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"How can you be a teacher with so many spelling mistakes?"

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"How can you be a teacher with so many spelling mistakes?" Life stories of teacher trainees with learning disabilities.

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative research is to examine issues relating to teacher trainees with learning disabilities (LD) – eliciting trainees' own feelings and recollections of their learning and life experiences in light of their LD (including current learning), their reasons for choosing this career, their perceptions of their own competencies and difficulties in the field and coping strategies employed, as well as their requests from the college. Furthermore, it will relate to their personal and group experiences and identities as people with LD. Beginning with background information about LD through the life cycle, definitions of LD, and a review of the literature, it will present the research approach and rationale, and progress to examine several trainees' (with LD) life stories, to gain a glimpse into their personal and group experiences and identity as people with LD. It will also draw on insights from associated professionals in the actual classroom, and attempt to glean implications for improving the admission, teacher-education process and support of people with learning disabilities in the workplace (i.e. classroom). This will all be contextualized in the social-educational milieu in Israel, with reference to existing literature and practice in other countries (mainly England and USA).

It assumes that there is a significant connection between the way they experienced their own schooling and early lives as LD, their choice of career, and their perception of their roles and functioning as teachers.

The ten students participating in this study are teacher trainees at a college of education, diagnosed with some kind of learning disability, who have approached the support center for assistance during their studies. This research will be based on their life stories, as well as interviews with professionals who follow their training – pedagogic supervisors or master teachers.

The research questions examine the way they perceive LD in their lives, factors influencing their career choice, how they define themselves as teachers, the manifestations of their disability in their work, and how they cope with these manifestations at work. Triangulation with data collected from supervising teachers will verify the extent to which their perceptions bear out in their practice.

Expected results relate to their lived experience with LD as a reason for their career choice, its unique influence on their professional identity as teachers, their teaching practice, and their approach to pupils. In addition, it may be assumed that they are aware of their own difficulties and strengths, of the professional requirements, and the "goodness of fit" between these two, and also of ways to minimize negative impacts of their LD at work.

The findings of this research are likely to be pertinent to teacher educators and other stakeholders within the education system: in order to assist and enable trainees with LD to acquire their profession of choice, education stakeholders need to be attentive to their life stories, to learn about their difficulties and needs, strengths and unique contributions in the field. There may be ramifications for training in other professions as well.

Keywords: Teacher trainees with learning disabilities, Adults with learning disabilities, Teacher education, Training adults with LD.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this narrative research is to examine issues relating to teacher trainees with learning disabilities (LD) – eliciting trainees' own feelings and recollections of their learning and life experiences in light of their LD (including current learning), their reasons for choosing this career, their perceptions of their own competencies and difficulties in the field and coping strategies employed, as well as their requests from the college.

It will examine the way teacher trainees with Learning Disabilities (LD) experience their disability throughout their lives, its impact on their choice of career, and their teaching practice in particular, both cognitively and affectively, as well as their personal and professional identity as people and teachers with LD, in order to better understand their needs as they move through supervised teaching practice into the independent field. It will begin with background information about LD through the life cycle, definitions of LD, teachers with LD, a review of the literature, the social-educational milieu in Israel, my professional background, the research approach and rationale. It will also attempt to glean implications for improving the admission, teacher-education process and support of people with learning disabilities in the workplace i.e. classroom.

It may be assumed that their own lived experience with LD in school and other areas impacts on their choice of career and on their professional beliefs and functioning, as well as their personal and professional identity. A further assumption is that they perceive differences between themselves and their non-LD trainee peers. Data from this research may inform those connected with teacher education and employment, as well, perhaps, as other professional training processes.

Background

This section will include a general background on LD, definitions of LD, adults with LD, career decisions and teachers with LD, and society and education in Israel with special reference to LD, interspersed with existing literature.

General background - Learning disabilities

There is a growing awareness in the western world, including Israel, regarding LD within educational settings, and in society generally (McLoughlin, 2002). As a result, children receive more assistance at school, yielding an increase in the number of people with LD graduating high school and subsequently turning to higher education with a view to pursuing a wide range of careers, like their non-LD counterparts (Farmer et al, 2002). However, appropriate support and accommodation in the workplace are still evolving both in theory and practice, and the dominant social discourse often reflects skepticism regarding the competence and qualifications (being "otherwise qualified") of people with LD in the work market. Negative manifestations of LD in learning and life generally may range from direct learning difficulties (spelling, handwriting, reading, mathematical calculations) through wider organizational matters e.g. general learned helplessness, time

management, spatial disorientation, social ineptness or behavioral issues like attention deficits. Positive manifestations are often evident in highly creative thinking, original problem-solving, great leadership or interpersonal skills, dedication and determination.

The incidence of LD in the general population may depend to an extent on the accepted definition, but its prevalence is recognized to be between 3.5% (Shaywitz, 2003) and 10% (4% severe, 6% mild to moderate) (Riddick, 1996). Farmer and colleagues (2002) estimate that around 2% of students entering Higher Education in Britain in 2001/2 were dyslexic and that this proportion is likely to rise in the coming years. ADHD is reported in 6–9% of the school-aged population (Katz, 2003) with some 50% of these children still diagnosed in adulthood.

