“Could I Have More Time?”

Accommodating Learning Disabilities for Children in Private School Settings: Teacher Perspectives

By

Amanda Leela

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Amanda Leela, April 2016
Abstract

The goal of this study was to critically analyze the research question: how are a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classrooms being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with a learning disability (LD). To expand this question even further, the study will also draw attention to challenges facing LD students in mainstream classrooms, teacher accountability and attitudes towards LD students in their classrooms, fairness of accommodations and technology benefits and problems. This study followed a qualitative research methodology organized around semi-structured interviews. Three 45 minute interviews were completed where personal teacher narratives were coded and transcribed as instruments of data collection and analysis. All four participants are current teachers from private school settings who lead me to an intensive data analysis where four main themes and accompanying sub themes emerged. The collected data exposes how technology has played a fundamental role in supporting students with LD in mainstream classrooms in private school settings. Conversely, the public schools’ process of accommodating LD students relies more on IEPs and resource rooms keeping budget expenditures in mind. This study is aimed at encouraging educators to steer away from a universal learning model and more towards an individual accommodating experience for LD students within mainstream classrooms by learning from private and public school systems.

Key Words: learning disability, responsive pedagogy, accessibility, technology, private schools
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my supervisors Angela Macdonald and Eloise Tan for their guidance and support throughout the Master of Teaching Research Project. You have both translated your knowledge and passion for research, driving me to work harder to produce a piece of work that I am proud of. Furthermore, thank you for helping me discover my research capabilities and commending my writing style during the process.

Moreover, I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to my four participants, Tara, Liza, Lauren and Sara for their role in leading me to my research findings. I was able to unravel many themes during my data analysis because of the in depth and excellent conversations we had. Additionally, I am grateful for you all taking time out of your hectic teaching schedules to meet with me and share your esteemed experiences.

I would also like to thank my cohort peers, the positivity, encouragement and moral support over the past two years shows how committed we were to each other as well as to our shared love for the teaching profession. I feel lucky to have worked alongside such brilliant people.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the role my parents have played in motivating me during the more stressful times over the past two years while working on the Masters of Teaching Research Project. Mom, thank you for being my co-editor and providing me with the most nutritional food to keep my brain fueled. Dad, thank you for encouraging me to believe that I can do whatever I set my mind to and that successes stem from hard work as well as failures. You have both been my biggest cheerleaders and I am blessed to have such inspiring parents and role models in my life.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... 2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. 3
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 6
1.0 Introduction to the Research Study .............................................................................. 6
1.1 Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................. 13
1.2 Research Questions ................................................................................................. 14
1.3 Background of the Researcher .................................................................................. 15
1.4 Overview .................................................................................................................. 17
Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................. 18
2.0 Introduction: ............................................................................................................. 18
2.1: Characteristics of Learning Disabilities ................................................................. 19
   2.1.1: Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyslexaculia ........................................................................... 19
2.2: Eliminating a “One Size Fits All” Approach ............................................................ 20
   2.2.1: Individual Education Plans (IEP) ...................................................................... 20
2.3: The Dynamic Assessment of Test Accommodations (DATA) ............................... 21
   2.3.1: Testing Through Technology .......................................................................... 21
2.4: Challenges facing LD students in Mainstream classrooms ..................................... 23
   2.4.1: Lack of LD Teacher Training and Class Sizes ................................................... 23
2.5: Learning from Private Schools ................................................................................ 24
2.6: Teacher Accountability ........................................................................................... 25
2.7: No Child Left Behind Controversy (NCLB) ............................................................. 26
2.8: Teachers’ Attitudes towards LD Students ............................................................... 28
   2.8.1: Inclusivity: Responsible Inclusion for Students with LD ................................... 28
2.9: Accommodations, Assessment and Standardized Testing ...................................... 31
   2.9.1: What is an accommodation? ............................................................................. 31
   2.9.2: Problems with Accommodations ..................................................................... 32
   2.9.3: Determining the Learner .................................................................................. 33
   2.9.4: What is a Fair Accommodation ....................................................................... 34
2.10: Technology Benefits and Problems ....................................................................... 35
2.11: Learning from a Specific Case .............................................................................. 37
2.12: Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 38
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................... 39
3.0 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 39
3.1 Approach and Procedures ........................................................................................ 40
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection ................................................................................ 41
3.3 Participants .............................................................................................................. 42
   3.3.1 Sampling Criteria ............................................................................................... 42
   3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment ....................................................................... 43
   3.3.3 Participant Bios .................................................................................................. 44
3.4: Data Analysis ........................................................................................................... 45
3.5 Ethical Review Procedure ........................................................................................ 46
3.6 Strengths and Limitations ....................................................................................... 47
   3.6.1 Limitations ......................................................................................................... 48
3.7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 49
Chapter 4: FINDINGS .................................................................................................................. 50
4.0 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 50
4.1 Participant's Conceptualization of Learning Disabilities .................................................. 51
   4.1.1 Teachers' Observations Informing Perspectives ......................................................... 51
   4.1.2 Challenges Teachers Confront with LD Inclusivity ................................................. 53
4.2 Teacher and Student Accessibility within Private Schools ............................................... 54
   4.2.1 Private School Finances and Funding ...................................................................... 55
4.3 Technology as a Tool for LD Support .............................................................................. 57
   4.3.1 Technology Benefits and Challenges ...................................................................... 59
   4.3.2 Support Systems for Teachers and Parents .............................................................. 61
4.4 Accommodations and Methods ....................................................................................... 63
   4.4.1 Specific Cases .......................................................................................................... 64
4.5 Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 66
Chapter 5: IMPLICATIONS .................................................................................................... 69
5.0 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 69
5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance .......................................................... 71
5.2 Implications ....................................................................................................................... 73
   5.2.1 Broad Implications ................................................................................................. 74
   5.2.2 Narrow Implications .............................................................................................. 77
5.3 Recommendations ........................................................................................................... 78
5.4 Areas of Further Research ............................................................................................. 81
5.5 Concluding Comments .................................................................................................... 83
REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................ 87
APPENDICES .......................................................................................................................... 93
Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview ......................................................................... 93
Appendix B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .................................................................................. 95
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

Research has found that students who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities (LD) are 15% more likely to drop out of school than their peers (Barga, 1996). Students with LD struggle with “the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information” (Learning Disabilities: a new definition, 2001, p. 3). These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking or reasoning (Ibid). These students are confronted not only by academic challenges in their everyday experience of schooling, but also with the stigmatization, labeling, and gatekeeping that accompanies this diagnosis (Barga, 1996). According to Barga (1996), stigmatization of students with LD in public schools is evident in the form of name calling, accusations, and low academic expectations by both teachers and students. Students from grade one up until college can experience stigmatization by being labeled “stupid.” Research has found that this can be so bad that some students do not access appropriate accommodations at the college level in order to avoid further stigmatization (Ibid). A further barrier that Barga (1996) underscores is that students with LD are also affected by gatekeepers within post-secondary contexts who navigate students away from certain programs of study to maintain credibility of a particular department, hindering these students’ academic growth, school and life experiences.

In response, the Canadian government and Provincial Ministries of Education are demonstrating commitment to better supporting these LD students. In 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed the legal rights of students with LD to receive an education that gives them an opportunity to develop their full potential (Supreme Court Judgments, 2015). The ruling was classified as Moore V BC (Ministry of Education) & School District 44. The reason for the
ruling was due to Jeffery Moore’s severe dyslexia discrimination case where The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) participated as support for the Tribunal to help sway the Supreme Court of Canada to classify Moore’s case as discrimination (The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2011). Moore attended a public school and suffered from severe dyslexia and in Grade 2, his psychologist from School District 44 claimed that he could not get the remedial help he needed at his school (Supreme Court Judgments, 2015). Moore’s father filed a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal on behalf of his son against both the school district and British Columbia. Moore’s father claimed that his child was denied a service customarily available to the public under section 8 of the B.C. Human Rights Code (Ibid). The Tribunal heard the case and concluded that there was discrimination against Moore by the school district and province of B.C. A wide range of benefits were ordered, one being that the family be reimbursed for the tuition of Moore’s private school that he was forced to attend (Ibid). Even though it took 12 years to consolidate Moore’s case, which was affecting the lives of many other students with LD, the lives of these ostracized children is said to be changed for the better according to the Court’s decrees from this recent case (The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2011).

In the past, students have struggled where little was known about learning disabilities and students were not commonly assessed, diagnosed, or supported. Today, more students are being psychologically and clinically diagnosed with a variety of learning disabilities including ADHD, Dyslexia, and Dyscalculia, to name a few. For instance, in 2007-2008, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) did a study on the total number of postsecondary students in Ontario with LD and reported a 13.2% increase over 5 years (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2011). With a growing number of students with LD being diagnosed, it is vital that
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

teachers be prepared and supported to respond to these students’ learning needs. This is particularly important in the current context, whereby students with LD are increasingly being placed into mainstream classrooms in an effort to fulfill school systems’ commitments to inclusion. The types of accommodations and modifications these students require can often go unattended to, in part because, unlike many others who are differently abled, learning disabilities are invisible in the physical sense. For example, efforts to include students with LD into mainstream classrooms began in 1986 and over ten years, 20% of students with LD had been transitioned into mainstream classrooms, helping to eliminate exclusion (Holloway, 2002). Since students with LD require extra help or attention, teachers are challenged between maintaining the whole class while also devoting their attention to the students with mild LD who remain in mainstream classrooms (Ibid). Teachers face other challenges when dealing with students with LD as many teachers believe that instructional adaptations are “desirable but not feasible” due to their lack of knowledge or skill for LD student planning (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Holloway’s suggestion of combining models of inclusive classrooms and resource rooms could help students with invisible disabilities be supported more accurately. He argues that this shared commitment by mainstream and special education teachers could help safeguard students by giving them a choice of learning opportunities within education nationally (Ibid). The implications for teachers could lead to less stress and uncertainty of accommodating students with more help from resource rooms who are specialized in the field of teaching students with LD.

Philippa Slater, a representative of the Learning Disabilities Association from B.C., has conducted several studies regarding undiagnosed LD and has confirmed what several individuals with LD have known for years: LD can lead to everlasting psychological harm unless they are
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

cought early (Preston, 2007). Five to ten percent of children from age six to fifteen have an LD in Ontario where half of those children are undiagnosed (Ibid). Research shows the current state of affairs with regards to the kinds of struggles teachers face. For example, Preston’s study recommended that teacher training require courses on detecting and teaching for LD because trial and error appears to be the method heavily relied upon to accommodate students with an invisible disability (2007). The problem and gap in the research is that trial and error can result in more harm to a child’s learning and their schooling experience. It can also overwhelm teachers because students are going through an experimental process with no firm conclusion. A vast amount of research exemplifies how accurate screening of students as young as kindergarten can increase the chances of determining if a child will have an LD, indicated by Thompson who emphasizes, “The key is to predict their troubles and help them before they fail” (Ibid, p.1).

With regards to accommodations and modifications, it is important to distinguish the difference in meaning between the two. Accommodations are defined as “alterations and changes in the way individuals with disabilities are enabled to function to demonstrate and apply their skills and knowledge” (Learning Disabilities: a new definition, 2001). Accommodations are intended to support student learning without altering the legitimacy of the students’ work. However, modifications are classified under the same category as accommodations because they are not mandated in law (Ibid). In an educational environment, modifications are defined “as ways in which the learning expectations, curriculum content, materials used, standards demanded or outcomes are changed and usually lowered” (Ibid, p.18) for student performance. This explains why modifications are not accepted during the administration of tests such as the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in grade 3, 6 and the grade 10 Ontario Literacy Test. Having accommodations and modifications in place across both public and private
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

schools can heighten success for students with LD, yet it is not that simple. What do students with LD need in order to be successful in both school and life? According to research conducted by Canada’s reputable Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, (2001) students with LD need more focalized attention on four key areas: specific skill instruction, compensatory strategies, self-advocacy training, and accommodations.

My topic explores how other education systems (i.e. public schools) can learn from the private school’s standard of education. Private schools are schools that are not funded by the government and are instead supported by a private organization or private individuals (i.e. parents or a local organization) where students are charged fees to attend (Oxford Dictionary). Private schools are praised for their smaller class sizes as overcrowding of public school classrooms is one of the most common complaints about the public education system and drives parents to place their children in the private system (OurKids.Net). Since private schools do not use public funds, they are able to develop their own curricula. Parents play a paramount role in the private education system and as long as parents agree with the intellectual, philosophical or religious basis brought to the curricula, they keep their autonomy from government interference, which is held as a great advantage of private schools over public (Ibid). In terms of teacher qualification, all teachers in public schools in almost all states and provinces in North America are required to have some form of federal, state or provincial certification along with a bachelor’s degree (Ibid). Where this may seem sufficient, in private schools, there are likely to be teachers who are more highly educated with graduate degrees and additional qualifications or awards (Ibid). In Canada, the Fraser Institute ranks private schools higher than public schools because of its acclaimed higher education reputation and access to student assistant resources (Ibid).
What is interesting is that the quality of education is actually no different between public and private schools, what matters is students’ social economic status. In 2011, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) analyzed results from the Program for International Student Assessment directing attention on the role of private schools (Maharaj, 2015). The research exposed that while students who attend private schools often perform better than students who attend public schools, relies on these students’ higher socio-economic backgrounds (Ibid). According to statistics Canada, “students who attended private high schools were more likely to have socio-economic characteristics positively associated with academic success and to have school peers with university-educated parents” (Ibid, par. 7). Drawing from this information, it is important to consider why private schools are valued as accelerated education without forgetting about children’s socio-economic status (SES). My research is aimed at pulling from private school strategies for students with LD where public schools could also reasonably and feasibly benefit from. Moreover, funding then becomes a large portion to consider when trying to learn from private systems that naturally have more funding due to student tuition fees, fundraisers, and parent support for a smaller number of students. The ministry allocates funding to each school board using a formula that is based on student enrolment and the unique needs of students in each board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). However, private schools are often early adopters of new techniques because funding is not as much of a concern as it is for public schools (Saltzman, 2014).

In 44% of elementary schools and 33% of secondary schools, not all students have access to the assistive technology recommended in their assessments or Individual Education Plans (Public Education Our Best Investment, 2014). This year, the provincial budget for special education is $2.72 billion, which is more than 10% of the total K–12 education budget (Ibid).
What is alarming is that with such a high amount of money, this is insufficient as 57 of Ontario’s 72 school boards spend more on special education than they receive from the province (Ibid). There is a Special Education Grant (SEG) funding that is “enveloped which means this funding can only be used for those students who require special education programs, services or equipment” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). It is reasonable that students who require SEG are only able to receive it, however, since special education funding is prescriptive, school boards are diligent of how special education funds are spent because of more LD diagnosis and an inability to keep up. Each special education school receives a base school allocation of $5,000 for Elementary and $20,000 for Secondary (Toronto District School Board, 2014). While devising an accommodation strategy for students with LD based on the techniques implemented by private school teachers, one must consider the feasibility of the plan and make it realistic based on available funds.

