and provided both similar and diverse programs. It is believed that the diversity of program options contributed towards diversity in study participants. This diversity increased the variety and richness of the research findings.

I established dependability through the use of a well-documented and clearly articulated audit trail. All elements of the research were documented. The dissertation proposal was an initial audit trail outlining anticipated processes. Throughout the dissertation process information regarding process, all required forms, reflective journals, data transcripts, audio tapes, the analysis process of the data, and interpretation of the findings were stored in electronic, paper, and audio format and kept in a locked cabinet in my home. All data will be kept in this manner for a period of five years.

Confirmability was attended to by carefully engaging in Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process. Moustakas' (1994) noted that it is a difficult endeavor to bracket presuppositions, researcher bias, and judgments. However, engaging in a recursive and reflective process throughout the process supported me in analysis and synthesis of the data (Moustakas, 1994). To attend to strategies for reflection and recursiveness, I audio taped each interview, transcribed the interviews verbatim, and then relistened to the audiotapes. Summarized transcripts were then submitted to the interview

participant to ensure accuracy in documentation. I utilized a reflective journal to support engagement in the epoche process and attend to any emerging issues of bias.

Ethical Procedures

Engaging in research with human participants requires careful attention to ethical procedures. Approval to complete this research study was granted by the Walden Institutional Review Board (04-01-14-0228006). Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. I delivered and posted flyers in postsecondary institutions, which provided key information regarding the purposes of the study, participant criteria, and highlighted confidentiality. Persons interested in participating in the study contacted myself directly. I used my cell phone, with confidential voicemail, as the contact number for potential participants. Participants were also able to contact me directly through a confidential email address.

Participants were informed verbally and in writing of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality in the data collection process, anonymity in the reporting process, and the right to leave the study at any time without repercussions. A consent form was signed prior to participation in the study (Appendix B). The consent form outlined the confidentiality agreement between the researcher and participants, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the right to withdraw at any time during the process.

All interview data was and will be kept confidential. Research participants were assigned a number and pseudonyms used in all data reporting procedures. Transcripts of interviews and all other electronic items related to data analysis were and will continue to be kept secure by storage upon a passcode-protected computer, then transferred to a

passcode-protected external hard drive and stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Audiotapes, files, informed consent forms, written reflections of the researcher, and all other forms of data relating to the study were and will continue be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Access to the data will be restricted to myself and all data will be destroyed after a period of 5 years following the completion of the study as per university and established research protocol.

Summary

In this chapter I presented information regarding research design, methodology, and ethical considerations for the study. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experience of developing academic self-efficacy beliefs for young adult learners with identified learning disabilities who were enrolled in postsecondary education opportunities. I engaged in a phenomenological study to develop further understanding of the phenomenon. I recognized that the identified phenomenon of interest has both personal and professional relevance, and as such required careful attention to potential researcher bias.

In this chapter I also provided information regarding the methodology of the study. The participant selection logic highlighted the use of a purposeful sampling strategy, identified participant criteria regarding learning disability identification and age range, and I reviewed recruitment procedures. The recruitment of 10 participants occurred through a snowballing strategy in addition to publication and distribution of flyers explaining the purpose of the study, identifying participant criteria, highlighting the

voluntary and confidential nature of participation, and providing contact information for myself.

In the section regarding the data analysis plan I discussed Moustakas' (1994) steps to phenomenological process. Data acquired through a semi-structured interview between myself and each participant was audiotaped, transcribed, reviewed by participants, and analyzed using the identified phenomenological process (Moustakas, 1994). All interviews took place at a location that ensured participant privacy and confidentiality. Interviews were guided by the central research question: What is the experience of young adults with identified learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and the secondary question of: How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy?

I highlighted issues of trustworthiness and included attention to credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Strategies of self-reflection, triangulation, member checking, saturation, and reflexivity were discussed to address credibility. Strategies to address dependability and confirmability I used included audit trails, reflexivity, and triangulation. Ethical considerations regarding informed consent, confidentiality during data collection, ensuring confidentiality through data storage procedures and the storage of all data related to the study for 5 years after study completion were highlighted.

In Chapter 4 I will present information regarding the findings of the study. The setting of the study, demographics of the participants, procedures of data collection and data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness, will be explained. In Chapter 4 I will also

describe the results of the study which will include the identification of themes and subthemes and supporting data from the participant interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to develop meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skill such as self-advocacy. The study consisted of 10 participants who identified themselves as postsecondary students with learning disabilities. The central research question was: What is the experience of young adults with identified learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs? The secondary question was: How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy and corresponding adaptive coping skills? In this chapter, I present participant demographics and characteristics, method of data collection, a detailed description of the data analysis process, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Demographics

This study consisted of 10 participants ranging in age from 19 to 23 years, with six male participants and four female participants. All participants were enrolled in postsecondary institutions and volunteered for the study. Five participants were majoring in the sciences, two participants were in engineering, one in a fine arts faculty, one in a dual arts and sciences program, and one in a general studies program. Two participants were enrolled in their first year of full-time postsecondary study, two were second year students, one was a third year student, and five participants were completing their fourth

and final year of study. All five participants in their final year of study were expecting to graduate upon completion of their final exams, which were scheduled for shortly after their interviews were conducted.

Participant Characteristics

Participant 1. Participant 1 was a 21-year-old male enrolled in his first year of postsecondary study at a local university. He was enrolled in a general studies program combining both university accredited courses together with high school upgrading courses. His long-term goal was to complete requirements for a degree in architecture.

Participant 2. Participant 2 was a 20-year-old male enrolled in his second year of postsecondary study. He was enrolled in an electrical engineering technology studies program with a dual track of both theory and practical application through apprenticeship. Participant 2 enrolled in his postsecondary institution immediately upon graduation from high school. His first year of studies was not successful; therefore, he repeated his first year to achieve higher grades prior to moving on to second year courses. He anticipated graduation from his fourth year in 2016 with a major in electrical engineering.

Participant 3. Participant 3 was a 21-year-old male who was enrolled in his first full year of postsecondary. Participant 3 had previously been enrolled in one semester of postsecondary immediately upon graduation from high school. After completing a semester of general studies in a combined upgrading and university credit courses, he switched career paths. He worked towards becoming a chef for two years. After two years of work experience and completing his first year of apprenticeship theory and

exams, he decided to return to university to pursue a degree with a dual major in kinesiology and psychology. At the time of the interview, he was looking to transfer faculties into the Business Faculty, with a particular focus on sports marketing and the economics of professional sports.

Participant 4. Participant 4 was a 19-year-old male enrolled in his second year of university study. He started university directly upon graduation from high school in a general studies program combining university credit courses with high school upgrading options. Upon successfully upgrading two high school upgrading courses along with four university level courses he transferred into a sciences faculty. At the time of the interview, he was currently enrolled in the Faculty of Science with a major in genetics. His stated long-term goal was to become a research scientist who specializes in genetics research. He indicated he intends to pursue both a masters and doctoral degree in his field of specialization.

Participant 5. Participant 5 was a 22-year-old female enrolled in her third year in a fine arts program with a major in sculpture. She enrolled into her chosen postsecondary institution directly upon completion from high school. She planned to graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2015. Her stated long-term goal was to be successfully employed as an independent artist and/or an employee within a museum.

Participant 6. Participant 6 was a 22-year-old male who had completed his second year of studies in a Faculty of Engineering within his chosen postsecondary institution. He enrolled in university within one year of completing high school. At the

time of the interview Participant 6 was exploring the option of transferring faculties into the Fine Arts Faculty with a stated interest in visual arts.

Participant 7. Participant 7 was a 23-year-old female enrolled in her final year of postsecondary studies. She was a science student with a dual major in biological and geological sciences. Participant 7 enrolled in postsecondary studies immediately upon graduation from high school and was expecting to graduate upon completion of her winter semester final exams.