Definitions of learning disabilities

The terms LD, SpLD (Specific Learning Difficulties) and dyslexia are sometimes used interchangeably, without precise differentiation. Since LD spans a wide spectrum of manifestations and is invisible, definitions vary, are sometimes controversial, and emanate from a variety of sources, as may be seen below. They present both primary and secondary manifestations.

A commonly accepted medical-cognitive definition of dyslexia is

"... a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin... characterized by difficulties with accurate and or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge." (Reid Lyon et al, 2003, p. 2).

Regarding learning disabilities more generally, Vogel (2005, p. 1) highlights the lifelong nature and the breadth of areas affected, as defined by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1990)

"Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be caused by central nervous dysfunction, and may occur across the lifespan. Problems of self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not themselves constitute a learning disability. ..."

When dealing with adults, it is important to understand it as a "performance difficulty... in society, family, work settings" (McLoughlin, 2002, p. 3). In addition to pinpointing the areas in which LDs may manifest themselves, it would seem that a lifespan approach needs to take into account a social, holistic overview: "the impact of cultural factors which can aggravate or ameliorate the condition" (Frith, 1999, p. 211), the situational and environmental factors which may serve as obstacles or facilitators (Fougeyrollas, 2004), and "the needs of the moment" (Miles, 1995, p. 44) in assisting adults through career transitions and adaptations.

The broader, situational perspective is reinforced by the ICF which

"takes into account the social aspects of disability and does not see disability only as 'medical' or 'biological' dysfunction. By including Contextual Factors, in which environmental factors are listed, ICF allows to record the impact of the environment on the person's functioning." (ICF home page, WHO, 2002, www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/. Accessed 31.8.08).

By taking personal and cultural, social, and environmental factors into account for people with LD, and seeking facilitating factors, the disability can be merely an impairment, but if not dealt with appropriately, it may become a genuine handicap. For this research I use LD in its broadest sense, including dyslexia and dyscalculia and their comorbid conditions. Attention will be given to behavioral conditions like AD(H)D, which, when not dealt with appropriately may impair or handicap an individual in school, society or work. Although AD(H)D is not strictly a learning disability but rather a behavioral one, it manifests itself with high frequency within local classroom situations, and seems prevalent among several of the participants in this research. Symptomatic behaviors like impulsivity, impatience, high distractibility and defiance towards authority figures are quite apparent in Israeli classrooms (and other places), and may impact not only on the "sufferer", but also on the wider environment.

Adults with Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are a life-long condition, which cannot be "cured", do not "go away with age", but do manifest themselves differently at different stages of the life cycle, and can, in certain situations and as a result of specific choices, be minimized or even avoided (Ferri et al 2005; Gerber et al, 2004; McLoughlin et al, 2004; Reiff et al, 1997; Roffman 2000; Snowling & Stackhouse, 1996). Nonetheless, they are likely to accompany the individual emerging in adult life in occupational (as well as social and family) situations. On the one hand people with disabilities who are otherwise qualified should be able to enjoy discrimination-free freedom of study and career choices, while on the other hand it is necessary to recognize that certain careers are likely to be distinctly more problematic than others, depending on the match with the individual's strengths and difficulties. Transition to the workplace, and day-to-day functioning at work, may pose great challenges for people with LD.

Typical problematic areas may be those in which the adult is required to read (silently or aloud); write clearly and coherently, briefly or at length; do mental arithmetic calculations; quickly process auditory or visual information, retrieve information from memory; organize materials or time effectively; interact with colleagues or clients; display manual dexterity or spatial awareness; multitask; deal with routine or change, or work in a noisy environment with distractions (Bartlett & Moody, 2000; Heaton & Mitchell, 2001; McLoughlin et al, 2002; Morgan & Klein, 2000; Pollack & Waller, 1994; Reid & Kirk, 2001; Reiff et al,1997). Paradoxically, due to the wide variety and individuality of symptoms, some of these very areas which are obstacles for some may indeed be the great strengths of others with LD. Many people with LD tend to be highly creative and original, offer innovative solutions to problems, have well-developed leadership skills, great charm and charisma, or a heightened ability to multitask.

Each individual responds differently to his/her own LD and its impact on life. Age of detection may play a part. For example, there is great variance regarding the age when the individual's LD was discovered, the process of diagnosis and assessment; variety of symptoms; the degree of severity; how it was dealt with (through remediation, treatment, support, avoidance, neglect or denial); family, societal, educational responses; successes;

skills or scars incurred over the years. Late diagnosis may mean that not only has the individual not received appropriate support throughout school, but s/he carries a great deal of frustration and anger towards those who did not identify the disability, misjudged his capabilities, and his own missed potential. Diagnosis is often accompanied by relief (that one is not stupid, dumb or lazy) but also with a degree of grief and mourning regarding one's own inadequacy or the ineptness of the system. The later the disability is detected and diagnosed, the rawer and more unprocessed the understanding and acceptance may be, and the less effective the compensations and other coping mechanisms.