The Toronto Star newspaper highlights private school benefits where their smaller classrooms allow for individualized attention between teacher and students’ with LD. Private schools have a 9:1 versus a 17:1 student teacher relationship, allowing for more focalized attention for students with LD (National Center for Education Statistics). My research is not a comparison between which schools systems are better, instead it is centered on learning from how private schools make connections and build bonds between parents, teachers, the school community and their children. Lois Rowe, the Vice principal from Havergal College, a prestigious private school in Toronto, emphasizes their advantage on how the faculty really knows their children, their family make-up, culture and traditions, where a child is comfortable and when a child needs support (Cornell, 2014). At Havergal and Branksome Hall, these exceptional institutions cater to continuity where teachers have one class per grade and the
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

teacher moves with the class through a few grades (Ibid). With a strategy like this implemented into the public school realm, students and teachers would have the chance to work more collaboratively by allowing the student with LD and teacher to develop a fuller relationship. Once students with LD have acclimatized to their environment and are comfortable with their teacher and peers, a new year begins. The possibility that the student starts back off at square one is high, especially at a young age if they cannot articulate what they need.

Thus far, the literature is deficient with regards to how teachers are adequately supporting students with LD. However, the research is abundant in terms of the challenges students with LD are facing such as class sizes, human resource support, funding, material resources, and access to technology to see if and what can be learned from private school contexts.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn how a sample of teachers working in mainstream classrooms within a private school system are instructionally responding to the learning needs of their students with an LD so that the findings can inform the work being done in the public system. A large component of my research will focus on private schools that have the resources to access relevant technology and to learn what technology they use toward what ends/outcomes for students with LD. School boards have the responsibility to ensure that educational programs are organized to accommodate students’ learning needs and to aid each child’s growth and development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). To understand how we can learn from private and public systems surrounding the central phenomenon of more diagnosed LD students in mainstream classrooms begins with evaluating ourselves and considering the impact of funding. As future and current teachers, we can benefit from this study as it is unavoidable to have students with LD in our classroom at some point throughout our teaching career. By
conducting our own research and drawing upon the positive methods being used in private school systems, as teachers we can begin to implement these strategies and be further educated on managing students with LD who require additional support. With the correct response techniques, teachers could be able to avoid devoting unnecessary attention to figuring out what the child needs and supply the child immediately. The implications of inequities with regards to who can access private education, and thus access more support for LD is an important aspect of the research problem as all children are not receiving equitable access to effective learning support, and public schools need to learn how they can work toward that goal.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this research is: How is a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classroom contexts being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with learning disabilities, and what might the public system and its teachers learn from these teachers and the private school system?

To answer this more generalized question, I will look at these sub-questions:

- How do these teachers conceptualize “learning disability”? What experiences and resources inform their understanding of LD, and their competence and confidence in responding to the needs of their students with LD?
- What methods, modifications, and/or accommodations are these teachers implementing as responsive pedagogy to support the learning and social needs of their students with learning disabilities?
- What do these teachers observe in terms of how their students with LD respond to this pedagogy? What indicators of learning do they observe? What do they observe in terms
of how other students in the class respond, and the social implications for their students with LD?

- What challenges do these teachers confront in this work, and how do they respond to these challenges?
- What factors, resources, and programs support these teachers work in this area?
- Specifically, what is the role of technology for aiding LD students in mainstream classrooms?
- What factor does the role of funding have on students with LD
- What classifies private schools as accelerated education?
- How often are children’s socio-economic statuses considered when teaching is taking place? Can students realistically complete their work in the same manner at school and home?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

My commitment to this area of research is rooted in my personal experiences. I was diagnosed with dyslexia in 2000 when I was seven years old. I read from right to left, would write the alphabet backwards, confused my P’s, Q’s, B’s and D’s, and would reverse my numbers in math. I would also begin writing in all subjects from the right side of the page, and I really struggled with reading comprehension and math application. Over the past fourteen years, I spent five years working with a psychologist prepping ways to allow for my academic success. I was placed in mainstream classrooms and I felt embarrassed when called upon to read out loud or explain our homework. My elementary school did not pay much attention to my learning needs and I felt more like an obstacle than an equal student.
When teachers were asked to spend more one on one time with me at lunch or at the end of the day, it appeared to be chore-some. I would pretend to understand what they quickly tried to explain to me as I felt rushed. My parents and psychologist were the ones who tested me over four years through trial and error. I would write with and without time limits and see where I did better. I would use white boards to write my answers versus writing on the assigned paper for a test. I transitioned to typing my test and exam answers and used highlighters and markers to write and underline. My brain senses were drawn towards colours on the page after being re-evaluated by my psychologist before I went to high school. At my new school, which was a private school, they had a dedicated section to accommodations for students with LD. All my teachers were sent a confidential form regarding my disability and the tools I require to allow me to succeed while remaining in a traditional classroom. The teachers even offered to have me write in a separate room when it came to tests and exams where I was also allowed to have an iPod or music playing in the background.

The transition from having teachers who were more focused on their 9:00-4:00pm job and the teachers who showed a genuine concern to help each child achieve their own success is what has lead me to my career path in teaching and passion for this topic. Not every LD student struggles and not every school neglects these students. That being said, through both reflection of my past experiences and the reflexivity I am experiencing through my research, there can be ways for all schools to implement a technique that strives for all student success. In my first placement school, they had a thirty minute “tribes” component to their day on Friday’s that is dedicated to fostering respect and compassion of their peers. This is an example of how we can use our classroom time to provide inclusivity and even allow for more one on one teacher to student time for those in need.
ACCcommodations for Learning Disabilities

More resources are being implemented by schools, however, it is the responsibility of teachers to either pay attention to these fewer students or let them suffer in silence. This topic is important to me because with LD numbers growing and a lack of care from teachers, these students who have the potential of being accomplished beings may never realize their worth. I know what I have struggled with through my academic career and without the care of my teachers I would have questioned going to university let alone graduate school. To this day, I still use the tools I gained when I was a young girl and they are the reason why I am reflexive in what other methods education has to offer LD students’ academic success and confidence.

1.4 Overview

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature in the areas of conceptualizing LD and the Inclusive classroom, research on the barriers and challenges confronted by students with LD in school, and research on the challenges experienced by teachers supporting students with LD and the challenges of the inclusive classroom model. Additionally, the literature review explores best practices on how to support students with LD in terms of what research has learned about what works, under what circumstances, and to what outcomes for students, including the benefits of technology. In Chapter 3 I review the research-methodology and procedures used in this study, including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. In Chapter 4 I identify-the participants in the study and describe the data as it addresses the research question. Chapter 5 includes limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and further reading and study. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature pertaining to the areas of conceptualizing LD and
the Inclusive classroom, research on the barriers and challenges confronted by students with LD
in school, and research on the challenges experienced by teachers supporting students with LD
and the challenges of the inclusive classroom model. Furthermore, my research explores best
practices on how to support students with LD in terms of what research has learned about what
works, under what circumstances, and to what outcomes for students, including the
implementation of technology tools and programs. More specifically, I review themes related to
neurodiversity, (dyslexia, ADHD, and dyscalculia) individual education plans (IEPs and 504s),
assessment, accommodations or modifications and standardized testing tactics already in place. I
also examine the availability of training and support for teachers to integrate students with LD
effectively into mainstream classrooms, while considering traditional methods of teaching, (such
as one-dimensional learning and the No Child Left Behind approach) [NCLB] along with the
importance of teacher-student relationships.

I start by reviewing the literature holistically by focusing on dyslexia, ADHD, and
dyscalculia excluding broader disabilities such as Autism and Asperger’s. Next, I review
research on the importance of teacher accountability for student success and I consider teachers’
attitudes towards integrating students with LD in mainstream classrooms. From there I examine
the impact of assessment, possible effects of accommodations or modifications and standardized
testing on student learning, as well as, how classroom inclusion and technology means are being
incorporated. Finally, I draw attention to funding within the role of school boards and the
policies for students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to support my
study on the responsiveness of school boards, legislations (i.e. public and private schools) and teachers with respect to students’ learning needs in mainstream classrooms.

2.1 Characteristics of Learning Disabilities

2.1.1 Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyscalculia

In this study, my conceptualization of learning disabilities is informed by the definition provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (2001): learning disabilities are “a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning, (oral and written language, reading, and mathematics) in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning” (p.3). Students with LD represent the largest category of disability throughout classrooms with approximately 6% of the total population of students enrolled in public K-12 schools (Fuchs, Fuchs & Capizzi, 2005). Students with dyslexia, ADHD, and dyscalculia differ in strengths and weakness. Dyslexia is neurological in origin and includes problems in reading comprehension. Consequently, the reading experience is reduced and the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge is impeded on (IDA, 2008). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) afflicts 3-5% of students with LD where they struggle to control their impulses and their inattention has an adverse effect on learning (Brand, Dunn & Greb, 2002). Research has examined students with ADHD and discovered that these students do not function efficiently in traditional classrooms because traditional teachers tend to demand that students sit silently, wait their turn to speak, and pay attention to instructions (Ibid). Students with LD are prominent in mainstream classrooms where 5% of LD students also struggle with dyscalculia, a neurological
disorder where individuals are deficient in particular number-handling (McCrone, 2002). These are the categories of LD I will be referring to throughout this literature review.

2.2 Eliminating A “One-Size Fits All” Approach

2.2.1 Individual Education Plans (IEP)

The “one-size fits all” approach has been fading due to the growing number of students with LD. This term relates to traditional teaching methods where teachers once acted as the “sage on the stage” standing at the front of the class to deliver information and have begun to transition as “guides on the side” monitoring student learning by purposefully walking around the classroom (Gibbs, 2014). The head of student support at Branksome Hall also draws attention to how as an educational society, we previously thought that “one-size fits all” and if you did not fit this model you were classified as having an LD (Cornell, 2014). Teachers are now required to adapt to their students learning needs with the beneficiaries of Canadian Individual Education Plans (IEP) or American 504 plans. An IEP is a plan constructed to ensure that a child with an identified disability under the Canadian law who is attending an educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology, 2013). IEP’s are claimed to be developed collaboratively, yet, “the principal is ultimately responsible for each student’s plan” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). This conflict between authentic principal-teacher collaboration and the interception of the principals’ status is concerning because the principal does not work with the children who require these plans. Having the principals’ signature on the IEP to indicate his or her assurance that the plan is appropriate raises question to the legitimacy of the plan as the principal could be speculating and claiming to know the student’s strengths and needs (Ibid).
A lack of teacher training for students with LD makes it difficult to alter IEP’s. This is a problem because it opens the gap regarding teacher qualifications and who is adequately qualified to teach students with LD. A study conducted in Utah where 200 general educators received survey’s to report their satisfaction with specific issues related to the IEP development process where the results indicated that general education teachers consistently reported lower levels of satisfaction with IEP development factors (Menlove, Hudson, Sutter, 2001). The satisfaction that training would be helpful and satisfaction that student input was valued were the two lowest percentages (Ibid). The teachers provided feedback to the IEP members’ board regarding the IEP process and highlighted five main areas: team connection, time, preparation, training and IEP relevance. What is even more significant about this research is that general educators voiced a need for training in understanding and valuing the IEP development process as no IEP training materials are specifically for general educators (Ibid). Both IEP and 504 plans require annual updates to warrant the effectiveness of student accommodations for his or her specific circumstances (Ibid). The educational world praises teachers for now focusing on accommodations and modifications with IEP and 504’s but as demonstrated by the research, these education plans serve no benefit if they are not suitable to the child.

2.3 The Dynamic Assessment of Test Accommodations (DATA)

2.3.1 Testing Through Technology

Moreover, within the current IEP team consisting of students, parents, the school administrator, and the teacher, the teacher is now given the most autonomy with respect to constructing the IEP as they are the ones that spend the most time with students in the classroom (Lynn, Fuchs, Fuchs, Capizzi, 2005). Research continues to debate if teachers should hold the primary role of identifying accommodations for students. This debate is sparked by teachers’
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

historic ineffectiveness in choosing accommodations that benefit the student (Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, Binkley, et al., 2000). With principals and teachers not being sufficient enough to control the IEP, this disagreement within the literature is worth noting as questions regarding what is not known about effective control of IEP student management. What is also interesting is that student demographic characteristics may influence teachers’ awarding of accommodations due to the subjective biases and preferences among their students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001).

Identifying appropriate accommodations is no easy task. Research indicates that there needs to be a method that preserves the meaningfulness of test scores while allowing students to demonstrate their full abilities, and The Dynamic Assessment of Test Accommodations (DATA) does this (Lynn, Fuchs, Fuchs & Capizzi, 2005). With DATA, teachers administer short tests, with and without accommodations to LD students. After the test, teachers evaluate the increase in performance by the student with the accommodation compared to non–LD students (Ibid). If the accommodation given is higher than that would be expected for non-LD students, it is considered a valid accommodation (Ibid). For example, students with dyscalculia would be given a problem solving question where the child completes the question with an adult reading the question aloud and then without the accommodation of the adult. However, the problem with this method is that DATA is available only for literacy and math between grades 2-7 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001). Students reading aloud to themselves in literacy and having an adult read questions aloud for students with LD in math have proved to be some of the most effective strategies in testing, (Ibid). While DATA testing may seem promising and conclusive, it requires more work from teachers and does not successfully target all students with LD from K-12.
2.4 Challenges facing LD students in Mainstream classrooms

2.4.1 Lack of LD Teacher Training and Class Sizes

In teaching, students with LD are being taught by mainstreamed education (ME), therefore, their success is hindered due to a lack of teacher attention in neurodiversity. The research demonstrates that teachers did not choose to work with LD students, and more importantly are not trained on how to meet the needs of these students (Naz, 2012). In the research conducted at the elementary level, teachers powerfully delivered that expectations and evaluative criteria should be the same for students with and without LD (Ibid). Twelve mainstreamed education teachers who were said to be adept in working with LD students did not know which students understood the concepts in a lesson (Ibid). It was also noted in the study that there was fractional evidence of modification by the teachers in methods, materials, or student assessment (Ibid). If mainstream teachers lack the ability to measure LD students’ level of understanding and emphasize “one-size fits all” instruction and assessment, it is difficult to trust these teachers with LD students’ success in the classroom. This lack of knowledge for inclusivity dates back to 1998, where research suggested that special education teachers often report their lack of knowledge about the mainstreamed education curriculum (Ibid). In the late 90’s, teachers utilized many of the same instructional strategies for students in the inclusive education classroom that proved effective in mainstreamed classrooms (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). The research regarding LD students in mainstream classrooms is controversial as it is difficult to tend to all children’s needs when class sizes consist of 30 students (Cornell, 2014). Research cannot account for all teachers and their practices, but gathering from the study above, some teachers chose to keep LD and non-LD studied equal instead of in an equitable playing field.
2.5 Learning from Private Schools

Private schools have an advantage because the class sizes tend to be smaller than public schools. Even though the Ontario government has capped the average class size at 20 students for public and separate school systems, the problem is that this only applies up until grade 3 (Cornell, 2014). Private schools are tempting parents who have children with LD because they are more likely to have specialized or integrated programs for students with dyslexia, ADHD, and dyscalculia (OurKids.net).