Participant 8. Participant 8 was a 23-year-old male enrolled in his final year of postsecondary studies. Upon graduating from high school, participant 7 took a year off from school to determine what area of study he would like to enroll in for university. After a year of working and travel, he enrolled in a science faculty within his chosen postsecondary institution. Participant 7 was expecting to graduate upon completion of his final exams.

Participant 9. Participant 9 was a 22-year-old female student enrolled in her fourth and final year of postsecondary study with a major in the sciences. She had enrolled in university, in the Faculty of Science, immediately upon graduation from high school. Participant 9 expected to graduate upon completion of her final exams.

Participant 10. Participant 10 was a 22 year-old-female in her fourth and final year of postsecondary study. Participant 4 enrolled in the Faculty of Science immediately upon graduation from high school and expected to graduate upon successful completion of her final exams.

Data Collection

I collected data for the study from 10 postsecondary student participants who volunteered. Participants self-identified as students who met the study criteria outlined in the Invitation Flyer (Appendix C) and in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B). I posted invitation flyers at three local postsecondary institutions through accessibility service departments, and in publically assigned bulletin boards. Participants contacted myself through phone calls and texts to establish initial contact and set up subsequent mutually agreed upon meeting places to conduct data collection.

To collect data for the study each participant participated in a semistructured face-to-face interview, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. I conducted the interviews over a period of 5 weeks and each interview took place in a mutually agreed upon location. As per IRB approval, interviews occurred at mutually agree upon locations that ensured privacy and confidentiality. Participants were asked 13 guiding interview questions (Appendix A) to elicit a detailed description of their lived-experiences as postsecondary students with learning disabilities in the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping skills. During each interview, I used follow up questions or prompts to gain further insight or understanding to the particularities of an individual's experience.

Each interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed. During the data collection and subsequent dissertation process, I was the only one to have access to the data. All audiotapes, informed consents, transcripts, researcher journals, and other forms of data relating to the study were kept in a locked cabinet within my home office.

Transcribed interviews were kept upon a password protected computer kept in a locked drawer within my home office. Upon transcription, electronic forms of data were transferred to a password protected external hard drive and stored in a locked cabinet within my home office. Each interview was subsequently summarized and provided to the participants, through shared email addresses, for member checking. During the member checking process one participant provided further data regarding what they perceived as barriers to their success in developing confidence as a learner. No further information was clarified, or provided by the other participants. One participant indicated “seeing my experiences in writing confirms for me how hard I have worked” (Participant 8). Another participant indicated that the summarized interview regarding their experiences “really captured what I had been trying to describe” (Participant 4). No variations, or unusual circumstances, occurred in data collection from the proposed plan I presented in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

To organize and analyze the data collected through the semistructured interviews I used Moustakas’ (1994) processes and steps to phenomenological research. I attended to processes of self-evaluation and reflection during the interviews. I kept journals, reread transcripts, and repeatedly listened to interviews as soon as possible after they occurred to assist in engaging in processes of self-reflection, and to come to know the identified research phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. I worked to bracket my own experiences and perceptions such that I was fully present and engaged with each participant in their interview regarding their personal lived-experience.

Subsequently, I engaged in a process of phenomenological reduction through horizontalization and imaginative reduction (Moustakas, 1994.) During this process, I repeatedly reread transcripts and listened to the audio tapes of interviews to consider each participant experience and identified statements in the data that spoke to the lived experience of developing self-efficacy beliefs and identified both barriers and supports to engaging in adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy. I listened to each participant's data for their view of the phenomenon, for their perspective from their horizon, and weighed each interview equally. During this process, I repeatedly reviewed each interview with an intention to fully immerse myself in the data, to listen repeatedly with an open mind, and identify relevant statements.

During this process, I listed participant's expressions of their experiences of the phenomenon and identified overlapping, repetitive, or irrelevant statements. These statements were discarded, leaving the essential horizons of the phenomenon. Once relevant statements were identified they were considered the units of meaning (Moustakas, 1994) for the purposes of this study. Moustakas (1994) referred to this process as imaginative variation. I reviewed, reread, and reconsidered the possible meanings and perspectives developed through the phenomenological reduction.

Through imaginative variation, I color coded and clustered together the essential qualities of the experience of the participants, in developing self-efficacy beliefs, into themes based upon commonalities in the data. I had predetermined that essential qualities would be considered themes if 60% of the individuals who participated in the study identified the theme within their interview. Further, subthemes were identified when 50%

of the study participants utilized a specific phrase, wording, or language during their interview. As the number of participants identified for the study through purposeful sampling was 10, themes were identified when 6 participants identified the unit of meaning within their interviews and subthemes identified when 5 participants utilized specific language.

Once the core themes of shared experiences regarding the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs were identified, I created a title to capture the essence of the theme. Subsequently, I then reviewed the data again and identified quotations from the individual participants that supported or were correlated to the theme. Through this process, six primary themes were identified with four subthemes highlighted through the analysis of the data. The six primary themes that I identified included mastery and non-mastery experiences, the importance of support systems, having role models, the impact of affective factors, adaptive coping mechanisms, the importance of accommodations, and characteristics of effective educators. The four identified subthemes included the role of pride, assistive technology, personalized learning, and interpersonal skills. Table 1 presents the identified themes and subthemes together with the participants for whom those themes emerged during data analysis.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes by Participant Data

Themes and Subthemes	Participants
1. The Role of Experience	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
Subthemes of 1	
Pride	1,2,3,4,6
Personalized Learning	2,3,4,5,8
2. Support Systems	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
3. Role Models	1,2,3,4,6,9,10
4. Adaptive Coping Mechanisms	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9
5. Accommodations	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9
Subtheme of 5	
Assistive Technology	3,4,7,8,9
6. Effective Educators	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
Subtheme of 6	
Interpersonal Skills	3,4,5,6,9

Themes Identified

All participants engaged in a semistructure interview (Appendix A) about their personal experiences in developing self-efficacy beliefs, their successes and challenges, and supports and barriers.

Theme 1: The Role of Experience

All of the participants in this research study identified the importance of the role of mastery and non-mastery experiences in the development of their academic self-efficacy beliefs. Each participant discussed how accomplishing an academic task contributed towards their confidence in completing subsequent academic tasks.

- P1. I have to be really forceful with myself and tell myself about all the times I did do ok in school to prove to myself that I can do this and make it through.
- P2. The first time I scored that high [of a mark], it was like, OK I can do this and it will work. Having done it once makes it easier to keep doing it again and deal with any setbacks or if you don't do well on an assignment you believe you can get it figured out before the final exam.
- P3. I have written papers that I thought were good papers and then when I got my marks back and they were really good that was a huge confidence boost. I was thinking 'ok I can do this in university'.

All participants also identified contrasting non-mastery experiences as playing an important role in shaping how they see themselves as learners and their beliefs about themselves as learners. Each interviewed participant discussed how experiencing a low mark, or limited achievement in a course contributed towards a shift in his or her orientation to their postsecondary studies.

- P2. I learned my lesson. I had to repeat my first year twice so I learned my lesson. After my two rounds of my first year, when I went back to actually

do my second year I wanted to get high marks, I wanted to be at the top of the class, I wanted to work until I understood and did not have to repeat any courses. I did not want to repeat that experience.

- P4. I had a kick in the pants in the first semester of my first year when I failed a course. I did not withdraw, I knew I had really screwed up the course but I was thinking ‘well I’m really good at tests so I will go into the final exam and rock this test and pull up my grade’. That didn’t happen and that was a swift kick to smarten up.

Subtheme 1: Pride

Pride was identified by five participants as a barrier to exploring available options through accessibility services within their respective universities. Of the five participants who identified this barrier, two participants continue to see their sense of pride as an ongoing barrier while the other three spoke of pride as being a retrospective barrier.