As a result, people with LD come to adulthood with vastly different "baggage". Many adults suffer from low self-esteem, and carry a history of difficulty, failure, humiliation, stigma in these areas of their own weakness, beginning from school or even earlier (Bartlett & Moody, 2000; Gabel, 2001; Gerber et al 1992; Miles & Varma, 1995; Reid & Kirk, 2001; Reiff et al, 1997; Shessel & Reiff, 1999). Consequently they may make defeatist, undemanding career choices, which actually lead them to underperform, and as a result, do not achieve great career satisfaction, nor make much of a contribution to society. Conversely, others may exhibit great resilience, determination and confidence, and make challenging and interesting professional choices, in which they overcome difficulties, are successful, fulfilled, and may even make a significant contribution (Adelman & Vogel, 1990; Gerber et al, 1992,1996, 2004; Greenbaum et al, 1996; Hitchings et al, 2001; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002; McLoughlin et al, 2002; Morgan & Klein, 2000; Patton & Polloway, 1992; Price et al, 2003; Reiff et al, 1997; Roffman, 2000; Shessel & Reiff, 1999; Taylor & Walter, 2003; Vinkler, n.d.,Vogel et al, 2005; White, 1992).

Recently, greater understanding of LD at school, remediation, and accommodations which enable pupils with LD to succeed scholastically, have paved the way for them to continue their studies in higher education, and consider a wide range of career choices. The growing awareness that LDs do not end after school but persist throughout the life cycle, is beginning to yield provision of appropriate attention and accommodation at various stages and situations, such as tertiary education and workplace frameworks. The need for support during further or higher education is now accepted in many parts of the world, with disability support services including assistance and accommodations for (invisible) learning disabilities, not only visible physical ones (Vogel et al, 2003). Furthermore, in some countries, it is anchored in legislation. "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual … shall, solely by reason of his/her handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, USA, section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)1990). Legislation also exists in other countries, such as England: Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), and in Israel - Equal Rights Legislation for People with Disabilities, 2007. However, the need to provide support during the more practical sections of training and induction and in the workplace generally, do not seem to be as consistent, firmly established or clearly defined.

Career choice and LD

A recent body of research is emerging also regarding the specific manifestations and impacts of these disabilities in different professions, and the difficulties and unique, valued contributions of people with LDs in each profession, e.g. "Dyslexic doctors: a resource in need of discovery" (Guyer, 1998). Internet searches nowadays supply references to "architects with LD", "law students with LD", "nurses with LD", "medical students with LD", etc, evidence of the fact that people with LDs can and do study and join the whole spectrum of professions, while at the same time evincing a recognition of the need to show consideration for their difficulties and uniqueness. This is still a fledgling area, however –references are made to the fact that knowledge in profession-specific areas is still somewhat lacking, and is often somewhat shrouded in myth and prejudice, with people with LD still regarded as incompetent, severely handicapped and professionally unfit.

There is also a growing interest in research relating specifically to teachers or teacher trainees with LD, largely emanating from England and the US, namely from Anderson et al, 1997; Cain & Riddick, 2001; Duquette, 2000; Ferri et al, 2001, 2005; Gabel, 2001; Gerber, 1992a, 1992b, 1998; Gilbert, 1998; Morgan & Rooney, 1997; Papalia-Berardi et al, 2002; Riddick, 2003; Valle et al, 2004; Vogel, 1998; Vogel & Adelman, 1999; Wertheim et al, 1998. In Israel this research focus (examining various aspects relating to trainees or teachers with LD) is also gradually developing, with material in Hebrew appearing by Avisar, 2005; Gal, 2008; Sharoni & Vogel, 1998; Sharoni, 2002; Vogel & Sharoni, 2004; Wertheim et al 2004 (however, to my knowledge to date, only Avisar and Sharoni relate in Hebrew to actual teacher education processes for trainees with LD).

Currently, appropriate support and accommodation in the workplace are still evolving both in theory and practice, with the dominant social discourse often reflecting a certain skepticism regarding the competence and qualifications of people with LD in the work market. This evolving situation periodically provokes social or professional controversy, raising ethical questions and expressing majority and minority or dominant and "oppressed" social discourse regarding equal opportunities or discrimination, freedom of occupational choice, the competence of people with LD in academic frameworks and in the workplace, their rights and responsibilities, and the rights and responsibilities of academic-training institutions and employers (Bartlett & Moody, 2000; Dudley-Marley, 2003; Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002; Morgan & Klein, 2000; Reid & Kirk, 2001; Vogel et al, 2003).

Indeed, the social discourse and resulting discord and tension between the medical, pathological, deficit-based definition and the cultural/social perception may themselves be either a handicapping or facilitating factor (McLoughlin et al, 2002; Reiff et al, 1997). Dudley-Marling (2004) refers to this as the "in-the-head" perspective (p. 482). Regarding disability discourse and definitions, Ferri et al (2005) caution that language serves to define a culture or group, and can either enhance or limit the group's functioning. Using a disability description derived from a deficit-based medical model may limit and oppress people with LD, whereas a socially-oriented one may be more supportive and liberating, examining or reflecting "the needs of the moment", among other realms, career choice

and opportunities. Looking at the individual holistically, relating to strengths, difficulties and facilitating factors, may enable a "goodness of fit" in career choice.

Nowadays, with freedom of career choice, once an adult has left formal study frameworks (school and further or higher education), they can choose to (almost) completely leave disabling conditions behind, avoid personal difficulties and areas of weakness, and make career choices which draw on strengths, not difficulties or disabilities. The individual may choose to completely liberate themselves from the disabling past and carry on a full and fulfilling life avoiding and bypassing difficulties, or find ways to minimize them, compensate or accommodate them in the workplace, functioning like any other, non-LD person. Thus, in their choice of employment, adults with learning disabilities may virtually put the majority of these disabilities behind themselves, and live full, satisfying lives, achieving their potential and contributing to society, with minimal difficulty.