Furthermore, Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario supports that with an increase in class size to maintain inclusion, a greater number of students requiring special education programs, resources and assistance, is prominent (Cornell, 2014). This is because with an increase of class size, difficulty arises for every student in the classroom to receive the individual attention they need (Ibid). From the research gathered, with smaller class sizes, teachers are better able to work with a student and accommodate their needs due to more available one on one time.

While there is much to learn from private schools, there is no concrete conclusion that private schools are the best choice for all students with an LD. Research reveals cases where parents explicitly choose public school even if they could afford private school tuition, which typically ranges from $4,000 to $30,000 (OurKids.net). Most private schools do not demand full payment up front, however, the reason tuition can be expensive is because it pays for staff salaries and support specialists, classroom supplies, facility improvements and maintenance, transportation and meal services, financial aid, property taxes (Ibid). Through the research explored, there is no concrete evidence about what school system is best for your child as each student is different. That being said, a particular family chose the public system for their
daughter, Anna, even though they could afford the private system. The reason they chose the public school was because the teachers’ were willing to work with her leaning differences, as the school had an accepting atmosphere, supportive principal and a “teacher who sang her way through routines designed to integrate the children in to the life of the school” (Schoenfeld, 2008, p.1). Anna’s parents found that the public school classrooms they saw were consistently calmer and more structured than the private school classrooms visited (Ibid). The study enhanced how teachers training and qualifications were demonstrated through lessons in the public school where a diverse student body was apparent and appreciated (Ibid). Anna’s parents recognize that public schools are not well funded for students with LD, however, the accommodations in private schools they saw rarely offered special services to students and their attitudes towards accommodations was condescending and contained limited flexibility (Ibid). The private schools visited were accustomed to privilege which proved to be a negating factor in Anna’s case. By delving into this aspect of the literature, the conflict between public and private systems is an ongoing and circumstantial debate that must be dealt with on an individual basis.

2.6 Teacher Accountability

Teachers are said to be accountable for all of their students success, thus accountability is at the center of standards-based educational reform (National Center for Educational Outcomes, 2003). Research examines how accountability systems omitted students with LD from assessments as they cause conflict for achievement charts due to LD students requiring specialized attention (Thurlow, 2004). To ensure that educators are held accountable for the achievement and improving achievement of all students, it is essential to insert all students’ scores in accountability calculations (Ibid). As a result of the NCLB legislation, research indicates that Canadian and U.S. accountability systems have been more inclusive of students
with LD, providing students with accountability-driven achievement assessments through traditional methods, while being able to use accommodations un-penalized (Ibid). Specifically in Ontario, the Education Quality and Accountability Office’s (EQAO) accountability system enables students with LD to participate in provincial assessments with their necessary accommodations, increasing their contribution in the system (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2007).

2.7 No Child Left Behind Controversy (NCLB)

The NCLB is an American legislation that requires all disabled students to eventually demonstrate proficient academic performance, yet, the problem with this statement is that teachers are assumed to know how to transform LD students into dexterous learners (Wasta & Kappan, 2006). Similarly, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) supports students with LD by vouching their right to learn and power to achieve (2014). However, the LDAC is different from the NCLB as it is a national, non-profit voluntary organization, which was founded in 1963 but incorporated for students in 1971 (Ibid). Their mission is to be a national voice for people with LD and the LDAC is devoted to an equal playing field for individuals with LD. While both the NCLB and LDAC have great intentions, their moral to help all students achieve their goals is also misleading. Research continues to be conducted on how to best accommodate LD students because it is a prevalent issue. Conversely, the U.S. Department of Education supports the NCLB’s claim that all students with LD will be performing at proficient levels and will all be classified as successful (Ibid). However, this is a bold claim to make as each student comes with different personalities where has different meanings to each individual, raising the question, how is success accurately measured? President George W. Bush
agreed that several children nationwide are not reaching their full potential and falling behind their peers in educational success (Sclafani, 2003).

How the LDAC aims to achieve their goals is through public awareness about the nature and impact of learning disabilities, advocacy, research, health, education and collaborative efforts (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2014.). However, parents comprise of the majority of members of the LDAC with some inclusion of physicians, psychologists, lawyers, language experts, optometrists, psychiatrists, public health and physical education personnel, educators, and members of school boards and administrators (Sclafani, 2003). The problem is that in Canada, there is no legislation pertaining to students with LD. In public school education, special education is offered, where in the U.S., they have the NCLB, the National Center for Learning disabilities, and the Individuals with Learning Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to also help support students with LD and learn from one another. I recognize that the U.S. population is larger than Canada’s, but by looking at the American legislative attention affiliated with students with LD, Canada can begin to bridge the gap and gather research from these regulations. Prior to NCLB and IDEA, students with LD were not fully included in instruction based on the curriculum or grade-level content, or in assessments (Luke and Schwartz, 2007). With both NCLB and IDEA, these laws indicating that all students have to be assessed, have the right to equitable instruction on curriculum research claims that, if children are exposed to the curriculum, they can rise to the occasion (Ibid). The problem is that through a closed lens, the world of education is trying to find ways for all students to succeed and not fall behind.
2.8 Teachers’ Attitudes towards LD Students

2.8.1 Inclusivity: Responsible Inclusion for Students with LD and Teacher-Student Relationships

Inclusive is a word we hear often throughout education, but responsible inclusion for students with LD refers to an advancement of a school-based education model that is student centered where education is based on placement and service provision of each students’ needs (Vaughn and Schumm, 1995). The main goal of responsible inclusion is for all students to be placed in mainstream classrooms unless their academic or social needs cannot be sufficiently met (Ibid). However, the research that does exist for students with LD suggests that where undifferentiated and large-group instruction is commonly the standard, they struggled to succeed academically (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993). Conversely, consensus does not exist, as parents and educational professionals applaud the benefits of inclusion (Vaughn, Schumm, 1995). Therefore, students with LD were physically present in mainstream classrooms but were not exactly full participants (Ibid). Research indicates that disagreements over responsible inclusion have suggested that the place where the student is educated is the issue, and that mainstream classroom settings are a more desirable place to learn over special education classes (Ibid). Research also demonstrates that if teachers choose inclusion classroom participation they then need to demonstrate skills that will allow them to support the various needs of their students with LD (Ibid). For students with LD, to become active participants in mainstream classrooms research looks at teacher planning and if their plans are effectively meeting the needs of all students, which they often are not (Ibid). Research has recognized that not all schools have strong administrative support for responsible inclusion, a willingness to monitor all students’ progress while using data to provide feedback, make modifications in unsuccessful programs and a willingness to allot school resources for LD
purposes (Ibid). Responsible inclusive classrooms are driven by student first pedagogy, teacher choice to participate in inclusive classrooms, adequate resources that are considered and provided, models that are developed and implemented at the school-based level, and that curricula meet the needs of all students where they are developed and refined (Ibid).

Since 6% of student populations from K-12 are diagnosed with an LD, it is important to consider teachers’ attitudes towards including these students into mainstream classrooms. Research examines teacher’s attitudes towards students with LD as a crucial aspect of change in the classroom because attitude was considered the strongest influence for implementing accommodations in the classroom (Biddle, 2006). For example, a study was conducted where 89 teachers were surveyed, 40% displayed positive attitudes towards inclusion and 42% had less than positive attitudes toward inclusion of LD learners (Ibid). The negative attitudes drawn from the survey demonstrates a less frequent use of effective accommodation where personal attitudes toward the student with LD be addressed before teachers can be shown how to implement required accommodations (Ibid). According to the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials (N.D.), the approximated percentage of LD students receiving accommodations nationally in K-12 schools during the 2008 year were 13.4%, but there is the common theme that teachers’ are inadequate to work with LD learners and have an undesirable attitude of working with these complex learners (Wolf, Brown, & Bork, 2009). As indicated by research, the needs of students’ with LD were hindered due to teachers’ lack of positive attitude towards inclusion being a factor in the decisions made to incorporate LD accommodations for learning,

Another study focusing primarily on the public school view of “invisible disabilities” is faced with budgetary cuts, perennially substandard academic performance, and low teacher morale (Maxam & Henderson, 2013). The study draws attention to the lack of support from the
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

school board, and teachers are specifically interested in raising test scores while complaining about students with learning disabilities disrupting their classes. In the study, Bryant School District suffers from academic deficiencies due to a high number of LD students (2013). Some of the teachers at Bryant School District were compassionate to the plight of students with LD, yet other teachers viewed these students as a disruption and did not agree that students with LD be integrated into mainstream classrooms (Ibid). Due to teachers feeling uncertainty on how to handle students with LD in their existing overloaded classes, some teachers saw that valuable class time was wasted tending to the needs of these students (Ibid). Yet, a problem with teachers’ roles in accommodating students with LD is that 47.7% of teachers examined in the study had never taken a special education course (Biddle, 2006). Research indicates that for teachers to incorporate LD students they need ongoing professional development opportunities such as workshops, observing model classrooms, working with colleagues to facilitate change, or immersing oneself in LD research with more equitable accommodations specific to grade (Biddle, 2006). Administrators are not allocating sufficient resources to assist teachers with training, supervision, materials or specialized teachers in their use of accommodations (Ibid). Research emphasizes that the positive contact educators have with students with LD resulted in accepting these students in classrooms (Milligan, 2005). Furthermore, teachers who have more information about students with LD that they will be teaching, invites more of a willingness to integrate them (Maxam & Henderson, 2013). The success of LD students lies heavily on teachers’ willingness and ability to accept them and provide accessible instruction, engagement, and assessment so that they can participate more equitably (Ibid). To encourage inclusivity for LD students, these children must feel valued and embrace their distinctive way of thinking.
2.9 Accommodations, Assessment and Standardized Testing

2.9.1 What is an accommodation?

Accommodations are defined as “alterations and changes in the way individuals with disabilities are enabled to function to demonstrate and apply their skills and knowledge” (Learning Disabilities: a new definition, 2001, p. 16). The reasoning for providing accommodations is to “level the playing field” for students with LD by allowing them to demonstrate their capabilities without their skills being impeded by their disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999; Tindal & Fuchs, 2000). Common accommodations include modification of test presentation (i.e. fewer questions), methods of responding, test setting, and timing or scheduling of tests (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Shriner, 1994). Researchers have evaluated accommodations in isolation, however, practitioners usually implement multiple accommodations at the same time to provide more inclusive accommodation plans for students and lower budget costs (Fuchs, Lynn, Cappizzi & Andrea, 2005). Yet, past empirical studies on evaluating the effectiveness of specific testing accommodations have been criticized (Elliott, Kratochwill, and McKevitt (2001)). Elliot, Kratochwill and McKevitt studied the significance of packages of accommodations rather than accommodations in isolation because accommodations are often used as packages in school practice (Fuchs, Lynn, Cappizzi & Andrea, 2005). Fuchs, Lynn, Cappizzi and Andrea disagree and think package accommodations are early given the limited research base on adequate test accommodations (2005). A more straightforward method may be to identify specific accommodations that are effective for some students and once combinations have been formed these potentially effective accommodations and their benefits should be evaluated (Ibid). Accommodations have the potential to help students with LD
decrease the barriers presented by their disabilities, explaining why federal law requires their use when necessary (Luke and Schwartz, 2007).

2.9.2 Problems with Accommodations

There is limited research regarding accommodations because until specific accommodations are determined to be beneficial for a large number of students with LD, evaluating accommodation packages is inefficient (Fuchs, Lynn, Cappizii & Andrea, 2005). This is due to little research being conducted on the effective singular accommodations (i.e. extra time or separate room for writing). Studies first need to be conducted singularly before a universal accommodations list for LD students can be made. Once a combination of potential accommodations has been gathered, where there is an increase in LD student performance, researchers can then evaluates these methods. Through research, assessment is termed a key component for success of students with LD because assessment in education is what claims a child’s achievement (Ibid). However, there is not enough assessment of student progress, (Ibid) which would help avoid a marks- driven determination of student success. Students with LD should not be satisfied with remaining behind their peers where only “little improvement occurs for them while they struggle to ever catch up” (Sclafani, 2003, p. 46). The past notion that LD students cannot learn has been negated in the education research, which is certainly positive and currently working to determine what strategies work best in the classroom. Another issue with testing accommodations is that outcome measurements are costly and administering tests to students becomes more difficult as the number of accommodations increases (Fuchs, Lynn, Fuchs & Andrea, 2005). Accommodation testing is a tedious task because of the prevalence of LD in modern day schools, where research funds, teachers, and school boards have to go that extra mile for these students. Ineffective accommodations waste funds, thus, this is why research
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

is conducted on four common accommodations: extended time, having the student write on the test rather than multiple choice sheet, orally reading the test to the student, and providing an alternative testing placement (Ibid).

2.9.3 Determining the Learner

Havergal College and Branksome Hall, two all-girls private schools in downtown Toronto, require certain teachers to hold learning inventories to help determine what kind of learner a child is and how they can use that knowledge to play to a child’s strengths (Cornell, 2014). Both schools also hold “sittings” before or after school that offer students extra help as a way of accommodating LD students. Cheryl MacKinnon, a learning support specialist at Havergal’s Junior School says, “We don’t wait for students to fail. We try to be really proactive. As soon as we see signs they are struggling, we get the family involved to try and put strategies in place as early as junior Kindergarten (Cornell, 2014, M7). It is remarkable to see how certain schools emphasize attention towards helping students with LD to succeed. Research indicates that there is limited exploration with regards to appropriate test accommodations as previous studies struggle with creating student profiles that are suitable with accommodations (Helwig & Tindal, 2003). It has been studied that accommodations can be negative for students and worsen their test scores if such accommodations do not pertain to what the students need (Schulte, Elliott, & Kratochwill, 2001). Individual decision making on valid testing accommodations, similar to individualization recommended for IEP’s, seems necessary to identify specific accommodations from which each student can succeed.
2.9.4 What is a Fair Accommodation?

Students with LD have to deal with the stigma of what is a “fair” accommodation. For example, enlarging font size for a test to help a student visually is classified as fair because both LD and non-LD students could benefit from this accommodation, yet students with LD still do not make it into standardized test score measurements (Fuchs, Lynn, Fuchs & Andrea, 2005). The gap between accommodation and student fairness is prominent, however, by ensuring that the test continues to measure the intended concept by assessing validity of the accommodations can help include LD students’ abilities with non-LD students (Pitoniak & Royer, 2001).