- P1. I am proud. I haven’t gone to accessibility services or anything like that because I don’t want extra help. I figure if everyone else is doing it on their own that I should be able to do it on my own as well.
- P2. I think in my first year, I was all ‘oh I know this, I don’t need any help, I can understand this, I don’t want to use this support. I can figure this out for myself’. So I was too proud and I did not want people to think that I couldn’t figure it out for myself.
- P4. In postsecondary I have had more experiences than I would have liked where pride was a barrier to my achievement because I did not ask for

help. First semester of second year, I had it figured out. I am like ‘Pride, get out of here. If I need help I am going to go and get it.

- P 6. Sometimes I have just been too proud to ask for the help I needed.

Subtheme 2: Personalized Learning

Personalized learning was also identified by five of the participants as a contributing factor towards academic mastery experiences. These participants highlighted the role of a personalized approach by educators, and the role of choice in personalizing programs, as leading to successful learning experiences and thus, increased academic self-efficacy beliefs.

- P3. The course choices are helpful to me as I can pick the courses that will work for me. I can balance my schedule and take courses that both work together and work for me. So I can take things that are easier together with things that are harder for me so I can balance the time that I need.
- P4. My Grade 7 teacher really personalized projects for people. If you were a kinesthetic learner he would be like ‘ok for you we are going to do some type of experiment or have you build something.’ If you were visual he would have people draw something or make a 3D diagram and if you were auditory he would support you to make a speech about what we were learning about. He would personalize each project for each type of learner. We all learned the content, how we learned it or showed what we learned was different. That was so helpful to me.

- P5. I have always been super artistic. When I am able to learn something, or how I show I know something personalized for me then I am much more successful in school. When I can use the arts to demonstrate my understanding, like create a visual piece showing my understanding of a historical event, then I am very successful. I know I can learn, I have to personalize my opportunities so I am using my strengths and not my weaknesses or areas of my learning disability.
- P8. In my degree the first two years were totally laid out for me and I didn't really like that. It was no different from high school. It didn't really help me in my experiences. I needed more freedom to make choices and be able to balance out my schedule so I could work successfully. I needed to be able to make my learning more personalized.

Theme 2: Support Systems

Having strong support systems, specifically family and friends, was identified by 100% of interview participants as critical to their development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs throughout their schooling. Participants identified supportive people as important for problem solving, managing academic work load, and ongoing motivation. According to Participant 3: My mom, my dad, my parents they are my key supporters. They want me to succeed and they have always promoted that. They are both supportive as well as being motivators.

- P6. My dad has been so supportive. He is a mini genius. It is so easy to go to him because he will help me figure something out if I get stuck on any problems. He is the biggest help to me.
- P7. Talking to my friends has always been so helpful. They give me a different view on things. They help me figure out if my course loads are going to be too much and they give me a personal and helpful opinion without judgment. I don't have to learn by trial and error for myself, they help me think things through.
- P8. Talking with my friends is super helpful. They have helped me to balance my schedule and spread out some of the really difficult classes for me. I did not do that first, I followed the course outlines and did not have the opportunity to avoid a terrible semester. Now I talk to my friends who can let me know what their experiences were and that helped me balance things out. Instead of investigating things for myself having my friends act as mentors is helpful. They are my best support system.

Theme 3: Role Models

Most participants identified role models as playing a key role in the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs. These participants identified a key characteristic of their role models as having similar learning challenges. They identified that having role models who have experienced difficulties in learning and achieved their educational goals were critical characteristics for those they considered role models.

- P1. I have a couple of good friends and they each struggled in their own ways and that makes it easier because they get it. So when I am saying it is hard, I feel like they get it and can understand, they understand what learning for me was and is like.
- P2. So knowing that people like my mom struggle too, and have to work hard to get something, and then seeing them get it after all that effort it is like 'I can do this'. When they talk to me I know they really get it.
- P4. My friend is super smart in the area that I am terrible in so I ask her questions about essays and my writing and she comes to me with her questions in the areas of science. We both struggle in certain areas, we balance each other that way, because her areas of strength are my areas of weakness and vice versa. So we take all our option courses together so we can work together.
- P7. I met some of my best friends here at University through a group, and we all have learning disabilities in some type so when we talk about school, or talk about how to get through certain courses, everybody gets it. I have older friends who were the same as learners and they graduated. So when I talk to them I can really tell them what is happening and I know they understand.

Theme 4: Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

The majority of participants identified the importance of using adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy, consistent questioning, initiating contact with

professors, registering with accessibility services, attending tutorials, and working with teachers' assistants as critical elements in developing positive self-efficacy beliefs and supporting goal achievement.

- P2. I try to be as vocal as I can about things now. I did not used to be like this, I used to be like 'whatever', and I did not exercise persistence in my learning. But now, I really care about school and I want to get through this so I don't sit there and pretend to understand, I go and get the help I need.
- P3. I advocate for myself. I go up to professors and ask questions right after class or I email them. Emailing your professor is really helpful, all it takes is a 10 second email to say I am stuck and they respond back really quickly and tell me how to look at things from a different perspective.
- P4. I talk to professors and I ask the resource center for help. I use my common sense, if I need help I am going to ask for it. I also use scientist's blogs a lot. I look up the authors of my textbooks and if they have a website or a blog I use that and follow them. I have posted questions on a blog and had the scientist who wrote the paper get back to me and answer my question in a way that really helped me to understand.
- P6. I registered with accessibility services right away. I go back at the beginning of each year to make sure that I can ask for any accommodations that I need.
- P9. I attend every tutorial, even if I think I am ok and understanding the topic. I still go to each one and listen to the questions that the other

students ask. This helps me to make sure that I understand and that all my assignments are done to the best of my abilities.

Theme 5: Accommodations

Accessing accommodations was identified by eight of the ten participants as a critical feature of academic success. These participants highlighted the role of accommodations in supporting them to demonstrate their knowledge and to work to show their abilities and not their learning disabilities. Accommodations highlighted frequently by the participants were the provision of extra time, the use of assistive technology, and advisors.

- P2. The best thing for me is extra time. I use that for all my exams and that takes a lot of the stress away.
- P5. I use the extra time for exams almost always. I find I am much more relaxed and I can think clearly. I also use writing in a separate area so I don't get stressed seeing people leave the exam and I am not yet halfway through.
- P8. I used my advisor all the time to help me plan a course load that would work for me. They helped me to know which courses paired really well together. They would tell me not to take this with that and helped. Then they also helped me to get the extra time I need for writing tests.
- P9. I use extra time often. Extra time and my computer are the best things for me to use. The extra time for exams is always there for me and I have gone to my professors to ask for extra time on some assignments and they

have been very understanding and helpful. I can learn and I can think, I just need a little more time than most of my classmates.

Subtheme 3: Assistive Technology

Assistive technology was a subtheme identified by half of the participants as very helpful. These participants highlighted the role of assistive technology in supporting their learning and therefore increasing their confidence in themselves as learners and their ability to achieve their educational goals.

- P3. My computer helps me a lot. I have class notes available, I type things out on my computer, being able to go on my computer and have all the resources I need available is huge. I use my computer to access online libraries, search engines, databases, online course content, and google scholar.
- P4. I use my laptop constantly. I use it to organize myself, to read my notes, to store ideas, and to access online libraries and databases.
- P7. I would not have got to my fourth year without the use of my computer. It keeps me organized, keeps everything together, I can record notes, I can record lectures, and I can access both my information and information that is online anytime and anywhere.
- P8. I use my computer to access information online all the time. I like to do things by myself and for myself so I use it all the time.

Theme 6: Effective Educators

Effective educators were highlighted by all of the participants as playing a key role in the development of their self-efficacy beliefs. Almost all participants highlighted key educators throughout their years of schooling as individuals who were both supportive and who helped them with learning academic content as well as understanding themselves as learners.