However, some people with LD choose to make career decisions which actually draw not only on their strengths, but which bring them into frequent contact with their difficulties. This may be because of a desire to help others with difficulties and handicaps, drawing on personal experience, deeper, "insider" understanding of such issues, and a "cathartic", self-healing process. According to Gerber and colleagues (2004), "Moving from the culture of school to the culture beyond school poses an opportunity to 'have LD' or 'not to have LD'. The decision rests with individuals who wish to put the LD experience behind them *or place LD as an integral part of their daily experience, particularly in the workplace*"(p. 290) (italics mine).

Teachers with Learning Disabilities

A person with a learning disability choosing to become a teacher may be likened to someone with an artificial leg choosing to run in a race with 2-legged, able-bodied runners. In both cases, they deliberately confront their disability in extremely difficult circumstances. In both cases, individuals have choices which would allow them to bypass difficulties, and function with impairment which may only slightly inconvenience them. By making this specific choice, they opt to function in situations in which the impairment may constitute a (severe) handicap (ICF, 2001), and where they may be disabled, able, or perhaps even over-able.

The concept of a person with a learning disability training to become a teacher presents six seemingly conflicting social interests.

- the personal right to freedom of occupational choice
- the general or institutional need (in some counties backed by legislation) to follow non-discriminatory practice regarding free and equal access to studies and career choice, for those "otherwise qualified"
- the need to maintain academic and professional standards while offering accommodations
- an expectation from education faculty to model differentiality through teaching and assessing by using varied and alternative methods
- giving academic freedom to faculty in their teaching and assessment
- practicing and modeling inclusion and diversity among teachers, not only learners

- the need to ensure an appropriate, non-prejudicial environment for practical training.

It also sometimes arouses a cognitive dissonance, or provokes prejudice or controversy, with sweeping generalized responses like "how can you be a teacher with such spelling mistakes?"

Rights and responsibilities are not the exclusive province of the institution alone, however – the trainee too is bound by obligations and rights, which in some cases may be at odds with each other, or with the larger institutional issues. Career choice offers adults the opportunity to avoid predictably difficult, stressful situations such as those where an LD may constitute a problem. However, by making a career choice of teaching, they project themselves into a framework which, a priori, will bring them into contact with issues with which they presumably struggled in their past, and which are still likely to handicap (and not merely impair) them in the present.

People with LD, wishing to become teachers, are likely to encounter particular difficulties unique to this very combination -working in a school environment, and having LD. According to Gerber and colleagues (2004) mentioned earlier, the passage from school into adulthood allows people with LD to make choices where their LD may play a greater or lesser part in their functioning, and in the personal and professional identity which develops. Dudley-Marley (2004) further highlights this by pointing out that "the performance of LD requires an institutional framework that assigns particular meanings to students' behaviors that, in other cultural contexts, do no carry the same significance.... it takes a complex system of interactions performed in just the right way, at the right time, on a stage we call school" (p. 484, 489) to construct students as LD. It may seem therefore, that people with LD choosing to become teachers choose to "have LD".

People come to the career of teaching with a seemingly intimate, specific familiarity with the profession. We have all been pupils, for a lengthy period of time, in a variety of situations and with different types of teachers, and as such have certain schemata regarding the functioning of a teacher (or teachers), including critical incidents and critical personalities. Indeed this knowledge is specific, even biased, since it relates to only "one side of the desk" (i.e. from the perspective of the pupil), but the knowledge has been gathered over a long period of time (often longer than 12 years), and is extremely personal – based on completely subjective, individual, ongoing and various experiences with teachers throughout one's own contact with the education system. In this way the career of teaching may be regarded as unique. Regarding prior contact to learning-teaching, compared to other occupations, the contact is far more intense in all senses, and therefore the span of experiences, prior knowledge and expectations are firmly in place before career choice, even if they may not be totally realistic (some tend to glorify and idealize a particular career before embarking on it) (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993). Thus, people's motives for choosing to teach can be regarded as relatively "informed". They are not "ignorant and unskilled as to the mechanics, processes and rules of their place of work" (Knowles, 1992, p. 101).

Many trainees and teachers without LD report their desire to teach as a sense of mission, a desire to help others, to form or inform others, educate and inculcate values, to care for

them and their wellbeing. For some it is a continuation of their own positive previous experiences, having had encouraging, caring, inspiring, nurturing role models. For others it may be the exact opposite – a type of corrective experience counter to the teacher in their own past who struck fear in their heart, who derided, humiliated, ignored, was boring or simply ineffective. Regarding these life events, Korthagen (2004) claims that the way teachers saw their role was to a large extent colored by the events and individuals in their lives.