The validity of an accommodation can be assessed by considering whether it concerns the nature of the disability (Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, Binkley, et al., 2000). According to the research I have gathered, a “valid accommodation should help a student compensate for his or her disability by increasing the student’s access that will allow him or her to demonstrate his or her knowledge; earning valid, and not necessarily optimal, scores” (Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, Binkley, et al., 2000, p.71). More specifically, if extended time, for example, increases the score of both LD and non-LD students, the accommodations are valid because it is equally helpful to both sets of students. To refuse accommodations that would benefit students with LD in displaying their skills and knowledge, which are often being blocked by a disability would be unfair, similarly to accommodations that improve scores, amplifying a student’s success.

Specifically, a study contributing to the increasing evidence that accommodation has both positive and negative effects for students with and without an LD (McKevitt & Elliott, 2003). The study indicates that reading aloud a reading test to students as an accommodation invalidates test scores (Ibid). The lack of differential improvement, for example, that both students with and with an LD benefitted from a read-aloud accommodation observed in invalidates the effect of a
read-aloud accommodation (Ibid). In the cases of students receiving teacher-recommended accommodations based on professional judgment scores did not improve significantly for either group (Ibid). Thus, the areas of research that require more attention should be directed towards the validity of accommodations, which need to come from multiple sources, while examining student factors, test factors, and the accommodations themselves (Ibid).

2.10 Technology Benefits and Problems

Technology has begun to play a prominent role in student learning and allows LD students to remain in classrooms instead of being sent for extra help, which can sometimes be embarrassing for the child. Incorporating technology as an accommodation tool has proved its benefits. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is where students use any kind of print or technology tools they need, specifically designed for students with LD, and the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) is trying to implement UDL into mainstream classes (Harac, 2004). Researchers support the notion that with “the right materials, technology, and training, teachers can make all lessons flexible enough to benefit every student” (Ibid, p. 44). The difficulty with technology related programs is that they are expensive and must be vigorously tested before these software’s are purchased by schools. Teachers would also have to spend extra hours learning these programs, and with teachers already having plenty on their plate, it is hard to add on another responsibility.

A study was conducted in the Boston area where CAST theories have been used positively in the classroom (Ibid). A program in CAST is the Thinking Reader, which provides students with post-its and highlighters for note-taking. Thinking Reader is a representation of how UDL works. A child began reading at a level 1 and with Thinking Reader, the passages of the text were highlighted on screen, while a recording of the same text played aloud for the
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

student to follow along. During the exercise the screen would display prompts such as “look at the highlighted words in the text to help you visualize what is happening, to describe what you see” (Ibid, p.42). By the end of the school year, the student was reading at a level 2. CAST’s mission since 1990, evolved from fixing the child to fixing the education system for students with disabilities and the federal government and some state-level administrations have started to incorporate UDL in their education policies (Ibid).

Assistive technology is “equipment or software that can help eliminate the barriers and maximize productivity and independence for students with LD” (O’Donnell, 2013, p. 206). Text to speech (TTC) is popular software that uses voice synthesis to provide oral reading of documents and this software can reduce the strains of working memory experienced by students as they struggle to learn words (Ibid). TTC does not have extensive research conducted but the research that has been done has demonstrated strong reading improvement for students with LD and helps with the scaffolding process (Ibid). Language and math are often the subjects LD students struggle with, and most students with LD tend to make mathematic progress at a rate that is approximately one-half that of their average achieving peers (Irish, 2002). Electronic technologies such as calculators and computers are considered essential tools for teaching learning and math because technology offers the teachers option for adapting instruction to LD students (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000). Memory Math is software to help students with performance in basic multiplication by teaching them to use their own cognitive strengths to learn, store, and retrieve basic math facts (Irish, 2002). LD students interacting with the Memory Math program at least three times a week for 10 weeks had students mnemonic abilities improve. The concern with this program is that further testing is needed through a larger assessment of student proficiency from the Memory Math program.
Private schools are said to offer the best in tech where the head of tech at the Bishop Strachan School (BSS) emphasizes the one-to-one laptop per-student approach, collaborative software platform, 3D printers, and robotics labs (Saltzman, 2014). BSS private school is continuously working to keep technology integrated in their student learning. SMART, Samsung, and 3D printers are vastly incorporated in Toronto private schools as SMART now offers collaborative learning software and the autonomy for teachers to reach more students' styles of learning. Samsung tablets are a highly integrated part of learning, and 3D printers allow creativity to be explored in more hands-on ways (Ibid). With private schools, students’ tuition helps pay for the technology being used, which is something to consider as the public systems’ budget is controlled by the government.

2.11 Learning from a Specific Case

In 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada came forth that British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal founded B.C’s Board of Education School District discriminated against a student named Jeffrey Moore based on his LD of dyslexia in 2005 (Wobick, 2013). The Tribunal disclaimed that the District and the Ministry had discriminated against Moore by overlooking his dyslexia and inadequately accommodating his needs from the District through early involvement (Ibid). LD services were cut down without providing these students with substitute options for learning. The Tribunal also declared that discrimination had occurred because a cap was placed on the funding for LD students as well as through under-funding of the District, leading to the cut downs in services for LD students (Wobick, 2008). From this B.C. example, it is important to make educators aware of potential circumstances for LD learning, which is why teachers’ roles and school boards are crucial people for LD student success. IDEA is the act that saves and protects LD students where “all students with disabilities will receive a free, appropriate public
education with related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living.” (Walter, 2006, p. 24). LD students generally have great support from school policies regarding accommodation privileges, but as the research indicates from this review, there is no seamless way to solve optimal LD classroom inclusivity.

2.12 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on the characteristics of LDs, the influence of IEP’s, 504’s and DATA to help drive teaching methods away from a one size fits all approach. Additionally, I explored research on teacher accountability with regards to accommodating students with LD in their classes as well as teacher attitudes towards having students with LD in mainstream classrooms, both factors influencing the success of LD students. The review elucidates the extent that attention has been directed towards finding ways to create inclusivity for LD students’, but there remains a gap in the literature regarding responsible inclusion, and adequate accommodations for LD students. Research focuses on accommodations in terms of what is fair in relation to testing and not much attention is placed on the classroom accommodations where students are preparing for these tests. The research examined raises questions about what classifies appropriate accommodations as effective i.e. technology growth and also how legislations such as the NCLB contradict the meaning of individualization by generally ensuring all students success as the same. This literature review points to the need for further research in the areas of how school boards and teachers adequately respond to students’ with LD growing in current classrooms with a lack of training and support. As well, how to accurately assess the efficiency of accommodations and what needs to be done in order to fund further testing and research for specific strategy implementation. My research question encompasses the landscape of literature explored in the above review based on how teachers in
private school boards in Canada are being responsive to LD students’ learning needs. In chapter 3, I will begin to unravel the methodology with regards to the research approach and procedures for a semi-structured qualitative study, the instruments of data collection, participants, data analysis, ethical review procedures, methodological limitations and methodological strengths for my study.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This qualitative research study is supported by data collected from literature in the field of students with LD as well as from two semi-structured interviews. The Masters of Teaching Program, at The University of Toronto sets the standards for the conducted research in this study. The inspiration for the research is centered on personal experience with dyslexia, where relevant literature is continued to be reviewed to support the growing number of students currently struggling with mild LD in mainstream classrooms. I will begin the chapter by reviewing the procedure of interview protocol and instruments of data collection before expanding more specially on participant criteria and recruitment. I interviewed four teachers as participants for my study from different private schools. Two teachers are from the kindergarten and junior division while the other two teachers are from the senior school division. The reason I chose teachers from two divisions is to allow for a more comprehensive study, opening the pathways of understanding both young and adolescent children with similar LD needs. The data collected during these three interviews was from a digital voice recording of the interviewees, where I proceeded to transcribe and code the interviews into corresponding themes to align with the literature review. Furthermore, I explain the data analysis procedure and review the
methodological limitations, while speaking to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter by outlining the ethical review procedure followed by a summary of what is to be expected for the chapters to come.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The primary means of data collection for this qualitative study was through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B for list of questions). For this study, qualitative research was aimed at retaining the integrity of the phenomena of teaching and learning through human and institutional activities (Saljo, 1993). Specifically to my topic, there is an abundance of research pertaining to existing accommodations for students with LD, however, through the literature I examined, there was little reflection on whether the accommodations were appropriate or suitable for the students in need. This is why qualitative research is conducted because when we want an intricate and detailed understanding of a topic, we can incorporate real life elements to tell stories from first hand experiences (Creswell, 2013). My research first began while working with students with LD from public schools during my first two practicums. The students were on IEPs, yet they continued to struggle even with provided accommodations. This raised a huge concern to me as I was also a student with LD, where I continued to struggle even when accommodations were offered to me.

Additionally, with qualitative research, methodological procedures are adopted that allow for teaching and learning to be analyzed through different perspectives (Saljo, 1993). Once I delved into the literature, I came across a Toronto Star article featuring private schools and their success with students with LD. This article catapulted the rest of my research, where I then focused more of my research around scholarly journal and peer reviewed articles. Moreover, I continued to read website articles, special education and LD ministry documents throughout my
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

research to shine light on more current contexts of students with LD and inclusive classrooms, while synthesizing a variety of old and new voices. Qualitative research is effective for this study because it allows for a combination of literature to be reviewed while empowering individuals to share their stories and hear multiple voices on a specific topic through interviews (Creswell, 2013).

3. 2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is in person and semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix B). The interviewer follows their constructed guide but is able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the questions when he or she feels this is necessary (Cohen, 2006). Semi-structured interviewing is best used when you only have one chance to meet with your participants (ibid). I feel that interviews are the most effective way to gather information for this study because the questions asked by the interviewee are geared specifically to answer the main research question through teachers’ first hand experiences and practices. The three interviews were 45 minutes in length where the interview questions were divided into four sections to provide the participants with a well-rounded and non-intrusive experience. I began the interviews with more conversational questions that are aligned to my focus on private school teaching to gain familiarity of the teacher’s background. From there, I asked questions about teachers’ beliefs regarding their perspectives on whether it is their role or responsibility to assist students with LD and why technology has become incorporated into the accommodation process. The next section of the interview covered more specific topics such as what teaching practice are currently being done for students with LD and how the students are responding to the accommodations provided. The final section looked at the next steps that could be taken by learning from private schools and what challenges
all teachers’ could face moving forward with more LD student diagnosis. The same questions were used during both interviews, however, some of the questions were formed by taking the schools backgrounds into consideration. The semi-structured interviews provided a clear set up for interviewers along with a more organic, reliable, and comparable qualitative data (ibid).

### 3.3 Participants

In this section, I reviewed the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment and I have also included a section where I outlined a biography of each participant. The goal for my study is to determine teachers’ perspectives on effective accommodations, strategies, or practices that are adequate for the student in need from education systems that have a high success rate in dealing with LD students in mainstream classrooms. To answer my research question, I interviewed teachers from prestigious private schools here in Ontario. I chose 4 participants ranging from 4-26 years of teaching experience in private institutions. I feel that by interviewing four teachers from different backgrounds, experiences, and years of teaching would strengthen the research on my topic by drawing upon former and current methods of assisting students with LD from more than one private school.

#### 3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The purpose of interviewing these participants is to discover their attitudes, strategies, and implementation practices through teachers’ lived experiences. The participants were chosen based on the criteria:

1. They must be working in private school settings.
2. They must be from different divisions/grades of teaching.
3. They must demonstrate commitment, leadership, and/or expertise to supporting students with learning disabilities.
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

4. A range of teaching experience.

The rationale behind my participant criteria is first to make sure I sample more than one private school because by gathering data from two schools, there is a higher chance that a variety of methods and strategies are being implemented. Thus, there is more to learn and draw from for all teachers. Secondly, I chose to interview teachers from kindergarten, junior and senior divisions because children with an LD can experience the struggle at any age and will cope differently. Additionally, children and young adults will have different struggles and challenges based on life and social circumstances that potentially interfere with what tools they may require to achieve success academically. Furthermore, the teachers I chose had to be committed, involved, or leaders in actively supporting students with LD in mainstream classrooms. Lastly, I chose to participants with different years of experience to pull from old and new instructional strategies and provide a lens on how accommodations have change from then to now.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

I contacted my participants by emailing two teachers from my elementary school and two from my high school, both being private schools. I provided them with background information on the methodology of the qualitative research and that the interviews are semi-structured. I also created a summary about my research topic and questions to introduce them to the study. Once the four teachers agreed, I provided them with the consent letter (See Appendix A) to further explain and outline exactly what is required of them and the choices they have while being a participant of the research.

When recruiting participants I initially began with the idea of purposeful sampling, however, after receiving no response or rejections from three private schools I have no connection with, I had to shift my focus to a mixture of purposive and convenience sampling. It
is important to note that my school background aligns with my research directed at private schools where I am also a part of a community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers that I relied upon on for my existing contacts and networks to recruit participants.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

Four participants will be used under the pseudonyms Tara, Liza, Sara and Lauren.

**Participant A:** Tara graduated from Brock University with a BA in Sociology and went on to earn a Master of Science in Teaching for Primary and Junior from the State University of New York. She launched her career as an educator in Sherrills Ford, North Carolina where she was named the Grade Level Chair in her second year of teaching. Tara has been teaching Grade 1 at a private school since 2005. A firm believer that nobody is too young to teach or too old to learn, she encourages her students to ask questions, share information and acquire her own enthusiasm for learning new things. As Primary Chairperson, Tara is also responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the primary grades.

**Participant B1:** Liza’s role at a Richmond Hill, ON private school is to support teachers in how they use technology in the classroom. This includes guidance in curriculum planning, tool selection and training, working in the classroom with our students and providing some support to parents to help them understand and manage the tools we use at HTS. A passionate educator, Liza truly believes that, when integration is deliberate and thoughtful, technology can provide opportunities to a broader spectrum of learners. She has more than 20 years of independent school teaching and leadership experience at all school levels.

**Participant B2:** In Sara’s 26th year of teaching, participant B2 has taught English in all divisions, and served as Coordinator of Learning Services in both public and independent schools in Ontario, Alberta, and abroad. The opportunity to teach internationally has always been
a dream of Jackie’s, and she and her family most recently lived in Jordan for 3 years where Sara was the Head of the English Department at the prestigious King’s Academy. Just prior to her experience in the Middle East, Sara coordinated the Student Success Centre at Strathcona-Tweedsmuir School in Okotoks, Alberta; a career highlight as its mission to optimize each learner’s potential to achieve his or her personal best melds with her educational philosophy.

**Participant C:** Lauren had been a Montessori teacher for 16 years. She has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Western Ontario (major in psychology and minor in English) and a Montessori Degree in both Children’s House and Elementary. Lauren has also completed a variety of certification that focus on learning differences as well as the Orton Gillingham Training (level 1 and 2). She currently works at an independent school as a toddler teacher and Learning strategist for ages 18 months-6 years.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to drive the study, however, data analysis has to take in other accounts like the collection of data to determine whether the data is sufficient (Morse, 1999). For example, there is a possibility of data being flawed or one-sided by not interviewing the most suitable participants. Nonetheless, the process of data analysis was essential to the research study because the information from the interviews needed to be deconstructed to produce the research findings. The data that was collected during the interviews was first transcribed and then coded into themes aligning with the research purpose and question. Each transcript was coded individually to identify categories of data and themes within sub-categories. Following, I read the categories and themes beside one another to synthesize themes to avoid repetition. At a later stage of analysis I completed the meaning-making process whereby I
highlighted what matters about these themes and categories given what existing research has already found pertaining to the literature review.