- P1. When I had an essay to write, as opposed to being a teacher who said ‘write an essay’, they would then show me how to write the different parts of the essay.
- P3. All through elementary, junior, and senior high school when you had a teacher that actually made things interesting and fun that made it easier because you became invested in the learning and wanted to do well. The best teacher I ever had was in Grade 7. This teacher created a really relaxed atmosphere and you felt like you could go talk to him and he would help you no problem.
- P5. Teachers who understand what it is like to work with kids with LD are the best teachers to have. If a teacher can make me understand, everybody can understand. I feel like good teaching for kids with learning disabilities is just good teaching. I have had some great teachers who made things make sense.
- P7. A great professor really makes a difference. When you know they are going to take the time to make sure you understand, that they want you to

succeed, it is so easy to be prepared and feel like you know what you are getting into and to believe that you can do it.

- P9. Even some of the TA's are the most helpful teachers because they go through the information step by step and slowly for you. The tutorial atmosphere makes it easier to ask the questions and if a TA is really good I feel like it doesn't matter how long it takes till I understand, they aren't going to give up and neither am I.
- P10. I check out my professors before I select the class section. I will go to rate my professor, an online place where students can post information about a prof, and I look to see what people have to say about the professors for a section. I look for comments that make sense for me and are things that I know I am going to need and then I will pick a course from that professor hoping to help out my experience. I often will post information after a class because I want people to be able to be successful and be prepared with information about the prof that could be helpful. If a prof is difficult about extra time or doesn't take student questions well then that is not a prof for me. I have found some really good professors this way and had some strong success as a student because they are really effective teachers and do the research in the area they are teaching in. But you have to remember that being a researcher or knowledgeable about a subject doesn't mean you will be a great teacher. You have to have both.

Subtheme 4: Interpersonal Skills

Strong interpersonal skills were identified by half of the participants as a key feature of effective educators and teachers who supported the growth and development of positive self-efficacy beliefs. Teachers who were approachable, created an atmosphere of genuine inquiry, and employed a sense of humor were highlighted as being effective in supporting the participants to develop strong self-efficacy beliefs as learners.

- P3. When a teacher is more personable and you can relate to them that makes a big difference. Knowing they are a real person, having a feel for their personality makes it easy to go and talk to them. My best teacher didn't have the scary teacher personality where you felt like if you went to talk to them they were going to ream you out for doing something wrong. He was just going to talk to you and help you. I personally don't succeed as well when the teacher is not someone I feel like I can go and ask a question of, if I feel like I am getting in trouble or the teacher starts to take it personally when I don't understand the way they have taught then I won't ask questions, I won't take a chance on being made to feel stupid for having trouble understanding or needing more time to get something done.
- P4. My best teachers got up and personal with me. If I was having a hard time they were personal. Like when I was in Grade 8 I was having a really hard time with writing essays and my teacher came up and sat down beside me and spent time with me going through how to write an essay. He taught me an analogy that I still use today. He helped me see myself as a capable

learner, he was personal with me and helped me see how to use my strengths to support learning in the areas that I was having trouble with.

- P5. The most important thing a teacher can do for me is to get to know me, to understand me. My job is to open the door and tell them what I need and how I learn then their job is to teach me. If we all were the same anybody could teach, but we are not and getting to know me and let me know that it is ok to ask questions, to be made to feel like my questions and struggle to understand is worth it – that is what makes a great teacher. They need to have the skills in how to develop relationships. They have to be interpersonal and not robotic. Some of my arts professors have been my best teachers because they seem to embrace the differences and the quirky ways that I must work to learn.
- P6. I actually dropped out of a class because I was too terrified to go and talk to the professor about what I needed as a learner. I felt I would rather drop and take another course section, which would potentially extend my graduation date, because I felt like it would not matter what I had to say, the prof was not interested. I found another prof for that course in the next semester and that made all the difference. When you have an LD, you have to feel like you can ask a gazillion questions without feeling like you should be apologizing for your differences. Teachers, profs included, need to have the interpersonal skills to care about their learners and students and to want them to achieve.

- P9. When a prof lets you know that they are a person too, gives you a little information into who they are outside of the classroom it makes it easier to connect and then ask questions. My best teachers created an atmosphere that let us all know that no matter what you could ask for what you needed, you could tell them you didn't understand and they would find a way to help you. I even had a teacher who when she couldn't explain things in a way a student could learn would send you to another teacher so they could try and explain – she didn't take it personally she was what I call a 'real teacher'. When she sent a student to the principal's office it wasn't about being in trouble it was about getting some one on one teaching time. I loved this teacher and principal. They taught me persistence pays off and I can learn.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant data regarding adaptive coping mechanisms and the use of accommodations were provided by Participant 1 and Participant 10. Contrasting with the other participants, these two participants shared that as postsecondary students they did not advocate for their learning needs and felt that they would not do so in any future context. Participant 1 shared that while he has had university professors provide information about the role of the accessibility services department and have encouraged him to make an appointment to see what supports are available he has not disclosed his learning disability and does not intend to ask for support to achieve. Participant 1 has completed his first year of postsecondary study. According to P1: I keep hearing my

English teacher talk about it [accessibility services] but I am not going to go there. I would rather figure it out for myself. I am not going to do anything different from anybody else.

Participant 10 highlighted that she felt no need to self-advocate or access accommodations as she is working within an area of strength and interest and has not needed to access accommodations to successfully complete her degree. She was scheduled to graduate in Spring term of 2014.P10. I know what I need to do and so I just do it. I know myself as a learner and I know what works for me – so I just do what needs to be done. I know what hard work is and I know that graduating will take and has taken hard work.

The discrepant data were noted and considered for insights and perspectives offered by the individual participants regarding their lived experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility was established through the processes of triangulation, member checking, saturation, and reflectivity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Triangulation of the data was addressed by reviewing the literature synthesized and summarized in Chapter 2 throughout the process of data analysis. Self-efficacy theory was used as the identified conceptual framework while analyzing the data. I repeatedly reviewed transcripts and listened to the audiotaped interviews throughout the data analysis procedures with Chapter 2 and the reviewed literature studies as a triangulation resource. Member checking was utilized and each participant was given the opportunity to review a summarized word document of their verbatim transcript to ensure that I had

captured the essence of their experience. During the process of member checking no changes were made to the content of the interview data. Saturation was attended to by ensuring that rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon were provided by the 10 participants who were involved in the study. Participants presented a multiplicity of perspectives upon the experience of developing self-efficacy beliefs. Saturation was further attended to by having participants whom were enrolled in various postsecondary institutions, in various programs, and at various stages of degree completion to contribute to diverse perspectives.

As stated in Chapter 3, I attended to dependability through the use of an audit trail. All required forms, my reflective journals, data transcripts, audio tapes, and processes of analysis are stored in electronic, paper, and audio format in a locked cabinet within my home. All forms of data and information contributing towards a clear audit trail will be kept for a period of five years.

During the study, I attended to confirmability by carefully engaging in Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I utilized a reflective journal to engage in epoche and attend to any emerging issues of bias. I utilized processes of reflective listening, of listening with respect and care, and of intentionally being fully present with an open-mind to all participants. I transcribed each transcript, reviewed the transcripts while listening to the audio tapes, and repeatedly listened to each audiotaped interview.

Results of the Data Analysis

Through this study I sought to explore how young adults with learning disabilities, enrolled in postsecondary institutions, describe their experiences in developing academic self-efficacy and subsequently how they describe educational contexts and characteristics of individuals who contribute towards their self-efficacy belief development. In essence, the study sought to understand the lived-experience, for individuals with learning disabilities, of the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs. The study participants varied in ages, stages of degree completion, programs, postsecondary institutions, and backgrounds presenting a rich and diverse group of individuals.