Many trainees or teachers with LD report the same motives, with even greater fervor in both directions (Duquette, 2000; Ferri et al, 2005; Gabel, 2001; Gerber, 1998; Morgan & Klein, 2004; Reiff et al, 1997; Riddick, 2003; Shessel & Reiff 1999; University of Sunderland, n.d.; Vogel & Adelman, 1999; Vogel et al, 2005; Wertheim et al, 1998). In addition, they hope to be able to share or use their insider perspective to the benefit of pupils who need a different approach, greater empathy and encouragement; someone to believe in them and the legitimacy of their difficulties; feel they have an ability to provide creative, alternative explanations; pinpointing strengths; are wary of not lowering standards and "dummying down" material, possess an ability to explain to colleagues the experiences and feelings of the pupil with LD and advocate for them, and serve as a role model. Additional gains may be more personal - a process of self-learning (both academically and experientially), self-healing, catharsis, a sublimation of their own pain and loss, or a corrective experience.

In the existing literature, many trainees with LD report success at achieving these goals – sometimes, the first wholehearted success they have experienced in their own right. In their own perception, their success is often greater than their non-LD counterparts in certain areas (Anderson et al, 1998; Ferri et al, 2001; Gerber, 1998; Gilbert, 1998; Morgan & Rooney, 1997; Riddick, 2003; University of Sunderland, n.d.). Together with their reported successes, it is also evident (and understandable, but not necessarily condonable) that they may have difficulty in the same realms as they had in the past – spelling, reading, clear handwriting, spatial orientation, organization, mathematics (Cain & Riddick, 2001; Ferri et al, 2005; Gabel, 2001; Gerber,1998; Gilbert, 1998; Karp & Keller, 1998; Riddick, 2003; Wertheim et al, 1998).

Society and Education in Israel

Formal education in Israel begins with early preschool from age 3-4, till matriculation at age 18, and is divided into 4 stages: early childhood (3–6), elementary (7–12), junior high (13–15) and senior high (16–18). It is state funded till 12th grade, (with certain school expenses paid by parents differing at each stage of the pupil's school career), and compulsory until 10th grade. The system is centrally controlled by the Ministry of Education (MOE), teaching a central core curriculum, Ministry-set interim and graduation examinations ("bagrut" or matriculation examinations) and Ministry approved and supervised text books, teaching staff and inspection. The ultra-orthodox Jewish sector and the Israeli-Arab sector each have an adapted curriculum built round the aforementioned core. Public schools are zoned according to residential area, sometimes

including bussing of pupils from a different neighborhood in order to achieve some social integration (or segregation).

Class size both in elementary and high school is relatively large – between 30 and 40, with ability tracking or streaming in several "problematic" subjects (including mathematics and English as a foreign language). Pupils with special needs attend separate schools or are integrated or included into mainstream schools, depending on the severity of the need, the placement committee and the family's preference. In mainstream frameworks the special needs support is not always adequate – since regular classes are large, the class teacher often does not manage to attend to individual needs, and teaching assistants' hours are usually scarce. Pull-out and inclusive support programs exist, but there is a gap between policy and practice in many schools.

The State of Israel has existed for 60 years, with many of the social problems influenced by this "nation in formation". It is made up of a great diversity of inhabitants – it is an immigrant society, and also includes secular and religious, Jewish and Arab populations, each with unique backgrounds and requirements. Within this diversity, there is a strong emphasis on socialization and nurturing of both national and interpersonal ties with manifestations within the school system. Among other expressions of these interpersonal links is the fact that pupils usually call teachers by their first names, or may phone them at home or on their mobile phones to discuss personal issues (newcomers from other countries are often surprised at the informality and lack of "distance" between teacher and pupils in Israeli schools). In addition, during pedagogic meetings, teachers assess pupils not only on their scholastic achievements but also on their social interaction with their peers, their contribution to the social fabric of the class and the school, and their behavior and interactions on school excursions. It is likely that a pupil who is not academically successful may nonetheless be commended for his social initiative, leadership abilities or supportiveness towards another pupil – or the reverse: an academically high achiever may be upbraided for his unfriendly relationships with peers.
The percentage of school leavers who achieve a full matriculation is approximately 70%. Admission to higher education is based on matriculation grades and psychometric scores (similar to the SATs in the USA), with entry requirements varying from institution to institution and from faculty to faculty.

Over the past 25 years or so, there has been a growing awareness of LD in Israel. The first MOE Director General's circular mentioning pupils with LD was issued in 1983, and has subsequently dealt with various definitions of LD, and examination accommodations (initially called "dispensations") (Einat, 2001). In 1997 a committee commissioned by the Ministers of Education and Science, headed by Malka Margalit, issued guidelines for recognition, identification and treatment of LD from preschool to Higher Education, and recommended updated professional specialization for teachers and therapists. By now the Ministry of Education supports children by providing LD assessments and remedial tutoring at the elementary or junior high school level, and implements accommodated matriculation examinations in high school. The MOE Psychological Services website has information (in Hebrew) for teachers, pupils and parents about support and accommodations, as well as the recommendations of the Margalit committee