Once the transcribing and coding of the interviews were complete, I reread the transcripts numerous times in order to identify these themes: the first theme, participants’ conceptualization of LD is accompanied by sub-themes Teachers’ Observations Informing Perspectives and Challenges Teachers Confront with LD Inclusivity. Secondly, teacher and student accessibility within private schools is supported by sub-themes Private School Finances and Funding. Furthermore, teachers’ exploring technology as a tool for LD support outlines sub-themes concerning Technology Benefits and Challenges as well as Support Systems for Teachers and Parents. Lastly, the theme for accommodations and methods are complemented by Specific Cases that were relevant to my research questions. Similarly, I also coded aspects of certain themes as null data, meaning that the questions were relevant to the research study but were not addressed by the participants. The overall findings of the data analysis are explored in greater detail in chapter 4.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedure

The Master of Teaching Program and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto has outlined the ethical parameters for this research study. Interview participants were given letters of informed consent prior to engaging in the interview process, which they were required to read and sign before the interview (See Appendix A). This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview). A copy of this form was given to the participant, and another copy was retained for the records of this study. Participants were given all of the necessary information about content, consent, and
confidentiality. All efforts were made to ensure the participants’ comfort and willingness to participate in the interview. There are no known risks to participation. I also re-assured them throughout the interview and in the consent letter that they have the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel comfortable with, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation.

From the start of each interview, I reviewed my research topic with the participants and informed them that they could refrain from commenting on any question, that they could review or revise their answers, and that they could change their mind about the use of their data at any point in the research process. All procedures were conducted as specified to the participants in the consent forms that were signed prior to the interviews. The location, date and time of the interviews were decided by the participants. No changes were made to those procedures during the course of the research process. All information that could compromise the anonymity of a participant has been concealed through the use of pseudonyms. Additionally, any personal information that the participants do not want included was omitted or changed to keep confidential.

The interviewees were informed that only my course instructor and I would have access to the data. All data and audio recordings are stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed after 5 years.

3.6 Methodological Limitations

The ethical parameters of approval for this study only allowed for a small sample size due to the constraints of time and accessibility. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable. I carefully created 20 questions that align with my main research question to drive the study forward. I also want to highlight that this study does not allow for students, parents, surveys or
classroom observations to be a part of the research. With a limited number of participants, our research becomes driven through teacher’s perspectives where important information could be lost by not interviewing students who are in fact struggling with LD.

3.6.1 Methodological Strengths

I am mindful that my topic has many branches for future research expansion, nevertheless, through this research process I have discovered more of my teaching pedagogy as I grow into a professional educator. Moreover, I am aware that our research questions cannot be probing to lead participants to the answers of our intended outcome, making the research more authentic. This qualitative study is a great way of learning how research is thoroughly conducted and the time and process it takes to make a strong argument since our main data is through people’s lived experiences. Qualitative research concerns itself with the meanings and experiences of the whole person, providing an authentic experience for data collection (Winter, 2000). As a future teacher, I have gained lifelong skills from this research process that I could implement into my future teaching practice. For example, the formulating of questions, interview protocol, the juxtaposition between theory and practice as well as the ability to collect and analyze data through difference sources. I realize that my topic is broad and has many opposing or conflicting lenses of where to place students with LD, minor and severe cases of LD students, responsibility for LD students, adequate teacher practices, etc. which is why my research cannot cover every aspect or perspective of children with LD. Even though my research is concentrated to the private system of integrating mild cases of students with LD into mainstream classrooms, the assisting students with LD, teacher strategies, attitudes, and technology, I am cognizant of the opposing views on inclusive classroom.
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

Given the scope of this research project, I am still covering a vast amount of relevant and unanswered questions that need to change as more and more students become integrated into classrooms across the world without a fundamental alternative to helping students with LD. It is important to remember that there is high value with regards to conducting interviews as a part of gathering research. Interviews allow more information to be shared and heard in more depth than a survey could allow for. The teachers’ are also in a space where they are in control of what they say, and can speak to what matters most to them about the topic. Fundamentally, in this study, interviews bring a voice to teachers and their experience, where the interview creates an opportunity for the participants to make meaning from their lived experiences.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the research methodology and procedures that are required for this qualitative study. My study is focused on the methodology of phenomenology as the main source of data was gathered through the meaning of people’s lived experiences. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, I was able to collect enough data and organize my information into relevant themes pertaining to my research question: How is a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classroom contexts being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with learning disabilities, and what might the public system and its teachers learn from these teachers and the private school system? Specifically, my topic is centered around disability theories, addressing the meaning of inclusive classrooms for students with LD in mainstream classrooms.

This chapter focused on ethical considerations by outlining and emphasizing the need for participant confidentiality and anonymity. Limitations of this qualitative study were explained, including sample size, scope of participants, null data, and teacher’s personal bias’ and beliefs.
Furthermore, the strengths of the qualitative study were also noted, which emphasized the depth of information gathered from face to face interview providing, teachers with a voice to issues that they connect with. Our teachers are fundamental to the education community and by acknowledging their work, as researchers we were able to learn from their first hand experiences. In Chapter 4, an overview of the research findings from the two interviews will be deconstructed.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings revealed from three interviews conducted with four educators. This is because in my second interview, two participants were present. However, all four of these participants represent or are associated with how mainstream classroom teachers are being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of students with mild LD. They each provide their own strengths and knowledge with regards to supporting LD students, yet their perspectives on methods of accommodation and inclusivity are similar. Two of the four participants taught in both private and public sectors of education offering a diverse perspective. For the purpose of anonymity, the four participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms Tara, Liza, Sara and Lauren. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which educators, conceptualize LD and the responsive pedagogy used to support LD students’ learning and social needs by considering teacher observations, challenges, technology, community and financial supports.

After analyzing the data collected from the participants’ interviews, four themes emerged. As a result, this chapter is divided into four main themes and two sub-themes per category in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of the data collected as it relates to my
research question and sub-questions. When applicable, for each theme and sub-themes, I will include participant voices in order to provide evidence and support of my data analysis. After critically analyzing the collected data, the following themes arose: participants’ conceptualization of LD, teacher and student accessibility within private schools, accommodations and methods, and technology as a tool for LD support.

4.1 Participant’s Conceptualization of Learning Disabilities

In this theme, all four participants were asked, “What does the term ‘learning disability’ mean to you?” where all provided answers that aligned with each other as well as with the literature. Common key words were used among all four participants such as: “different avenues of success, “learning differences and not disabilities” and “what works for each individual.” These phrases related to how teachers observe students with LD in their classrooms and the perspectives they draw from working with them. The literature explores the conceptualization of LD in a more scientific and psychological sense with regards to specific retention, understanding, organization and processing of information. The dichotomy over conceptualizing LD draws attention to the participants’ observations and challenges while working with LD students.

4.1.1: Teachers’ Observations Informing Perspectives

As gathered from the interview data, teacher observations dealt with identifying children who require extra support, forming teacher attitudes towards having LD students present in mainstream classrooms. Among all three interviews, the participants agreed on writing, reading and problem solving math skills to be the areas where LD students struggled most. Specifically, in terms of identifying students in need of extra support, it was concluded that teachers observe auditory processing, attention issues, spelling, social interactions, retention and memory of new
concepts, written expression and reading comprehension before making their professional judgment. The participants noted that differentiated instruction would take place with or without a formal label and diagnosis of the student in need. Conversely, even though teachers were open to assisting students with learning differences, there was no percentage on the amount of teachers who had negative attitudes towards inclusion of LD students, as uncovered in the literature review. As determined by the literature explored, 42% of teachers surveyed had negative attitudes towards LD students in mainstream classrooms (Biddle, 2006) where the participants interviewed exposed how their colleagues had a difficult time wrapping their minds around the distribution of fairness among other students in terms of accommodation support. Furthermore, the interview data presents an increase with regards to LD diagnosis and presence in classrooms averaging four students per class. That being said, all four participants agreed that even though this may be a ‘hot topic’ amongst colleagues, there is speculation whether teachers have just become more “in tune with identifying issues at a younger age or if it is a product of today’s society and lack of exposure to books, social interaction and discipline” (Lauren, personal communication, October 1st, 2015). As supported by literature not cited in my review, but discovered in further readings, more awareness has been determined on possible areas of analysis where student development is affected due to children’s social contexts.

Reflecting on teacher observations, the participants were able to recognize areas of attention for their students’ heightening their responsive pedagogy strategies through a trial and error process. Teacher observations lead me to ask the controversial question about the importance of integrating students with LD into mainstream classrooms. Inclusive classrooms are an area of my literature review that dealt with controversy concerning what type of learning environment is best for the child in conjunction with idealist images of inclusive learning. All
participants emphasized that if the LD is not severe, it is more beneficial for students to be placed with their peers in mainstream classroom for collaboration and social exposure. The data greatly supported inclusivity of LD students because students would be able to see themselves as equals amongst their peers, developing empathy and understanding of a variety of learning styles and the need to work harder in certain subject areas. The significance of this particular analysis relates to the process in which teachers become instructionally responsive to their students in need. Without teachers’ observing what their students require, it would be difficult to help assist them in their learning.

4.1.2: Challenges Teachers Confront with LD Inclusivity

Each participant revealed their own challenges when working with LD students, especially with those students who have not been formally assessed. Tara and Lauren emphasized that a clear understanding of what is causing the learning difference would help to facilitate more adequate support from the teacher. From analyzing the data collected often the teacher is spending time trying to figure out what the child is struggling with, especially in the junior grades because they have more difficulty articulating their challenges. Liza and Sara explained the difficulties in working with parents who are not willing to accept their child’s learning difference and teacher recommendations to pursue a developmental or educational assessment. Among all three interviews, parents expressed that they “do not want their child labeled,” (Tara, personal communication, September 4th, 2015) and the data determines that differentiated instruction should be a norm in all classrooms. The four participants agreed that differentiated instruction provides benefits to both LD and non LD students, bringing a sense of ease to parents by avoiding stigmatization of an LD.
That being said, what was learned is that differentiated instruction takes a great deal of the teacher’s time because they have to account for the students who have an LD, those who are gifted and for the students in the middle ground. The participants emphasized student engagement across all learning levels, pulling them in many directions. Through the coding of the data, it has been determined that the students’ best interest is kept as priority, but the participants struggle with finding accommodations that invite inclusivity while keeping the rest of the students engaged and learning. When answering the main research question concerning teachers’ instructional responsive pedagogy towards LD students, it is important to note that the teacher has to account for all students with and without a LD. The interview data is significant because it supports the literature in that inclusive classrooms are more challenging for the teacher as many teachers believe that instructional adaptations are “desirable but not feasible” as cited in the literature review by Vaughn & Schumm, 1995. However, Holloway’s suggestion of combining models of inclusive classrooms and resource rooms (2002) is information that the interview data did not disclose. Resource rooms are not an option in the private school system, which was an interesting insight.

4.2 Teacher and Student Accessibility within Private Schools

All four participants emphasized private school accessibility and the autonomy they had to implement strategies they discovered through their professional development. Tara presented her school with a unique strategy supporting student focus through the use of yoga balls. She observed a classroom in North Carolina where yoga balls were being used in a corner of the classroom, and the feedback she received from the students working on the yoga balls validated her drive to bring them into her classroom in Canada. The school supported Tara with yoga balls for each student in the class as a substitute for chairs. Tara indicates that students “have the
choice to use a chair, but all chose the yoga ball” (Tara, personal communication, September 4th, 2015). She accentuates that classroom rules are in order since the yoga balls are an unconventional way to stimulate and support students. Tara discusses how the yoga balls are a representation of differentiated instruction that is applicable to students with and without an LD. She did not want to divide her classroom because she felt that promotes segregation and less of an inclusive classroom for struggling learners. Moreover, Liza and Sara are teachers as well as technology experts, where they provided an in-depth review of the accessibility their school has to assistive technology. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in a later theme focusing solely on technology findings. Lastly, Lauren presents a different form of accessibility in terms of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, tutors and any other professional deemed necessary to work with the struggling students in her school. This theme provides context towards private school access and implementation of resources, financial support as well as their ability to support the school community (teachers, parents and students).

4.2.1: Private School Finances and Funding

What was very informative while analyzing the data was how Tara highlights that “we don’t have the same needs as public schools” (Tara, personal communication, September 4th, 2015). I found this quote to be informative because it addresses the divide between private and public sectors in terms of supports that are put in place. For example, “parents who have children with severe types of learning disabilities do not send them to private schools, and that’s the reality because you are spending a lot of money to attend an independent institution” (Ibid). Educational assistants (EA) are not present in Tara, Liza and Sara’s school, where Lauren does receive professional help from outside the school. The data concludes that with private schools being independent they operate differently and under their own support frameworks and beliefs.
This piece of data teaches us that private schools hold a reputation for themselves where they have the sovereignty to deny entry to students with LD.

The main research question raises concern on how public schools can learn from private schools, which is something that was not fully unveiled. The participants note how private schools are able to make modifications to the program to benefit a student with a learning difference without the “red tape the public schools have to deal with” (Lauren, personal communication, October 1st, 2015). From this data collected, when analyzed and compared with the existing literature, the participant is referring to how public schools are under a union and universal curriculum, which is tricky to navigate around. The participants also drew attention to how private school families typically can afford to pursue a private assessment immediately and avoid wait lists for diagnosis. Furthermore, families are able to hire tutors for their children, which is an additional cost for families from lower socio-economic classes. The most instructive information gathered from Tara and Sara who worked in public school settings is the notion of flexibility. The public school boards only allow for one curriculum program where the Conference of independent schools earn their accreditation with recognition that their programs and schools are sufficient in accommodating students with a variety of learning styles once accepted into the school. The support is often associated with technology in private schools with their larger budgets due to parent support. That being said, it is crucial to highlight what is learned from the research conducted and analyzed from both the literature and interviews, private schools use a vast amount of their money towards assistive technologies, laptops, IPads, etc. Conversely, public schools are using their budgets to support students with resource rooms and EA options. Which strategy proves greater student success has yet to be determined, as both systems offer effective supports given their means. Nonetheless, curiosity is ensued regarding
private schools’ lack of employment of public school strategies and appears to be relying on technology and out of school professionals to provide extra support even with financial stability.