The majority of study participants, 80% of participants, highlighted that they were confident in their academic abilities to complete identified postsecondary requirements. Participants discussed their confidence in their abilities to achieve predominantly being due to studying within an area of interest or of perceived strength. These participants highlighted the importance of pursuing postsecondary study in an area of personal interest and strength as essential to degree completion. One participant, Participant 4, indicated that as biology has always “come easy” they knew that enrolling in a faculty of science was the best plan for degree completion. Other participants highlighted studying within their area of interest as being “common sense.” Participants posited that “using your strengths” was critical to developing motivation, hope, and positive academic self-efficacy beliefs.

All participants highlighted the importance of successful academic experiences in developing positive academic self-efficacy beliefs. Participants discussed how accessing needed resources, working conscientiously, obtaining necessary accommodations, asking questions, attending extra tutorials or study sessions, and having a positive attitude contributed towards being successful in their studies. Further, most participants described learning experiences that contributed towards increased motivation and self-confidence to continue postsecondary studies when faced with academic difficulties. One participant, participant 3, identified “doing it once means you can do it again.” Participants identified when academic results met their expectations, given a high amount of concentrated effort, this directly contributed to increased motivation and further persistence. Participant 2 shared “I did not know it was possible for me to achieve that high of a mark. That changed for good when I saw the first exam I passed, after putting in all the work, and I far exceeded what I needed to pass. Now I always put in the work.” Participant 1 shared “I tell myself about all the times I have done OK in school to prove to myself that I can do this and I will make it through.”

Most participants identified positive learning experiences occurring during their secondary school experiences as critical to developing positive beliefs about their ability to be successful in postsecondary contexts. Participant 10 shared “I learned what I needed to do to succeed in high school.” Other participants highlighted that high school was where they recalled encountering their first significant difficulty with course content and learning how to work through challenging material was critical to their postsecondary

success. Participant 4 stated “High school taught me to believe I’m smart, to believe I’m capable, but that I have to be stubborn and persistent to learn.”

Having a positive support system was identified by all participants as critical to the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs. Most participants identified a family member as essential support in developing positive self-efficacy beliefs when they were younger. These participants identified their parents, a parent, siblings, or grandparents as critical support. They attributed their attitudes of persistence to family members as family members communicated belief in their abilities, helped them learn to advocate for themselves, helped them work through difficult academic content when younger, and were consistently encouraging.

Participants identified the importance of having supportive peer relationships during their secondary and postsecondary educational experiences. Participants identified friend and peer support as one of the best resources for postsecondary experiences. Peer support, particularly from peers who can identify with those with learning disabilities, was argued to be a key factor in motivation to continue postsecondary education, in maintaining a positive and persistent attitude, and in communicating belief in their capacities to be successful. One participant highlighted peer support as essential due to peers as “totally encouraging, they keep telling me they know I can, and that just because I have to work harder and take longer it doesn’t matter. At the end when you have the degree no one asks you how long it took or if you think you had to work harder, they just know you are qualified” (Participant 1). All participants highlighted the importance of having peers who can provide critical strategic support for coping with a learning

disability within a postsecondary context and who understand the higher levels of effort that may be required to succeed. Participant 9 stated, “It is important to have friends who truly understand because when you need help they know how to give you good advice, or direct you to where you need to go, or tell you what not to do.”

Vicarious experiences through role models were identified by most of participants as key in their positive academic self-efficacy belief development. These participants highlighted that having someone close to them, a family member or a close friend, who struggles with learning and has worked very hard to achieve their goals enhances their own beliefs in themselves and increases their levels of persistence. One participant identified having a close friend who struggles with learning in his area of strength has been very helpful, as he is able to take on a mentor role and this contributes towards his confidence as a learner. Another participant accredited watching a family member struggle and work very hard to achieve an academic goal as critical to their development of persistence in the face of difficulty. All participants who identified role models and shared learning through vicarious experiences as critical elements in the development of their positive self-efficacy beliefs highlighted that the most important characteristic the role model(s) displayed was an attitude of persistence and determination.

For some participants, similarity between themselves and the role models was identified as very important. For these participants the sense that another truly understood, or understands, their struggles and how hard they work is a critical feature. For these individuals role models who are friends with similar learning profiles was identified as very supportive in their development of self-efficacy beliefs. Participant 1

stated “I feel like they understand me, they understand what learning is like for me and they don’t judge. I don’t feel judged by them. We help and push each other.” Participant 5 shared, “The friends I met through accessibility services and attending their seminars, being fully immersed in my postsecondary experience are the best because when I am struggling they get it, and we get how to help each other, and we get that when we say it’s hard, we mean it really is hard.”

Participants were asked to identify any experiences they have had that they identify as barriers to their academic success or to their development of positive self-efficacy beliefs. While a consistent theme was not identified for a majority of participants’ individual experiences are presented here to provide insight into self-efficacy belief development. Of the 10 participants interviewed, three participants discussed experiences that they characterized as barriers to positive self-efficacy belief development. The other seven participants did not describe specific experiences they perceived to be barriers to their development of academic self-efficacy beliefs.

The barriers identified by the three participants were consistently reflective of negative emotional affect as impacted by having a learning disability. Participant 2 shared their high school experience of feeling judged.

I don’t think it is helpful that there is judgment for students, everybody has to take the highest level of courses possible. Even if you have an LD you feel like if you don’t take the highest level of course that everyone is judging you and then you don’t want to take the course that is right for you. So judgment and feeling

judged in high school threw a brick wall at me. I did not want to ask questions in front of my peers, so I just didn't ask.

This participant shared that eventually they did take a math course that was more appropriate to their level and met their postsecondary program requirements but recalled that making the decision to take this level of course was difficult and negative emotions were attached to the experience.

Participant 4 highlighted academic achievement in high school that was impacted by negative emotional affect. "I had difficulties with emotions affecting school in the past." This participant further described hopefulness around the postsecondary experience as being different from their secondary experience.

I was wondering what the people would be like and hoping it would be really different from high school – without the who is who of being cool. I was hopeful that postsecondary would be just a bunch of different kids and adults doing their thing in their areas of interest and that there would be fewer of the seriously distracting people; the people who make fun of others, or bug others for asking questions about what they need.

They described being worried, feeling sad or depressed, and subsequently struggling to advocate for themselves during their high school experience. They further described being frustrated by having a learning disability and feeling negatively judged by their peers. This was a significant barrier as their grades dropped during this time period resulting in the need to complete academic upgrading courses prior to enrolling in their degree program.

A third participant described struggling in high school to develop a sense of value regarding learning academic content. This participant struggled to make sense of what and how he was being taught. He described having a very negative attitude towards high school.

In high school I didn't really value what I was learning or the way I was being taught to 'learn'. I tried to memorize everything I could to get a decent mark, but memorizing for an exam is not learning something. Memorization and learning are two different things. If I am learning about something I should be able to have an educated conversation about the topic and have a formed opinion whereas memorization is looking at words and sentences on a piece of paper and repeating them for a final exam. That is not learning. In high school I was memorizing not learning.

This participant shared that he struggled to complete high school with the required grades for entry into postsecondary. Thus, he worked for a few years while taking courses of interest and upgraded required high school components prior to enrolling in his current postsecondary program. He described the importance of learning in an area of strength and interest as key to approaching postsecondary educational experiences with a positive outlook.

The described negative emotional affect as impacting the educational experiences and development of positive self-efficacy beliefs for these three individuals can be argued to indicate that an individual's physiological or emotional state influences the development of self-efficacy beliefs. Each of these individuals experienced negative

emotional affect, which impacted task approach, persistence, and completion resulting in lower grades for high school completion and necessitating upgrading for two of the participants.

Most participants described adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy, questioning, self-awareness, and further self-determination skills as playing a key role in supporting educational success and continued development of positive self-efficacy beliefs. The participants described the importance of self-determination skills such as personal awareness of areas of strength and challenge, ability to access accommodations, and awareness of what strategies work best for them when compensating in their area of disability to promote academic success and continued positive beliefs in their capabilities.