(http://cms.education.gov.il/educationcms/units/shefi/likuyeylemida/medinyut/. Accessed 28.10.08). Many veteran teachers still lack a full understanding of LD, but current in service and pre-service courses about special needs, especially LD and AD(H)D, are increasing in training and professional development programs. However, this means that adults who are already in the workforce, and young adults who are currently studying in higher education, may not have been identified as LD in the past through limited knowledge within the education system at the time.
Today the knowledge and support are better established in schools, the Ministry and in society at large, to the extent that there is sometimes a tendency to over-diagnose or accommodate, and some children or parents are prepared to go to great (and sometimes costly) lengths to get an assessment in order to have examination accommodations during their studies. In the past 10 years figures of pupils with some kind of LD assessment (thus eligible for examination accommodations) have leapt from 8% to over 22% (personal communication from Yehudit Eldor, Head of the Learning Disabilities Unit within the Psychological Counseling Service in the MOE, 4.11.08). In response to this inflation of assessments, the MOE now requires each assessment to be accompanied by documentation from the pupil's present teachers and school counselor, and is working towards regulation regarding which professionals may perform LD assessments. Eldor strongly endorses the Margalit committee recommendation for all teachers to have a sound knowledge about learning disabilities in order to understand the phenomenon, to identify or distinguish between LD and other problems, and also be able to deal sensitively and take responsibility for assisting these pupils in mainstream classes, in order that they may fulfill their learning potential.

There is also a growing understanding of the fact that LD does not disappear after high school, and consequently, institutions of higher education, (both universities and colleges) provide varying degrees of support and accommodations for students. There is currently a move to anchor this backing in government legislation. In addition, an NGO, Leshem, exists for supervising, implementing and supporting this assistance in vocational and academic training, modeled on support services in many frameworks in the USA and England. Prof. Susan Vogel (of North Illinois University) is one of the people influential in establishing and guiding Leshem's activities. Leyser and colleagues (2003) quote Margalit and colleagues (1997) that 3% of students in higher education in Israel have LD.

An additional element in the socialization of young citizens is compulsory army service (for Jewish citizens). Within the year after graduation, about 70% of young people (male and female) are conscripted to army service (or in the case of religious girls who request an alternative framework, to some form of national service). Not all forms of army service are completely militaristic in nature – some soldiers serve in social or educational capacities, as teachers (for needy soldiers or in civilian frameworks), teacher aids, psychometric assessors, social workers or health care/paramedical assistants. In the army too, a soldier's social interactions carry weight in his/her functioning and level of recognition and appreciation by others, with the ability to give to and assist others being highly rated factors, and essential for operating in stressful situations. Whether service is combat or not, there is scope for gaining life experience in a wide range of realms, many demanding high levels of responsibility and decision-making. Length of service ranges

from one year for national service, to 20 months for most female soldiers, and at least 3 years for males. Thus women are released from the army at approximately age 20, and men around 21, when they may begin embarking on career choices and preparation. In some respects, the period of army service may be compared to a "gap year" that many young people choose to take in other countries – a moratorium, a pause between school and further steps in life, an opportunity for self-discovery and maturation.

Some 30-35% of young people go on to further or higher education following their army service. In some cases, experience gained during their service may influence their choice of career. Israel is a modern country largely influenced by western culture, trends, employment, technology and economy, and career choices are often based on very pragmatic personal considerations of potential earning capacity, with social status being awarded similarly. Teaching, unfortunately, is neither highly paid nor does it hold very high social status, but attempts are periodically made to introduce reforms into the system, intending to benefit both pupils and teachers. At present, there seems to be a drop in registration at teacher education institutions and a lack of teachers in certain subject areas in schools; nonetheless, there are those determined individuals who still join or stay in the profession.

Teacher education in Israel is government supervised. The Ministry of Education and the Council for Higher Education set requirements for admission into these institutions, based on matriculation and psychometric scores. The entrance requirements are not extremely high – students choosing this field compare with the average student at the universities, especially in the fine arts. The basic number of hours of study are stipulated by the Council for Higher Education, but the content and standards of the courses are somewhat determined by each institution. Students may choose to study towards a B.Ed at a college of education (4 years) or study at university in a particular discipline for 3 years, taking a teaching diploma during their last/3rd year of B.A and continue for 1 more year in order to also get a teaching diploma. Unlike USA and England, there are no exit or licensing examinations for teacher trainees or novice teachers. However, the first year in the field is a regarded as a *staj* or internship, during which the new teacher works independently, but is closely supervised by a mentor and assessed on the job according to criteria set by the Ministry, both formatively and summatively by a mentor, colleague, inspector and the school principal, according to standardized assessment criteria stipulated by the MOE.

Those who choose the college programs sometimes have an initial lower academic record than those applying to universities. University prerequisites are determined to an extent by the nature of the course, and by supply and demand, i.e. and the popularity of a course at a given time. Currently the colleges require many more hours of actual supervised teaching practice than the university programs. Requirements for actual teaching at the levels of early childhood, primary and junior high school are a B.A. with a teaching certificate or B.Ed, while high school qualifications are an M.A. (However, in some cases this latter requirement is a formality, often depending on supply and demand).

A beginning teacher's salary is low (approximately $750 p.m.) but is currently undergoing an upgrade. Salary increments may be gained by years of service, professional development courses, and additional duties at school (e.g. being a form teacher, department or grade level coordinator, organizing school excursions or social activities). As mentioned earlier, teachers do not enjoy particularly high social status (Kashti, 2007a). Teaching tends to be a largely female profession, even at high school. The relatively short days, flexible hours and long school vacations make it a convenient profession for mothers with young children, and also enable (and necessitate) teachers to do additional work to supplement the low income.