4.3 Technology as a Tool for LD Support

This theme will focus on data collected mostly by Liza and Sara as they focus exclusively on technology as an integral part of student learning for both LD and non LD students. There was extensive data collected regarding success of technology as a product of whole school integration in this particular interview. This theme can stand alone because of the participants’ combined expertise in IT and teaching. The private school Liza and Sara work at was recently awarded Apple distinction, meaning that “it has nothing to with how much technology you have or what you have, it has to do with how you are using it” (Liza, personal communication, September 21st, 2015). Moreover, Liza explains how the institution demonstrated visionary leadership, adequate resource selection and use of resources, innovative teaching and learning practices, ongoing professional learning for faculty and data representing success and evidence of growth (Ibid). This was conveyed through a book written by Liza regarding the actual activity use of technology in the school. This piece of data is very informative because the school is recognized for effectively implementing technology as a tool of differentiated instruction that benefits all students and promotes inclusivity. Liza spearheaded technology integration within the school community after her many years working in IT as well as teaching. She believed that with technology advancing quickly, education should be using the tools that have been created for enhancing, engaging and supporting student learning. Her efforts are admirable and both private and public sectors should be cognizant of the skills faculty and staff brings to the table beyond classroom experience.
Additionally, the school requires that all students try the technology but they do have the option to say no. Nonetheless, from the data gathered, rarely did the parents opt out of purchasing laptops or IPads for their children. From grade six to eight, the school asks the families to send their children with an IPad of any model preferably one with a microphone because it has more resource options. In grade 9-12, students come to school with a family purchased Mac laptop of any model. For the students in grades one to five, there are carts of both IPads and laptops. Liza goes on to say that, “we have several carts of Ipads and laptops so that pretty much at every level students have access to two devices.” In contrast to the other schools interviewed, they did not have this kind of technology program in place where more than one technology tool is present for students at all times. As discovered through the literature, private schools are said to offer the best in technology where the head of technology at the Bishop Strachan School (BSS) emphasizes the one-to-one laptop per-student approach, collaborative software platform, 3D printers, and robotics labs (Saltzman, 2014). Similar to BSS, these schools appear to be working to keep technology integrated in their student learning because they see merit in the support of technology for both LD and non LD students.

Liza and Sara have represented their school as a model of successful technology integration where the IT program operates at an accelerated level with equipped individuals running the functionality of assistive technologies. The significance of this data relates to how technology is presented as a tested and proven tool for being an effective instructional strategy that vastly benefits LD students while supporting the entire student body. The Apple distinction validates that one to one technology programs are a step in the way future schools and education may look, which in turn will help incorporate LD students and improve the functionality of inclusive classrooms.
4.3.1: Technology Benefits and Challenges

The primary focus of this study was to discover what instructional strategies teachers are using to be responsive to students with mild LD. All four participants concluded that the ability to be able to write using a laptop can change the way kids think and the facilitation of thought. Laptop accessibility was not a problem for all four participants and their institutions, however, Liza and Sara emphasize that “it is not just about the hardware that is available; it is about the infrastructure that is in place to support the technology. For example, having robust Wi-Fi is essential, which is often a concern in public systems as examined in the literature. Furthermore, Liza raised the debate concerning the issue that technology has limited impact on what is happening, yet both Liza and Sara mention that it is the lack of appropriate implementation or support from the school and IT services. In agreement, all four participants highlight that technology does not necessarily level the playing field as there are still a number of students who do not have everything they need. The significance of these interviews lays in the concept that technology tools are a step in the right direction with these assistive technologies in place. For example, voice to text, text to voice software like Dragon, Google docs, Inspiration for mind mapping, notability for note taking, fluency tutor, study skill and organization apps and Raz Kids for interactive eBooks are specific ways to support students in multiple areas of development. However, Sara mentions that her institution’s math assistive technologies did not have enough flexibility required for LD students in terms of breaking down concepts, and thus, are still looking for more effective math programs aside from computation apps.

The findings divulge that among all four participants, it was agreed that when technology is used properly by students and integrated appropriately by the school it can be an empowering experience for all. From Liza and Sara’s interview, it became clear that technology provides
access to information and learning when the student is ready to learn. Students therefore gain more autonomy in the learning experience. However, an interesting point was made by Liza regarding stigma associated with technology as being more independent learning. Both Liza and Sara dispute this claim and provide an alternate perspective explaining that collaboration still occurs through mediums like Google docs, interacting on iPads in groups, online networking, etc. Furthermore, the benefits of technology are outstanding in certain regards. Similar to BSS’s use of 3D printers, Liza and Sara present an excellent project where the grade eight classes have connected with a company called Enabling the Future where a child needs a prosthetic hand. Blueprints and a kit for the joints of the prosthetic hand have been printed with the 3D printer, making things more cost effective for the family. Even though this finding does not specifically relate to students with LD, what it provides is the breadth of possibilities that technology integration can do, not just for student learning but for building rapport with a community.

Furthermore, the findings from the interview also revealed that some of the exams in the high school grades went full technology depending on the subject, where internet access to certain sites were shut down. Similar to accommodations unrelated to technology, Liza says, “to be honest with you some of our faculty have struggled equity in regards to providing LD students with assistive technologies during exams, but it is a mindset that we are trying hard to change.” This quote parallels with teachers’ attitudes towards LD student inclusion in mainstream classrooms in both the literature review as well as in section 4.1.1 Teachers’ Observations Informing Perspectives and 4.1.2 Challenges Teachers’ Confront with LD Inclusivity in this chapter. All four participants discuss how their schools may be further down the road with access and integration of technology, but that advantage is more about equitable access to achievement by using what their institutions have to offer to do the best job they can for LD and non LD
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

students. Even though we are unable to gather student responses in this qualitative study, based on information shared between teacher and student conferencing when students were asked if they wanted to share with Apple what they have learned or done, an abundance of children volunteered and expressed their excitement to show their projects using their IPads as a portable multi-media experience. Liza and Sara gathered that the students understood the value of technology in relation to their learning, which is a step in providing students with autonomy in their learning. Drawing connections between all three interviews, the participants agree that all children have the right to learn the best way they possibly can recognizing that technology does not provide all the necessary help for LD students, but it acts as another strategy of proven support that has liberating possibilities.

4.3.2: Support Systems for Teachers and Parents

When discussing the role of technology for assisting LD students in mainstream classrooms, the concern of balancing technology use arose. While speaking with Liza and Sara, they emphasize that technology “has to remain a tool and that there is no point in using it unless it improves learning because you do not want to give up face to face collaboration and communication” (Sara, personal communication, September 21st, 2015). For effective technology integration, Liza and Sara were asked if the teachers in the school are familiar with how to use the technology and what training was required. The findings revealed that a program for the faculty is in place and there is an open door policy between teachers and the IT department. Liza highlights that the teachers are able to refer back to the program modules outlining the operations and functions of Smart Boards, Ipads and Macs. Regular workshops also take place in support of the modules. Furthermore, the school has two full-time integrators at the school who are experienced specifically with technology implementation. The data uncovered
that practicing with the technology is fundamental to learning its uses, therefore, the integrators and IT department include technology skills as a part of the curriculum.

Moreover, time is set aside for interacting with the technology. Often, Liza reports how teachers will approach her when they are having trouble teaching a topic because she has tech resources to support her colleagues. That being said, the most crucial discovery was that the IT department will even go into the classroom with the teacher “holding their hand” so to speak as they are learning about a new resource and its corresponding technology device. Sara also contributed by saying that whatever assistive technology, resource, or device being used is documented so that it can be shared with the school community as well as parents. This data illustrates those teachers who are often uncomfortable or unaware of how to use technology do not have to feel embarrassed because there are support systems in place that offer a welcoming hand. From the examined data, it is apparent that a supportive and educated IT department substantially helps with the effectiveness of technology integration for student learning.

Conversely, parents also play a role in their child’s education and thus Liza and Sara explain that since their students’ parents have not grown up with technology at their fingertips, they find it difficult to help their children. Liza and Sara found that they have to provide a number of resources to families to help them become familiar with the tools their children are using on a daily basis. For example, social networking is a big deal, therefore, whenever there is a class project a workshop for the parents is offered where they learn how to set up an account. More specifically, Liza asks parents, “would you like to learn how to follow the projects that the students are doing? What are your concerns about privacy and online safety? Let’s address them, let’s talk about it, let’s understand it” (Personal communication, September 21st, 2015). It was discovered that without keeping parents involved or informed in their child’s learning,
parents are concerned, especially students with LD who are using specific assistive technology programs. The present benefits of technology inform the significance of what is learned from this section of data. Thus, communication is essential from both the school and teachers to inform parents why they are required to purchase Apple devices and what these tools are doing to enhance student learning.

4.4 Accommodations and Methods

While conducting all three interviews, the participants conferred that accommodations are an integral part of supporting students with LD. However, the findings uncovered that those students who were formally diagnosed had more specific and adequate accommodations because of the psychological assessment that was involved in determining the child’s LD. As presented in the literature, Elliot, Kratochwill and McKeveitt (2001) raise awareness on the use of package accommodations in U.S schools, yet this universal approach to accommodating students was not discussed by any of the Canadian participants. Similar to researchers, Fuchs, Lynn, Cappizzi & Andrea, (2005) the participants provided accommodations on a case by case basis and only offered what they thought the student required. Accommodations were isolated and specific for the student. Common among all participants were accommodations based on direct instruction to ensure comprehension, retention and understanding, repetition of direction that is given with patience, auditory processing issues are simplified both orally and in written form, differentiated instruction for assessment (providing students with choice), ear phones, fidget cushions, slant boards, calculators, manipulates, tablets and laptops.

In terms of the presence of lead specialists within the institutions, it was determined that both schools welcomed outside help for extra support outside the classroom. Some additional supports were math tutors, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, team teachers
and a strong guidance department. Students had access to these supports on their own time where parents were informed of these supplementary resources. As previously mentioned in greater detail, assistive technology and yoga balls also played prominent roles in the contribution to instructional and focus supports for LD but also non LD students. This theme aligns well with the research study because it supports and values the importance of what methods and accommodations teachers are implementing as responsive pedagogy for students with LD.

4.4.1: Specific Cases

Tara explains her responsive pedagogy strategies for a grade 5 boy who had memory issues. He brought his laptop to every class before the school became Apple distinguished. The laptop separated him from other students and, therefore, Tara wanted to educate all her students who were all different and learn differently. She had her students do multiple intelligence tests to explore different types of thinking to have students better comprehend why certain students may need additional tools to support their knowledge and understanding of material. Tara’s student did not write anything by hand; he had Google folders so that his assignments would be submitted directly to the teacher because organization was also a problem for him. Since this boy had a memory problem, calculators benefitted him in math as Tara explains that “a lot of the times we are looking if they can follow the steps to long division not whether or not they know their multiplication facts (Personal communication, September 4th, 2015). Moreover, Tara made sure the student had reading material ahead of time and was placed in the lowest group so that he felt capable of reading and collaborating with his peers. What was interesting from this particular case was the role of parent involvement. For students with LD, by sending work home early for future classes, the teachers relied on parents to be there to familiarize and prepare their child with
the texts. It is clear by this data that the participant required extra hands because often there is
not enough time for one individual to provide extra help to several LD students.

With regards to technology supports, Liza and Sara attended an Assistive Technology
Conference where a girl was working towards receiving her PHD in Physics. She suffered from
vision impairment and worked with a guide throughout high school and was very successful. For
a project in university she had to work with 3D modeling in math and she was struggling because
of her disability. Yet, once her professor printed the models on a 3D printer, she was able to
activate her other senses and feel the object and understood what she had to do. Scenarios like
this are liberating because they demonstrate that equity must exist for students to reach their
potential and feel capable. The tangible object is what allowed this student to feel confident and
successful, which garners academic but also social support. This research study considers the
social implications that students with LD have to face. This is why teachers need to continue to
observe, analyze and follow-up with their students so that they are supported academically and
understood by their peers in terms of equitability.

Lauren described her experience with a grade one student who was formally diagnosed
with Dyslexia and Dysgraphia. Her learning goals were to have the child experience daily
success and ensure concepts were retained through consistent review and recall. Many
assignments were completed orally, some follow-up work was modified into simple, phonetic
sentences so that the student could read and complete the work independently with success. She
played to his oral communication strength and allowed him to present his work to other students.
The student used books on tape, Explode the Code, Beyond the Code (for phonetics instruction)
and the Orton Gillingham Approach to reading, which is an instruction support for students with
Dyslexia. However, this student also had a private tutor and the outcomes observed by Lauren
were gains in retention of information as well as phonetic symbol/sound association and spelling rules. His confidence increased with modifications and an explanation on how his brain worked, which was especially fascinating. Lauren openly discussed the student’s thinking with him so that he could understand why he struggles and had additional supports separate from his peers. By deconstructing the data collected, it is evident that accommodations and modification have the capacity to make a significant difference in LD student learning, keeping in mind the way these strategies are integrated as an essential instrument for student success.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the four themes and the six sub-themes that were found after examining the data collected from three interviews I conducted with my participants. The first theme is participants’ conceptualization of learning disabilities accompanied by the sub-themes teachers’ observations informing perspectives and challenges teachers confront with LD inclusivity. Teacher and student accessibility within private schools is the second major theme coupled by private school finances and funding. The third theme explores technology as a tool for LD support where the data explains sub-themes concerning technology benefits and challenges as well as support systems for teachers and parents. Lastly, the theme accommodations and methods are complemented by the sub-theme specific cases where the participants explain how as educators they have implemented their methods of accommodating students with LD.

These themes and sub-themes support each other as they work towards answering the main research question: How a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classroom contexts are being instructionally responsive to the leaning needs of their students with LD, and what the public system and its teachers can learn from the private school system.
All four teachers conceptualize the term “learning disability” in a similar manner with regards to LD students requiring different avenues to achieve success. Once the coding of the data was complete, among all four of the participants’ observations and experiences working with LD students made them feel frustrated since many of the children were not formally diagnosed. The parents wanted to avoid labeling their child as being different. Furthermore, the participants explained how many colleagues would develop more negative attitudes towards including students with LD into mainstream settings, which aligned with the literature. This is because some teachers found it unfair to those certain students who received accommodations while others did not. Where I can understand how all students could benefit from extra help and support, the participants shared my views on providing equitable versus equal treatment for students with LD. That being said, the data displayed how strategies like Tara’s yoga balls and Liza and Sara’s technology devices were offered to the whole class or school.

Resource accessibility within private schools was not a concern for either school that was interviewed. However, Tara, Liza and Sara note that they do not have access to educational assistants or resource rooms that are seen in the public system. Yet, at the school Lauren teaches at, she comments how specialists from outside the school are welcomed to offer support to those LD students whether they are diagnosed or not. It is important to remember that with private schools, students’ tuition helps pay for the resources, additional supports and technology used, which is something to consider as the public systems’ budget is controlled by the government.