- P3. I invest myself and my time in my learning. I know I can do it, the resources I need are there I just have to find out about them. Reading the course outlines tells you what you need to know and then if the information is not there I ask questions. I will always ask questions.
- P4. When professors ask at the beginning of classes if anybody needs anything to let them know I always let them know that I have the accommodation of extra time. It is better to have the extra time up front and if I need it I use it and if not then I don't have to worry about asking for it.
- P5. I went to accessibility services right away to get the extra time I needed for exams. I always note my professors' office hours and email

addresses so that I can contact them if I need anything other than extra time.

- P6. I went to accessibility services and I kept going back until I was able to get the accommodations that I needed. You need to talk to the people who know what is available and then go and make it happen.

The secondary question identified for the study was: How do young adults with learning disabilities describe educational contexts and characteristics that contribute towards or impede their development of academic self-efficacy and corresponding adaptive coping skills? All participants were asked to describe experiences and individuals that supported their development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs. All participants identified effective educators as being key to establishing classroom environments and interpersonal relationships that support individuals with learning disabilities to have confidence in their abilities and to succeed. Participants described contexts characterized by an atmosphere of inquiry, of curiosity and safety, of free from perceived judgment, and of social support as key to their success. They further described educators who invested time to get to know their students, who had strong interpersonal skills, who approached individuals with an attitude of support, patience, and encouragement as critical to their success.

All participants described effective educators, or key teachers, throughout their academic experiences as contributing towards their positive academic self-efficacy beliefs and confidence in their abilities to be successful as postsecondary students. For some participants these teachers were in their elementary years, for others they were

secondary teachers, and one described a key professor within their first year of postsecondary studies as a critical relationship. All participants described effective educators as individuals who took the time to get to know the participant as an individual and communicated their belief in their capacity while giving them direct strategic support for learning.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of the research study. The lived experiences of 10 participants in the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping mechanisms were explored through a phenomenological research design. The identified goal of the study was to develop additional understanding of the phenomenon of the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs for learners with identified learning disabilities. Further, through the study I sought to address an identified gap in the literature regarding the voice of young adults with learning disabilities in characterizing their experiences.

Following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process, interview data from each participant was analyzed to identify the essence of the experience. Through this process the identification of six major themes and four subthemes answered the central and secondary research questions. The six major themes I identified were: (a) the role of experience, (b) support systems, (c) role models, (d) adaptive coping mechanisms, (e) accommodations, and (f) effective educators. Two subthemes were identified for theme one: pride and personalized learning. One subtheme was identified for theme five: assistive technology. One subtheme was identified for theme six: interpersonal skills.

Each theme and subtheme highlighted the individual and collective essence of the experience of developing positive academic self-efficacy beliefs and characteristics of supportive educational contexts and educators.

In Chapter 5 I will present information regarding the interpretation of the findings, including how the findings of this study confirm and extend the knowledge in the field of learning disabilities within the context of the conceptual framework of self-efficacy beliefs. In Chapter 5 I will also review the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of developing academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding adaptive coping mechanisms for young adults with learning disabilities. I identified a gap in the literature regarding the voice of young adults with learning disabilities and the development of self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, a phenomenological research design was identified as appropriate to the stated purpose of the study and the identified gap in the literature. The goal of the study was to develop further understanding of the role of self-efficacy beliefs as a factor in the educational experiences of learners with identified learning disabilities, potentially contributing to knowledge regarding appropriate interventions for these learners.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with 10 study participants. Participants self-identified as postsecondary students with a learning disability and volunteered to take part in the study. Each participant interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological process was used to analyze the resulting data. Key findings of the study indicated six critical components, or themes, in the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs for the young adult learners with learning disabilities who participated in this study. These six critical components included: (a) the role of experience, (b) support systems, (c) role models, (d) adaptive coping mechanisms, (e) accommodations, and (f) effective educators. Two subthemes for the role of experience were identified: pride and personalized learning. One subtheme under

accommodations was identified: use of assistive technology. One subtheme under effective educators emerged: interpersonal skills.

Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the findings of the research study were predominantly consistent with the findings that I described in the peer-reviewed literature in Chapter 2. All participants highlighted the importance of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs in motivation to pursue postsecondary studies, in affective characteristics such as a positive outlook upon the outcome of their scholastic endeavors, and persistence in the pursuit of understanding academic content at all educational levels (Klassen, 2008). Participants further described the relationship between positive academic self-efficacy beliefs and goal setting, developing adaptive coping skills, and self-determination (Zheng et al., 2012).

The findings of the study were not consistent with research indicating that postsecondary students with learning disabilities report decreased levels of academic self-efficacy beliefs and confidence to meet academic demands (Reed et al., 2011). In the present study, 80% of participants reported strong levels of positive self-efficacy beliefs and confidence to achieve postsecondary graduation requirements. The majority of participants stated that they were confident in their abilities to learn academic content, had made decisions to enroll in postsecondary programs consistent with their areas of strength and interests, and communicated strong levels of personal determination to achieve graduation requirements. However, this is consistent with Gerber (2012) who argued that postsecondary students with learning disabilities who have accurate and

positive self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to be successful within their academic environment.

The six themes that I identified in this study were consistent with the summarized research I presented in Chapter 2 regarding the lived-experience of individuals with learning disabilities in the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs. The six themes that emerged through data analysis include: (a) The role of experience, (b) support systems, (c) role models, (d) adaptive coping mechanisms, (e) accommodations, and (f) effective educators.

Theme 1: The Role of Experience

All participants identified positive, successful, learning experiences as contributing significantly to their belief in their ability to be successful within an academic context and to meet their goal of postsecondary graduation. Participants highlighted the importance of academic experiences in which they put forth high levels of effort, believed they had been successful, and then received confirmatory grades as critical to their beliefs that they could master academic content and be successful postsecondary students. This is consistent with, and confirmatory of, research findings indicating the impact of positive experiences in developing positive academic self-efficacy beliefs (Gerber, 2012; Klassen, 2010; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; Wright et al., 2013).

Theme 2: Support Systems

Most participants discussed the importance of having a positive support system in the development of their self-efficacy beliefs and continued academic success. Consistent

with the Lackaye and Margalit (2008) study findings of hopefulness and positive social connections being related to positive self-efficacy beliefs, study participants highlighted the key role family and peer relationships play in their continued academic persistence and determination to meet graduation requirements.

Theme 3: Role Models

Many participants highlighted the importance of having peer relationships or familial relationships in which a close friend or family member shared similar learning characteristics. In this study, seven of the 10 participants described the importance of having role models in the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs and continued motivation for achieving postsecondary graduation requirements. For these individuals, knowing another who has experienced learning challenges or similarly is identified as having a learning disability provided them with a strong level of social support or social influence towards achieving their identified academic goals (Bandura, 1997).

Theme 4: Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

Most participants in this research study highlighted the importance of the use of adaptive coping mechanisms in continuing to develop positive academic self-efficacy beliefs and in experiencing success within their respective postsecondary environments. Participants highlighted the importance of self-advocacy, resourcefulness in identifying available resources and accommodations, consulting with peers regarding most effective scheduling and managing both time and course load, and persistence in the pursuit of understanding. These characteristics are consistent with literature findings indicating the

potential impact of self-advocacy and self-determined behavior on self-efficacy beliefs (Baird et al., 2009; Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Zheng et al., 2012; Zimmerman, 1995).

Further, participants in this study highlighted having developed positive academic self-efficacy beliefs contributed towards their persistence in self-advocacy, in researching available resources and accommodations, consulting and accessing both professional and peer support, and taking ownership for their learning. These elements of self-determined behavior (Zheng et al., 2012) and adaptive coping skills (Gerber, 2012; Getzel, 2008; May & Stone, 2010; Walker & Test, 2011) are consistent with findings in the reviewed literature in Chapter 2 regarding elements present for academically successful students with identified learning disabilities.