Some of the common difficulties reported by teachers in the field are large class size (between 30 – 40 pupils per class), great academic and socio-economic heterogeneity, classroom management or discipline issues, violence, lack of adequate support for pupils with diverse needs and lack of adequate training for working with pupils with special needs. There is a high level of attrition and burn-out among teachers, and a dropout rate of 28.1% among first-year teachers (Kashti, 2007b).

Despite these drawbacks, some choose the profession out of a love of young people, or a deep motivation to help, teach, even liberate, others, or to provide the model that they feel they received, or lacked, as pupils. Others, however, possibly choose teaching as a convenient fall-back, to have "just in case", or because they were not accepted into other courses.

Models of training vary to some extent, but at the colleges, students begin guided observation of classroom procedures together with several supervised teaching sessions already in their first year of studies. The curriculum includes many theoretical courses (mainly education-based), pedagogy, deepening discipline/subject-matter knowledge, and also practical elements such as creating teaching resources, writing lesson plans and supervised clinical experience with pedagogical supervisors from the college, and master teachers in the field. By their third year students co-teach with another student or master teacher for 3-4 hours a week in each subject area, either throughout the year or for a concentrated period of time. Their 4th year is their induction year, when they begin working as novice teachers, with a full-time teaching load of between 24 (at junior and high) and 30 (elementary) weekly hours of actual teaching.

Throughout their teaching practice, trainees are accompanied by pedagogic supervisors from the college, or master teachers in school, who assist them in aspects of lesson planning, reflection on delivery, and are present to observe during their actual teaching. This contact is on-going and intense, amounting to several hours a week throughout the year, and (regarding supervisors) sometimes for more than one year. In some cases this develops into an extremely supportive relationship, with trainees sharing issues with their supervisor that go far beyond the demands and difficulties of the classroom, and in other cases there are clashes and unresolved hardships. Contact with the pedagogic supervisor combines both theoretical and practical elements – the supervisor teaches about pedagogy, relates it to the specific school subject/s being taught, helps with lesson

planning, carries out observations in the classroom and provides feedback and elicits guided reflection from the trainee.

For a fair number of those who come to teaching after the army, the experience they have had during their service may also be an influential factor – generally the type and degree of responsibility they undertook may stand them in good stead for the professional decisions and functions they will need, and if they served in an education (or human services) - related capacity, they bring certain skills and field knowledge with them (albeit from a different, authoritarian structure). Some also have been youth leaders of youth movements and organizations, which also provides them with a certain type of experience regarding group management and instruction.

The college in which I work

The College of Education where I work has 2,200 students, offering B.Ed degrees and in-service courses in Early Childhood, Elementary and Junior High School; special needs and regular mainstream classes, as well as specialization in specific subject areas or disciplines. The course of studies lasts 4 years. Within this population some 80 or more students apply each year to the Support Center for Students with Special Needs. A minority have a physical disability (a few students are visually or hearing impaired or in wheelchairs), while the vast majority have LD or AD(H)D assessments and request support ranging from testing accommodations to mediation with faculty, learning strategies, general help and sympathy, or study-mentor assistance. The Support Center is staffed only by the director/coordinator (myself).

The students' disabilities cover the whole LD and AD(H)D spectrum, and range from mild to more severe – auditory processing, non-verbal, visual-spatial, word recall, language-based, mathematical, organization, attention and concentration disorders. Some were diagnosed and remediated early in their school careers, and have developed a repertoire of strategies to overcome, bypass or compensate for their disability. Others were diagnosed towards the end of their schooling or even later, and may still be processing the implications, not yet having set in place effective coping skills. In practice, some have difficulty with spelling in their mother tongue, reading aloud, reading lengthy academic articles, note taking during lectures, separating main and subsidiary ideas, expressing themselves clearly in academic writing, learning a foreign language, sustaining attention during lectures, and some do not always feel confident about tackling the variety of academic and practical tasks. On the other hand, many seem to do well "on-the-job", maybe better than in the academic framework. They often show a high level of determination and dedication to their pupils, pleasure at planning interesting teaching activities, some prepare extremely creative, unusual teaching aids, suggest alternative ways to teach, and exhibit a high tolerance and empathy for the "different" child in class.

My work

My current work, as director/coordinator of the support services for students with special needs at a college of education, brings me into contact with teacher trainees with LD who approach the support center for assistance. I interview each of the students applying for

support, and follow them through their studies and teaching practice, matching the assistance to their requests and type of difficulty.

Students may self-refer or are sometimes referred by faculty, if they have difficulty with their studies or in their teaching practice. Some may have already been diagnosed and wish to receive accommodations during their studies or for examinations, others need ongoing support in the form of individual consultations, a mentor, learning strategies workshops or mediation with faculty. Others have not yet been diagnosed and do not understand the nature of their difficulties, or suspect a disability and request a referral to diagnosis.

At times, faculty members (both academic and pedagogic supervisors) may approach me and express concern about a particular student's functioning or request advice on how to help a student who has asked for accommodations or revealed certain difficulties. In the course of my work and research I have also encountered a range of responses from education faculty, school inspectors, supervisors, teachers and lay people who express concern or prejudice about people with LD being teachers. I am sometimes called upon to advocate for trainees with LD, and defend their right to freedom of professional choice. However, situations may also arise when it seems that a student (with or without LD) has made an inappropriate career choice, and although academically he or she may be coping with material and coursework, in the field this person is unsuited to the rigors of the profession, and should be counseled to examine other options, or at least a different aspect of teaching.