Sara says, “If you have a ramp, everybody can use the ramp, but if you have stairs only some can use stairs (Sara, personal communication, September 21st, 2015). This quote holds significance because in my interview with Liza and Sara, technology integration for both LD and non LD students was the focus. Tara and Lauren discussed how technology has the potential of
being a significant supporting tool for LD student learning and success. Nonetheless, they were not as descriptive as Liza and Tara were about what assistive technologies are in place, acting as proven supports for their struggling students. Liza and Sara also emphasize the importance of infrastructure with regards to how the IT department operates. If there is not enough educational knowledge and support for faculty, the technology becomes a nuisance and has limited use. The effectiveness of the technology diminishes, which is why the school takes pride in being classified as Apple distinguished. The way the technology is being implemented has been evaluated extensively by one of the world’s most prestigious technology companies, Apple. Additionally, Liza and Sara discuss how support extends beyond the classroom and into the homes of parents. Providing workshops and modules for parents helps keep them up to date and involved in their child’s learning, especially when the teacher is confident in the purpose and uses of technology as a tool for student learning. The school does hold technology with high status, but Liza and Sara present how the school’s philosophy believes in balancing the technology with peer interaction and collaboration alongside independent learning.

When interviewing the participants on their methods of accommodations, differentiated instruction was a commonality amongst all. The participants had a consensus that individual accommodations as opposed to package accommodations were more conducive for LD students because they were specific to the child and were changed if and when needed. Tara’s experience with a grade 5 student involved more use of manipulates because a calculator in math for example allowed him to demonstrate his knowledge of the next concept even if his computation skills were still a work in progress. In contrast, Liza and Sara discussed how the 3D printer made it possible for the student with vision issues to use her sense of touch to help her understand what and how to create a 3D model. In Lauren’s case, conferencing with the child about how he thinks
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

differently than others allows the child to gain self-esteem and feel successful even if he has to use specific reading programs or books on tape to support that development. The data gathered from all three interviews is promising because it aligns with the literature explored, while providing new insights on a debated topic. LD student inclusivity is contested widely throughout education, yet the data collected has allowed for more insight on teachers’ developing responsive pedagogy towards keeping LD students incorporated and supported in mainstream classrooms.

Chapter 5: IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In 2014 the provincial budget for special education was $2.72 billion, which is more than 10% of the total K–12 education budget (Public Education Our Best Investment, 2014). Yet, in 44% of Ontario elementary and 33% of Ontario secondary schools not all students have access to the assistive technology recommended in their assessments or Individual Education Plans (Ibid). These numbers are alarming, which has enticed me to address the importance and purpose of this qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to gather data on how a sample of three private school teachers working in mainstream classrooms are being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with LD so that the findings can inform the work being done in the public system. As a mainstream private school student who was diagnosed with dyslexia in grade 3, I am aware of the struggles and challenges that a student with LD faces, therefore, my passion for this topic has driven me to present the importance of responsive pedagogy and inclusive LD supports. Fifteen years later, I have transitioned from the student with an LD to a future educator, where as teachers, we can benefit from this study as it is inevitable to have a growing presence of students with LD in our classroom.
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

This qualitative research study examines the primary research question on how a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classroom contexts are being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with learning disabilities, and what might the public system and its teachers learn from these teachers and the private school system? This overarching research question was supported by several sub-questions relating to themes discovered through three semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ schools where the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Both schools anonymously referred to in the study are private institutions. The reason I chose private schools was to represent the possibilities and accessibility of accommodation methods and classroom strategies already in-action. The participants were asked a series of questions from different headings under my methodology chapter, (background information, teacher beliefs, teacher practices, supports, challenges and next steps) relating to the primary research question stated above. The participants’ answers were recorded via tape recorder with consent. With the data gathered from the three interviews, the transcribing and coding processes followed. The data revealed harmonizing as well as new findings related to the research question and reviewed literature. These new discoveries were specifically related to technology devices and assistive technology supports already in place and developing within private schools. From the analyzed data, four themes emerged; participants’ conceptualization of LD, teacher and student accessibility within private schools, accommodations and methods, and technology as a tool for LD support. Each theme was supported by two sub-themes.

This final chapter will begin by providing an overview of the key findings from the fourth chapter followed by an overview of the broad and narrow implications of my findings as they relate to the educational community and my own teaching practices. Furthermore,
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

recommendations will be outlined for the different stakeholders affected or influenced by my research. The chapter will come to a consolidation with a section on areas for further research accompanied by concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

As mentioned above, four overarching themes are accompanied by 1-2 sub-themes per category and were formed after analyzing the data from the three interviews. The first theme, participants’ conceptualization of LD is accompanied by sub-themes Teachers’ Observations Informing Perspectives and Challenges Teachers Confront with LD Inclusivity. Teacher and student accessibility within private schools is supported by sub-themes Private School Finances and Funding. Furthermore, teachers’ exploring technology as a tool for LD support outlines sub-themes concerning Technology Benefits and Challenges as well as Support Systems for Teachers and Parents. Lastly, the theme for accommodations and methods are complemented by Specific Cases where the participants reveal personal implementation strategies of their methods for accommodating students with LD.

The key findings related to how the four participants shared similar feelings of frustration with regards to working with LD students since many of the students they work with are not formally diagnosed. The participants highlight that parents’ stigmatization around labeling their child proved to be a main concern, negating more student diagnosis of LD. Additionally, the participants explained how many colleagues developed more negative attitudes towards incorporating students with LD into mainstream settings, aligning with research extracted from the literature review (Biddle, 2006). From the examination of the interview data, some teachers found it unfair that certain students received accommodations while others did not. Yet, in the literature, lack of knowledge, resources, budget and time for differentiated instructional
strategies highlighted the dichotomy between negative teacher attitudes and inclusive classrooms for students with LD (Maxam & Henderson, 2013). This research is related to a public school study but is noteworthy as it presents a contrast on how private schools have the choice to accept or deny LD students entry while public schools do not (Tara). The concept for whole class accommodations was also raised during the interviews, which has merit. However, the participants shared my views on the notion of equitable versus equal treatment for students with LD as mentioned in chapter 4. That being said, the data displayed how and when strategies could be implemented for whole class purposes, given adequate budgets, school and classroom spaces to support things like Tara’s yoga balls and Liza and Sara’s two devices accessibility (i.e. computer and IPads) were offered for whole class use.

The findings from the interview data is substantial information because it supports the literature around instructional adaptations for teachers as being “desirable but not feasible” as disclosed by Vaughn & Schumm, 1995. Since Holloway’s suggestion of resource rooms is not an option in the private school system, this illustrates how teachers carry greater responsibility for providing inclusive classroom techniques (2001). The interview data revealed that those students who were formally diagnosed had more accessibility to adequate accommodations because of the psychological assessment that accompanied the diagnosis of a child’s LD. It is important to know that budget and resource accessibility within both private schools was not a concern for either school that was interviewed. What was exposed by participants Tara, Liza and Sara was that their institutions do not have access to educational assistants or resource rooms that are available in the public system. Conversely, Lauren comments how specialists from outside the school are welcomed at her institution to offer support to those LD students diagnosed or not.
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

This information illustrates the flexibility within private institution to offer focalized supports they deem suitable for their LD and non-LD students.

Since my second interview relied heavily on technology based strategies and their implementation in the classroom, Liza and Sara also emphasize the importance of infrastructure with regards to the functionality of the IT department with a school system. This is why Liza and Sara’s school received Apple recognition because of the commendable way in which the technology is being successfully implemented throughout grade 4-12 classrooms. For example, 1-1 devices and opportunities for assistive technology programs in Language and Math are main focuses. Additionally, Liza and Sara discuss how technology support extends beyond the classroom and into the homes of parents through school workshops and online modules. Yet, both schools emphasize a balance of technology use with peer interaction, group work and independent learning. From the data collected, the uncovered themes have led to broad implications for the education community to consider when thinking about teacher instructional responses for students with LD in both private and public school systems. As well, narrow implications for me as a future teacher and researcher arose from the interview data as I am likely to face similar situations as the participants and other educators for accommodating LD students in mainstream classrooms.

5.2 Implications

Through both my literature and interview research, I am more aware of the relevance and importance of my research contributing to a greater body of knowledge in the realm of education. With teachers being the people who spend majority of time with a child, their role as educators is significant because the student’s classroom experience is driven by teacher pedagogy, functionality and adaptability. By this I mean that children are enrolled in schools,
private or public for the purpose of receiving an education, but often parents and students are unaware of the additional roles imparted on the teacher outside of classroom time. This relates back to what was unveiled in both the literature and interviews regarding feasibility for teachers to support and accommodate LD students in mainstream classroom while considering extra planning time, resource accessibility and budgets/funding of a school. Through my experience, I am mindful of the challenges teachers face in terms of accommodating for students with LD in mainstream classrooms, while considering the implications also affecting the school, students and their parents. In the sections below, I will outline the broader implications concerning my primary research question as it relates to the educational community, then discuss the narrow implications that encompass my own teaching and research practices.

5.2.1 Broad Implications

An important aspect of the research problem relates to the implications of inequities with regards to who can access private education and resources, and thus, access more support for LD students. From the findings under the theme Teacher and Student Accessibility in chapter 4, Tara presents the school with an unconventional tool for supporting student focus with yoga balls in the classroom. Her motivation to bring not one but 25 yoga balls into her classroom had implications for the students, parents, school as well as herself. The students had to adjust their behaviour since they interacted with many bouncy balls in a grade 5 classroom environment. Moreover, Tara remarks that it took a great deal of patience, ball etiquette, and classroom respect for her to develop with her students concerning the purpose of yoga balls replacing chairs. As noted in my interview with Tara, the students were required to follow the classroom ball rules so that all students could have access to the focused attention benefits that these stability balls can provide for learning. Both teachers and students had to adjust to this new learning atmosphere by
adapting their bodies to lessons where students would be bouncing up and down. Tara says, “it was just as much as a learning curve for me to adjust and accept 25 heads bouncing during my lessons.” With the research supplementing the benefits of yoga ball implementation as a strategy for students both with and without an LD, Tara provided this accommodation to the whole class with respect to adequate resource funding and school support. That being said, the opposition between teacher and student perspectives shifted when parents found the yoga balls to be humorous and unnecessary in the classroom (Tara). Tara spent a vast amount of time conferencing one on one with parents to value the strategy, offer an equitable learning environment, while providing a focus choice for students to use a ball or chair. This added communication with students and parents is not only something teachers have to facilitate, but students and parents become affected by a new learning community. While addressing the implications from the private school perspective, it is important to keep in mind an emphasis needed for justifying certain accommodations, their value and purpose. Children from public school settings may not have equitable access to these yoga ball opportunities, which will be further discussed under my recommendations section.

The second largest finding is circulated around the theme, Technology as a Tool for LD Support. Both schools interviewed had ample access to technology resources (i.e. laptops, Ipads, assistive technology programs) that became an ingrained part of student learning. Liza and Sara’s institution is recognized as Apple distinguished meaning that they have been praised beyond their access to technology and instead applauded for their use of it with students. Even though Liza and Sara highlight the benefits of voice to text, text to voice software like Dragon, Google docs, Inspiration for mind mapping, notability for note taking, fluency tutor, study skill and organization apps and Raz Kids for interactive eBooks as specific ways to support students in
multiple areas of development, they draw attention to how technology is not the only solution to supporting students with LD. For example, Sara mentions that her institution’s math assistive technologies did not have enough flexibility necessary for LD students in terms of deconstructing complex problems. That being said, Lauren’s institution incorporated technology more selectively and brought in outside experts as a part of their resources accessibility for students with LD.

From these findings teachers, students, parents and the school communities are also affected by the implications of technology use. Firstly, teachers need to become familiar with the technology, which requires more of their personal time, however, on the other hand, the technology could also save them more time from having to differentiate lessons from scratch. The students are affected by the distractions that come with having technology in the classroom. Thus, they must learn to develop self-regulatory learning habits and understand the purpose of technology as a tool for learning but not the answer to all problems or questions. What was interestingly discovered in my interview with Liza and Sara was the necessity of a strong IT support system from the school offering help to teachers, students and information sessions for parents. Parents are another group of people who would have to be informed by the school community on the use, value and purpose of technology, as well as an opportunity to learn the programs their children are using to assist them when needed. Lastly, the school community holds the paramount responsibility of organizing budgets for technology resources, setting up Smart Boards in classrooms, establishing a reputable IT department, offering robust Wi-Fi and creating an environment that wholly supports the choice and extra value of technology use within classrooms for students with and without LD. In the following sub-heading, more narrowed
implications relating to my teaching and research practices will be discussed concerning these instructional strategies for students with LD.

### 5.2.2 Narrow Implications

Implementing instructional strategies for mainstreamed LD students take teachers’ time, the schools’ budget and students’ participation, which is why this sub-theme will outline the implications for me as a teacher and continued researcher. The findings in both the literature review and interviews have led me to set realistic expectations of myself and what I feel I can do personally for those students with LD. As discussed under the broad implications sub-heading, yoga balls and technology implementation were two key findings during this qualitative study, which I will be referring to as I discuss the narrow implications for me as a future teacher. My esteemed passion for teaching children has now been challenged by the research I have gathered throughout this project because of the energy, time and possibilities that is required by me as an individual for supporting students with LD. As a future teacher, I feel torn between my will to exert myself for my students but also keeping in mind my own well-being. That being said, with newer strategies such as yoga balls and technology being implemented as instructional responses for students with LD, I see myself adopting a “trial and error” (Preston, 2007) approach for accommodating students and their specific needs. I disagree with Fuchs, Lynn, Cappizzi and Andrea on the notion of standard accommodations (2005) because of each child’s individuality. I am cognizant that a trial and error approach could lead to faulty strategies used for those students with LD, however, unless a child has been psychologically diagnosed, I do not feel it is ethical for me to claim knowledge on an area I am not a professional in.

The research I have conducted reaffirms my choice of profession because with my personal connection with LD, I can draw on my experiences and offer an authentic perspective to
those students struggling with the stigmas associated with having a LD. Exposing children to strategies I found most affective may offer LD students with more opportunity to accommodations whether they have been diagnosed or not. Yet, where I believe that integrating LD students into mainstream classrooms has its social and academic benefits, I would modify my teaching by emphasizing a philosophy of community in my classroom. Being transparent with my students from the beginning of the year and co-creating an atmosphere that welcomes, accepts and praises multiple learning styles is something I still hold valuable. Furthermore, as a researcher, I will disclose that interviewing teachers had its benefits in terms of providing unseen insight to some of the realities, frustrations as well as hopeful possibilities that students or parents may not be aware of within the educational realm. However, the range of information and competing perspectives gathered in qualitative research contains personal bias from participants, which is why I found it important to analyze and contrast both existing literature and collected participant data. Keeping personal bias in mind, under the following heading I will make recommendations for teachers, schools boards and teacher education based on what I learned through this research process.

5.3 Recommendations

From the research conducted and discoveries made during this qualitative research study, I will focus on potential recommendations for school boards, teachers and teacher education with regards to effectively accommodating students with LD into mainstream classrooms.