Theme 5: Accommodations

The majority of study participants, eight of 10 participants, highlighted the importance of using accommodations to support their success in postsecondary contexts. Participants highlighted the need to access available accommodations, consistently use available resources, and negotiate access through accessibility service departments. The participants who highlighted accessing resources discussed disclosing their learning needs to professors, accessibility department personnel, and registration personnel in order to access supports they believed would be most important in achieving their academic goals. This is consistent with research study findings indicating that those who chose to self-disclose their identification as a student with a learning disability (Getzel, 2008) and utilize accommodations (Anctil et al., 2008) may evidence higher academic self-efficacy beliefs and corresponding academic success.

Theme 6: Effective Educators

The majority of participants discussed the role of effective educators in contributing towards their development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs. Most participants, 90% of participants, discussed how effective teachers at all educational levels provided them with constructive feedback, showed them how to use their strengths to meet identified educational goals, supported the development of self-understanding, and communicated continued belief in their capabilities as learners. Participants described these educators as individuals who provided educational contexts and structured learning experiences that were considered critical in contributing towards success. This is consistent with the study undertaken by Klassen and Lynch (2007) that highlighted the importance of direct and supportive feedback for individuals with learning disabilities in the development of self-efficacy beliefs.

Conceptual Framework and Finding Interpretations

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was the guiding conceptual framework for this study. Bandura argued that an individual's self-efficacy beliefs are the beliefs they hold about their capacity to succeed in particular contexts or situations. Thus, academic self-efficacy beliefs are the beliefs an individual holds regarding their capacity to be successful in academic learning and educational contexts. Bandura further argued that the development of these beliefs is influenced by four main components: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) social influences, and (d) physiological and emotional states. Social learning theory, particularly self-efficacy beliefs and self-

efficacy belief development as posited by Bandura are consistent with the results of this study.

Mastery Experiences

All participants stressed the important role mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997) have played in their development of positive self-efficacy beliefs. Participants emphasized that previous positive academic experiences contributed towards their beliefs in themselves as capable postsecondary students. They highlighted positive experiences in both mastering academic content as well as successfully being able to advocate for themselves and their learning needs as critical components to ongoing persistence, motivation, a positive attitude, and progress towards their identified academic goals.

Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences through role models were identified by seven of the 10 research participants as playing a key role in their positive academic self-efficacy belief development. These participants highlighted having peers or family members demonstrate persistence in the face of academic challenges, use of adaptive coping mechanisms, and achieve an established academic goal as contributing towards their own belief in their capabilities to master similar activities. Consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), participants who identified vicarious experiences as contributing towards their own beliefs in their capacity spoke of the importance of having role models who demonstrate persistence, a positive attitude, and who are similar to themselves in terms of learner profile.

Social Influences

Social persuasion (Bandura, 1997), or social influences, was an identified element in positive self-efficacy belief development in the identified themes of support systems as well as role models. Ninety percent of participants shared the importance of having a support system who communicated faith in the participants judgment, belief in participant capabilities, and supported the enactment of adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy, goal setting, and planning. Participants spoke to the role of social persuasion stating their families, friends, educators, and peers were encouraging as well as critical in providing direct feedback on how to accomplish their established goals or access needed accommodations.

Physiological and Emotional States

Consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), three participants highlighted the role of positive mood in self-efficacy belief development. The other seven participants did not refer to mood as playing a factor in their overall self-efficacy belief development. For the three participants who did discuss mood, a lowered overall level of mood combined with feelings of being judged, experiencing negative peer commentary regarding their capabilities, and challenges with motivation during their secondary school experiences were characterized as barriers to their successful academic achievement.

The three study participants disclosed experiences with negative emotional affect as presenting periods of increased challenge during their educational journey. These participants highlighted these periods of negative emotional affect as contributing towards decreased levels of academic achievement. Decreased levels of academic

achievement have resulted in longer-term impact as these individuals required academic upgrading courses, or repeated courses, subsequently delaying their postsecondary graduation timelines. This is consistent with research summarized regarding the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and emotional affect (Bandura, 1997; Hen & Goroshit, 2012; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010) I presented in Chapter 2.

Summary

In summary, the study findings of this research study align with the four components identified by Bandura (1977) in social learning theory, as influencing the development of self-efficacy beliefs. All participants identified the role of mastery experiences, seven of 10 participants identified the importance of vicarious experiences through role models, and nine of 10 participants identified the role of social persuasion through support systems. While only three of the participants identified the role of emotional affect their experiences are summarized here for the provision of individual insights or horizons (Moustakas, 1994) of the experience. Additionally, this study identified themes of using adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy (Zheng et al., 2012), self-disclosure as a student with a learning disability and need for accommodations (Getzel, 2008), accessing accommodations consistently (Anctil et al., 2008), and working with effective educators (Klassen & Lynch, 2007) as key factors in positive academic self-efficacy belief development.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the small sample size of 10 participants who self-identified as postsecondary students with learning disabilities. All participants were required to be between the ages of 18 and 25 and currently enrolled in a postsecondary institution. The participants who volunteered were between the ages of 19 and 23 and enrolled at various postsecondary institutions and in various programs. The individual perspectives shared by the research participants represent their experiences and insights into the phenomenon and may not be representative of the population of individuals with learning disabilities. Thus, the study is limited by the small sample size and individual perspective.

Given my personal and professional experiences, researcher bias was acknowledged as a potential limitation of the study. To address this potential bias, I worked to engage in the process of epoche and bracketed my preconceived biases and judgments and listened to each participant with an open mind, attentively engaging to understand the participant description of the lived experience of developing academic self-efficacy beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). The use of the interview protocol (Appendix A) and member checking were also used to attend to limitation issues identified regarding potential researcher bias. The study was further limited and bound by the indirect nature of interview data provided by the specific participants. This represents a further limitation to the study as the interview data represents the lived-experience of the phenomenon from an emic or insider perspective. The data is thus representative of the participants' experience and researcher interpretation through analysis.

Recommendations

This study sought to address the identified gap in the literature regarding the lived experience of developing self-efficacy beliefs for learners with identified learning disabilities. The 10 postsecondary students who participated in this study were enrolled in postsecondary institutions in a metropolitan area in Western Canada. All participants were enrolled in undergraduate studies. All participants provided important insights into the development of self-efficacy beliefs from their personal experiences.

While this study required participants to be between the ages of 18 and 25, further research addressing the lived experience of the development of self-efficacy beliefs for adolescents is recommended. Insights provided by the adolescent voice regarding the development of self-efficacy beliefs may contribute critical knowledge impacting pedagogical practice and available accommodations at a school level. A further possibility for future research may involve a longitudinal study examining self-efficacy beliefs for individuals with learning disabilities in their secondary and subsequent postsecondary educational experiences. Such a research study may contribute important insight into a developmental perspective of self-efficacy beliefs.

Many participants in this study identified a need for peer mentorship programs in their first year of undergraduate study to support access to accommodations, enhancing the development of self-advocacy skills specific to a postsecondary context, and providing role models with similar learning characteristics. These participants emphasized the importance of working with an individual who has a similar learning profile, has experience within their area of study, and who has successfully self-

advocated in the postsecondary context as essential features for a peer mentoring program. Peer mentoring was not a factor explored in the literature for this study; however, given the insights shared by participants peer mentoring is a recommended area for further research. Thus, a potential area for future research is the impact of peer mentorship programs for those with identified learning disabilities. Research in this area could examine the graduation rates for those who participated in available mentorship programs comparative to those who did not.

Further research in the area of developing effective interventions, such as identified by the research participants, is a recommended area of focus. Research examining the role of assistive technology, supportive relationships, and the development of self-advocacy skills within educational contexts presents opportunities for those working with individuals with learning disabilities to enhance professional practice and improve available resources. Future studies could examine the role of self-advocacy skills in transitioning between secondary and postsecondary contexts, compare the role of assistive technology for individuals with and without LD, and explore how individuals with LD characterize the development of supportive relationships. However, overall any additional research into the area of the development of self-efficacy beliefs for learners with learning disabilities would contribute knowledge to the discipline and potentially inform practices leading to enhanced functioning for this population.

Implications

Students with identified learning disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education contexts in increasing numbers (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Newman et al., 2010;

Russell & Demko, 2005). Despite the increasing postsecondary enrollment numbers reported for students with identified learning disabilities, students with LD are less likely to complete graduation requirements (Getzel, 2008; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012) or to graduate in a timely manner consistent with their non-learning disabled peers (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2005). Positive academic self-efficacy beliefs contribute to continued enrollment, enacting required adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-advocacy, and support overall higher academic achievement levels (Gerber, 2012; Wright et al., 2013).

The participants of this study provided valuable insight, from an emic perspective, into the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs, the importance of utilizing adaptive coping mechanisms to support continued positive self-efficacy beliefs, the role of accommodations and support for learning within a postsecondary context, and characteristics of effective educators. Understanding their lived-experiences contributes towards understanding how to best support this population in obtaining their educational goals. The insights shared by the participants should provide family members, educators, and other professionals who work with this population valuable information into supporting the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs.

Thus, implications of this study for positive social change include an increased awareness of supports and challenges to postsecondary completion from the perspective of students with learning disabilities, ways of interacting to support this population to access available resources and accommodations, and how professionals who work with students with identified learning disabilities can support increased academic self-efficacy

beliefs. Research participants within this study emphasized the importance of working with educators and professionals who communicated clear expectations, a belief in the individual's capacity to learn and master difficult academic content, created contexts whereby participants felt able to ask questions repeatedly and communicate on a personal level, and communicated an interest in each student as a person and learner. This increased understanding of ways to engage professionally with students with learning disabilities may lead to overall increased levels of postsecondary education or increasing timely graduation for individuals with identified learning disabilities. Increased levels of postsecondary education and timely graduation for students with learning disabilities thereby may contribute to increasing or enhancing quality of life satisfaction for these individuals (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012).

Conclusion

The intent of this phenomenological study was to develop meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities regarding the development of academic self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent adaptive coping skills such as self-advocacy. The goal of the study was to develop further understanding of the role of self-efficacy beliefs as a factor in the postsecondary education of learners with learning disabilities. Exploring with participants how they characterized the development of their self-efficacy beliefs, the relationship of these beliefs to the development of adaptive coping skills, to academic persistence, and to accessing available accommodations and learner supports has provided valuable insights and contributed to further knowledge in the field. This knowledge may provide valuable

insight to others with learning disabilities, to family members, to educators, and to those who provide educational support services, regarding characteristics and conditions for successful academic self-efficacy belief development. Supporting all learners in the development of positive academic self-efficacy beliefs is essential for creating conditions of success.

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Appendix A: Guiding Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as a postsecondary student with a learning disability.
2. Please tell me about how you see yourself, your beliefs in yourself, as a learner in your postsecondary context.
3. Please tell me about your experiences in developing your beliefs about yourself as a learner.
4. Can you please describe experiences you have had that have supported your academic achievement?
5. Have you had experiences you would characterize as barriers to your success, or developing confidence as a learner? If so, will you please describe them?
6. Please describe for me strategies you find helpful in coping with your learning disability in a postsecondary context.
7. Please describe for me strategies you use to advocate for your learning needs.
8. As you were planning to transition to postsecondary what were your hopes, thoughts, concerns, feelings?
9. What factors do you believe motivate you to continue in your education?
10. Please tell me about people who have been key supporters in your academic journey. Are there any characteristics they have in common?
11. What resources have been most beneficial to you as a postsecondary student? Are there resources that are not available that you believe would be very beneficial to your success?
12. Please tell me about your confidence as a learner with a learning disability in a

postsecondary context.

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that would help me to further understand your experiences as a postsecondary student with a learning disability?

Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of postsecondary students who have a learning disability. I am inviting young adults with learning disabilities who are enrolled in postsecondary education to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Karin Coles, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to develop a meaningful understanding of the experiences of students with learning disabilities in postsecondary environments. The study will focus upon the personal experiences of students with learning disabilities as they work towards their educational goals.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview that will be approximately 60 minutes long. This interview will focus upon your experiences as a postsecondary student with a learning disability and be interactive in nature. The time and location of the interview will be mutually determined and ensure your confidentiality. The content of the interview will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. You will receive a copy of the transcript for your review and to ensure that I have accurately captured your experiences.

Here are some sample questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences as a postsecondary student with a learning disability.
2. Please tell me about how you see yourself, your beliefs in yourself, as a learner in your postsecondary context.
3. Please tell me about your experiences in developing your beliefs about yourself as a learner.
4. Can you please describe experiences you have had that have supported your academic achievement?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The potential benefit of participation in this study would be that your information regarding your experiences could help in the development of program supports, accommodations, or strategies for future postsecondary students with learning disabilities.

Payment:

There are no payments or other compensations provided to you as a result of your participation in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in a locked cabinet within my home. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or at xxx.xxx@xxx.xxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx. Walden University's approval number for this study is 04-01-14-0228006 and it expires on March 31, 2015.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix C: Invitation Flyer

Invitation Flyer

Would you like to tell your story about your experiences as a postsecondary student with a learning disability?

You May Be Eligible For This Study If:

- You are between the ages of 18 and 25
- You are currently enrolled in a postsecondary institution
- You have a diagnosed learning disability

The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of young adult learners with learning disabilities in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy beliefs are the beliefs an individual has regarding their capacity to be successful within a specific situation. The study will focus primarily on your personal experiences as a student and what resources and strategies you identify as being helpful or as barriers in your learning journey. Sharing your story has the potential to impact programs, services, and educational practices for postsecondary students with learning disabilities.

What You Will Be Asked To Do:

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in one recorded interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be an interactive discussion about your experiences as a student with a learning disability. The interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient for you. A secondary follow up communication may be required and will take place by phone call or in person.

All information will be confidential and used solely for the purpose of understanding the experiences of postsecondary students with learning disabilities.

This research project is part of a dissertation study conducted by Karin Coles a
Walden University doctoral candidate.

If you are interested, please contact Karin Coles at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at
xxx.xxx@xxx.xxx

Curriculum Vitae

Karin A.M. Coles
Calgary, Alberta
Canada

Education

Walden University - Minneapolis, MN
Doctor of Philosophy (Candidate), Psychology (Educational Psychology Specialization)
Expected Graduation 2014

Walden University – Minneapolis, MN
Master of Science, Educational Psychology
2012

University of Calgary - Calgary, Alberta
Master of Arts, Curriculum Specialization
2000
Thesis: Dwelling with the Gift: Teaching and Responsive Reading

University of Calgary – Calgary, Alberta
Bachelor of Education, Early Childhood Specialization
1989

Professional Experience

The Family Psychology Place
Registered Psychologist, #4143 (AB)
Calgary, Alberta
2014 – current

The Family Psychology Place
Counselor
Calgary, Alberta
2010 – 2014

Kaleidoscope Educational Consulting
Educational Consultant
Calgary, Alberta
2008 – 2010

The Calgary Board of Education
School Administrator
Calgary, Alberta
2001 – 2008

The Calgary Board of Education
Teacher
Calgary, Alberta
1989 – 2001

Professional Affiliations

The Golden Key Honors Society
2012 – current

The Canadian Psychological Association
2012 – current

The Alberta Psychological Association
2012 – current