Private schools have a 9:1 versus a 17:1 student teacher relationship (National Center for Education Statistics) where Cornell’s Toronto Star newspaper presents the benefits of private schools by highlighting their smaller classroom sizes for greater individualized attention opportunities (2014). My research study is not a comparison between schools systems, but the
study uses private schools as a model for making connections and building bonds between teachers, students, parents and the school community. At two Toronto private schools, Havergal and Branksome Hall, their teachers move with the students in their class throughout a few of the following grades (Ibid). I would recommend a strategy where school boards hire teachers based on qualifications that can extend beyond one grade for the public school system. For example, by having a primary/junior or junior/intermediate qualification the teacher could progress forward with the child instead of the student and teacher taking time to develop a new relationship each year. This recommendation could allow for students and teachers to have greater dialogue, familiarity and practice with one another concerning LD students’ needs. The Canadian government and Provincial Ministries of Education are beginning to demonstrate better commitment to supporting LD students. That being said, I would suggest that school boards calculate the number of diagnosed LD students and juxtapose those numbers to the budgets they allocate for special education and LD resources. By taking the time to see what areas are lacking in funding and by at least acknowledging the presence of LD students and possible foreseeable student diagnosis could help frame more of a clear path on what accommodations are proving to be effective and what resources they can attain by learning from the strategies out there and displayed by private institutions.

As a future teacher with exposure to similar feelings and challenges students with LD may face in mainstream classrooms, I would suggest that teachers first educate themselves on the LD that is present in their classroom or make use of the special education AQs that are offered. Often the term LD does not specify the variety of learning needs that are out there, and thus, familiarizing themselves with the differences between ADHD and dyslexia for example could help the teacher provide more suitable accommodations or modifications. From experience, my
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

teachers often provided me with accommodation for attention disorder and not for reading comprehension or math support. For those students who are not diagnosed with an LD, having a general background on particular signs and systems of LD could also be a pathway to offering suggestions for diagnosis to the IPRC in the public system and parents in the private system. Furthermore, as uncovered in the findings in both the literature and interview data, negative teacher attitudes towards students with LD are difficult to hide. I speak from experience as a child who could sense a teachers’ impatience or reluctance to help because they were either overwhelmed or unsure of what to do. Like Tara, she took initiative and researched then implemented yoga balls as a fundamental tool for supporting students after she saw this strategy being implemented outside her school community. Additionally, with budgets and funding being more of a concern within public schools, I would recommend gathering a smaller handful of yoga balls and testing their benefits in particular classroom settings. These yoga balls do not have to be ordered new, they could be second hand or from clearance fitness shops.

Interestingly enough, a 2016 study has just circulated and is celebrated by parents and school officials for giving children with special needs access to occupational therapists without having to leave the comfort and convenience of their classrooms (Balca). The program is called Partnering for Change, (P4C) which is an initiative that sends therapists directly into school classrooms. This program is new, however, similar to Lauren’s institution where outside professionals are welcomed. If the presence of occupational therapists working alongside teachers is showing benefits, I would recommend exploring team teaching or teacher/ therapist based classrooms depending on the number of students and LD spectrum.

As teachers, willingness and advocacy against LD marginalization is a huge factor in helping students succeed, thus, I would also recommend that teachers provide choice to their
students in the material they read, relatable content materials as well as manipulatives, structured break times and spaces within the classroom where students can work independently or collaboratively. As a teacher candidate of 2016, teacher education programs could be improved with the kind of exposure to special education material that is studied. It is unfortunate with the new two-year teacher education programs, students are required to have 80 instead of 40 days placed in typical classroom settings, disadvantaging them with the opportunity to work in more specialized classrooms. Thus, more hands on and case-based study approaches could help future educators with the integration process of LD students into mainstream classrooms as well as detecting for LD diagnosis. The courses I have taken have negated the realities of implementing accommodations into practice, which is frustrating because teacher candidates are being expected to run a classroom without practice of such complex situations or exposure to LD environments. Furthermore, a case-base study approach for special education could provide students with a more conceptual understanding of what types of learners and behaviours exist in daily classrooms. It could also show how teachers are solving these dilemmas of balancing their classrooms, what strategies are effective, which are not and what changes teacher candidates can provide drawing upon their own backgrounds.

In the section below, areas for further research will be overviewed so that as an education community we can build upon the problems and challenges teachers, students and school systems are facing with regards to supporting LD students.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

With my experience as a LD student from private school but a teacher candidate in the public system, I would continue to explore research on the benefits offered by both school structures. As educators, we can learn from each other to derive effective instructional strategies
for LD student use. It is no surprise that private schools have larger budgets due to family donations, parent committees, etc. however, the teacher motivation that I was exposed to during my practicums in public school settings appeared to be greater than my exposure from teachers as a student in private school. Is it because public school settings have more students with LD to account for? I would be interested to see the difference in numbers between students with LD in private versus public school systems and what the specific support variances are. Additionally, I recognize that public schools are a part of a union and have to follow certain ethics, where private schools have greater autonomy and resources for supporting LD students. Therefore, another area for further research could relate to how public school systems and educators navigate their classrooms to gain autonomy and accessibility to resources for LD students while respecting union guidelines.

Moreover, this study addresses teacher LD response pedagogy specifically within mainstream classrooms as a part of the primary research question. In relation to the dichotomy between inclusive and segregated classrooms revealed in my literature review, this discrepancy was also raised during the interviews. Tara, Liza, Sara and Lauren mention that they do not have educational assistants or resource rooms present in their schools, which is a tool that the public systems use. When looking for areas of further research, I would be interested to see how private schools would or could implement the concept of a resource room and see what benefits or challenges they face with this experience.

Thus far, the research has been deficient and complex with regards to how teachers are adequately supporting students with LD aside from a trial and error approach. However, the research is copious in terms of the challenges students with LD are facing such as class sizes, funding, material resources, access to technology and school board support, yet the implications
for change have yet to be uncovered. Research in areas acting on change for LD students within school systems would help expose effective methods for teachers to draw upon in their classrooms. The below paragraphs will offer consolidation and speak to the significance of why this research matters and to who it matters for.

5.5 Concluding Comments

“Could I Have More Time,” is a qualitative research study that shines light on LD students who are integrated into mainstream classrooms where teachers are struggling or are unsure of how to effectively accommodate their learning needs. From my personal experience of being a mainstreamed student with dyslexia, my connection to the topic has fueled the breadth of literature reviewed and passion behind the diverse participants selected for this study. My positive experience working with speech to text technologies such as Dragon were supported by all participant data, specifically Liza and Sara. That being said, technology has played a fundamental role in supporting students with LD in mainstream classrooms, however, the technology access is more prevalent in private schools. This is why budget and funding considerations must be taken into account where Tara’s use of yoga balls could be an effective and more affordable strategy for educators in the public system. This study samples private school teachers and not public school teachers because I wanted to look at the possibilities of access to resources that support or could support students with mild cases of LD in mainstream classrooms. Conversely, the study is not aimed at comparing private and public schools systems to indicate which is better, but instead, to provide learning opportunities and methods of teaching strategies that could be interchangeable between both school systems.

This chapter brings closure to the study by offering the researcher a place for reflective positioning, while highlighting the key areas of the findings from chapter 4. Additionally, this
final chapter examines the broad and narrow implications of the findings with the consideration of the educational community to the researcher personally. Furthermore, recommendations are offered as a way to critically examine the discoveries from the literature and participant data to display areas for further development on responsive pedagogy for teachers working with LD students in mainstream class settings.

All four participants conceptualize the term “learning disability” similarly by indicating that LD students are children who require different opportunities to achieve success. A main concern for defining LD is situation around parents being reluctant to diagnose their child to avoid labeling. The negative attitudes experienced by some teachers as revealed in both the literature and interview data stems from a lack of fairness with regards to teacher preparedness, willingness and equality versus equity of students. Where possible, all participants noted that accommodations suitable for all students were provided (i.e. extra time on tests) to assist with the disproving use of what a fair accommodation is.

As referred to in the literature review, constructing IEPs also proved to be a struggle for teachers because they felt that they did not have the adequate training to make conclusions or informally diagnosed students with unusual behaviours or learning abilities. Similarly to the teacher participants, the uncertainty of accommodations and their effects or benefits for LD student development was a bargain. However, schools like Havergal and Branksome Hall accentuate their smaller class sizes, strong teacher, student and part relationship, proactive mentality and teacher progression accompanying student development to help enhance success for LD and non-LD students.

Since there was no concern over access to resources amongst both private schools interviewed, Liza and Sara noted that Apple distinction is not gained solely on access to
technology but emphasizes the infrastructure in place to support the technology use. With private schools lacking access to educational assistants or resource rooms that are prevalent in the public system with the new therapy program P4C, the program’s collaboration with schools allows teachers to work alongside therapists to learn techniques to help the students on an ongoing basis (Dario, 2016). Talag, an occupational therapist says that, “Being able to transfer that knowledge to the teacher, I think, is the key of Partnering for Change” (Ibid) With P4C working with over 60 schools across Peel, Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth, and 17,000 children have been positively impacted while using the same amount of resource money, this strategy could be seen more in the near future (Ibid). More research would have to be conducted and monitored on P4C, but it appears to be a convincing strategy thus far. P4C is unlike the school Lauren teaches at. She mentions how specialists from outside the school are welcomed to offer support to those LD students whether they are diagnosed or not keeping in mind that outside professionals cost money.

The four predominant themes are complemented by 1-2 sub-themes per category and were formed after analyzing the three interview data. The first theme, participants’ conceptualization of LD is accompanied by sub-themes Teachers’ Observations Informing Perspectives and Challenges Teachers Confront with LD Inclusivity. Teacher and student accessibility within private schools is supported by sub-themes Private School Finances and Funding. Then, teachers’ exploring technology as a tool for LD support outlines sub-themes concerning Technology Benefits and Challenges as well as Support Systems for Teachers and Parents. Lastly, the theme for accommodations and methods are complemented by Specific Cases where the participants reveal personal implementation strategies of their methods for accommodating students with LD. These themes and sub-themes encompass the purpose of the
study offering students with LD the chance to succeed under environments that are welcoming, prepared and driven to tackle the challenges at hand. This qualitative research study answered the primary research question: How is a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classroom contexts being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with learning disabilities and what might the public system and its teachers learn from these teachers and the private school system? This question was answered by gathering and analyzing enough data to provide teachers with tools and strategies offering children a chance to meet their learning needs, reach their goals, feel less like an obstacle, and become an equal student in an equitable learning environment.
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

References


ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES


Gibbs, Jeanne. (2014.) Reaching All by Creating: Tribes Learning Communities. United States of America: CenterSource Systems, LLC.


ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES


Lori, A. P. (2010). Dyslexia and writing: Why are so many instructional plans one-dimensional? Voices from the Middle, 18(1), 54.


ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES


National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials. (n.d.). K-12 & postsecondary comparison 3-column table. Retrieved from:  
http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/aim/comparisonchart.pdf.


ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES


ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES


Wobick, A. (2013). What services are school boards required to provide to students with disabilities? Education & Law Journal, 22(2), 237.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ____________________

Dear ____________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how a sample of private school teachers who work in mainstream classroom contexts are being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students with learning disabilities for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela Macdonald-Vermic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Researcher name: Amanda Leela

Email: amanda.leela@mail.utoronto.ca
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela Macdonald- Vermic

Phone number: _________________ Email: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Amanda Leela (name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ____________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendices B: Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this qualitative research study. This study aims to learn how teachers who have students with mild learning disabilities are being instructionally responsive to the learning needs of their students. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes where I will ask you a series of questions about your background working in a private school, your teaching practices with regards to inclusion of LD students, your beliefs on integrating LD students into mainstream classrooms and what your next steps are moving forward for these students. I want to remind you that you can choose to not answer any question you feel hesitant or uncomfortable answering. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. a) Can you state your name for the recording?

b) What grades and subject areas do you currently teach? Which have you taught previously?

c) How many years have you been teaching? Have you always taught in the private school system? How long have you been working in the private school system?

d) Do you have experience working in the public school system?

e) Why have you chosen to work in the private school system?

f) Can you tell me more about the school where you are currently teaching? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities). How long have you been teaching at this school?

g) What inspired you to become a teacher?

h) As you know, I am interested in learning how teachers working in private school systems support students with learning disabilities. Can you tell me what personal, professional, and/or educational experiences have contributed to developing your commitment to supporting these students? *

i) How common is it that you have students with diagnosed learning disabilities in your classroom?

j) Have you seen an increase in students with learning disabilities throughout your teaching career?

Section 2: Teacher Beliefs
2. What would you say your vision of success is for the students in your classroom?
   a) What does the term ‘learning disability’ mean to you?
   b) What indicators of learning disabilities do you observe from students?
   c) What do you believe is the role of schools in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities?
   d) In your experience, what are some of the common challenges students with learning disabilities face in school?
   e) In your view, is it important to integrate students with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms, or would you prefer that these students have access to more individualized support?
   f) How well do you think the school system does, generally speaking, in responding to these challenges?
   g) In your experience, how does support for students with learning disabilities differ, if at all, across public and private school contexts? How/in what way?

What, if anything, do you think public schools can learn from private schools in terms of supporting students with learning disabilities? And what about the other way around?

Section 3: Teacher Practices (WHAT/HOW?)

1. How do you support students with learning disabilities? What instructional approaches and strategies do you implement and why?
2. What are the benefits of these approaches that you have observed? What outcomes have you observed from students?
3. Can you give me a specific example of a student with a learning disability that you have supported?
   a. Who was this student? (grade, subject, learning needs)
   b. What were your learning goals for this student?
   c. What opportunities for learning did you create? What accommodations or modifications did you make and why?
   d. Did this student have additional support from a resource support worker?
   e. What outcomes did you observe from this student?
   f. What resources did you use / draw on when supporting this student?
4. Was there ever a point in your teaching experience where you felt unable to accommodate or provide a student with a learning disability the help they needed? If yes, please describe that case for me. Why did you feel unable to support them? What resources or conditions would have further helped you support this student?
5. Are there additional learning support workers available in your school to support students with special needs? If so, how do you work collaboratively with them? What are some of the challenges of working together to support students’ learning needs?
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

6. As an educator, can you give me an example of a time where you observed a student feeling ashamed of having a learning disability? What methods, modifications, and/or accommodations did you implement for this child to support their learning and social needs?

7. When accommodating a student with a learning disability, what do you observe in terms of how the student is responding to the provided accommodations? Have or were you able to ever observe how other students in the class respond to them and what the social implications for these students with a learning disability might be?

8. Through your experience over the years, what seems to be the most common method of helping students’ achieve success with a learning disability?

Section 4: Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

1. What factors and resources support you in your capacity to do this work? probe re: access to resources, school philosophy, support workers, funding, parent expectations

2. What are your goals for how you might further support students with learning disabilities?

3. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers committed to supporting students with learning disabilities in private and public school contexts?

Thank you for your time and participation.