In addition to working with trainees with LD from various departments, I myself am a teacher educator in the English department of the college, teaching EFL courses and acting as pedagogic supervisor. I have taught English in schools for over 30 years, and within the school system have also served as mentor, supervisor and department head, bringing me in touch with large numbers of veteran and novice teachers in the field. I have planned and given in-service training and professional development programs, and have also been responsible for hiring (and firing) teachers, and working with school inspectors, principals, parents and pupils. In certain circumstances I have been called upon to guide a faltering teacher who has not shown mastery of subject matter or pedagogic methodology, at other times I have needed to defend a teacher in the face of criticism from parents, colleagues or a school principal. Although I am not teaching in school at present, I am well and practically acquainted with the needs and quirks of school pupils of different ages, and the interface between them and their teachers.

Additionally, I participate in a think-tank on teacher trainees with LD at the Mofet institute for R&D in teacher education, and am active in a non-profit organization Leshem for students with LD in Higher Education.

Anecdotally, I can report having heard comments from teachers and others such as
-"A teacher with a learning disability? You mean – like revenge on the system?" (a school principal, father of a boy with LD and ADHD)
-"With all her spelling mistakes – how can she teach?" (a parent)
-"Have you seen his worksheets, what a mess they are? What can he teach my child?" (a parent)

-"Teachers with LD – no wonder schools in are such a bad state! Does the Ministry know about this?" (a secretary working in the Ministry of Education)
-"Someone with LD, who can't spell or read aloud, shouldn't be allowed into a kindergarten" (early childhood teacher trainer).

In position papers about students with special needs in teacher training institutions, presented by a think-tank team of the Mofet Institute for R&D in Teacher Education, headed by Sharoni (2002) and the Deans' Forum at Mofet (2001) it is acknowledged that there is to date a dearth of research on people with special needs in education and teaching. Sharoni and colleagues recommend following graduates with special needs to find out what kind of assistance helped them in their studies and teaching practice. I would hope that data gained in this research, in the trainees' own words, will make a contribution in this direction, following not only their stated needs but more broadly the ways they perceive the impacts of LD on their professional functioning.

With my solid appraisal of the field from several angles, together with a concern for upholding professional standards, I am interested in examining the functioning and needs of trainees with LD, specifically from my dual vantage point as both teacher educator and service provider.

Research questions/issues

In what ways are teacher trainees with LD influenced by their disability, and how can this data be used in the field?
What are the autobiographical memories of trainees with LD? How do they impact on their teaching?
What influenced their career choice?
How do they perceive of themselves, with LD, in the field?
How do they cope with their LD?
What implications may be gleaned from this data for teacher training and induction into the field?

I seek to learn about trainees with LD's memories and feelings about themselves with LD throughout school and other frameworks, degree of LD awareness in their environment, assessment-related factors, significant incidents and people in their past; factors influencing their career choice, how they perceive the positive and negative impacts of their LD in their teaching practice, coping strategies which they used to deal with their difficulties and requests or recommendations to the college, and how they perceive of themselves as teachers with LD.

Method

Population - trainees
Teacher trainees were selected from a pool of approximately 80 students with LD who had approached the support center for assistance. The choice of participants was made

with a view to purposive sampling – taking as diverse a representation as possible from within the population of trainees with LD at the particular institution. Selection criteria were: both males and females, all with an assessment, from 2nd year and up (thus having some experience in teaching practice), and from a representation of different study specializations. (Of the students approached, only one declined to take part, claiming to be too busy. The rest agreed willingly, many with great eagerness to share their stories, and interest in the research.)

Ten students of education were interviewed - 7 females, 3 males; 3 studying in 2nd year, 5 in 3rd year, one in 4th year and one in an academic retraining program, all towards a B.Ed. Three specialize in early childhood, one in elementary, 2 in junior high, 3 in special education or inclusion in mainstream education, two in English, and one in history. (Some specializations are combined e.g. early childhood and special education, therefore the number is greater than 10). They have all been formally diagnosed with one or more kinds of LD or behavioral disorder– 8 with language-based difficulties, 5 with attention deficits, one with dyscalculia, one with ODD (oppositional defiant disorder). All are involved in teaching practice at the time of the interviews, and can therefore report on the impact of their LD in the field (as well as in their studies), and coping strategies which they employ.

Teacher trainee research participants

name	**Male / female**	**age**	**year**	**course**	**First diagnosis**	**Self-described disability**
Barry	m	25	3	Special education, English	Childhood/ 2nd year college	LD, ADHD
Dan	m	27	3	Early childhood	Post high school	LD
Kate	f	27	retraining	English	Age 4 (several subsequent)	ADHD, ODD, LD
Mary	f	25	2	Junior high history, special education/ inclusion	Elementary school	LD
Maya	f	24	3	Elementary	Junior high	LD
Neta	f	24	2	Early childhood	11th grade	LD (ADHD reported, not diagnosed)
Nora	f	25	3	Special education, severe	college	LD ? ADHD

				handicaps		
Odelia	f	24	2?	Junior high, inclusion	Elementary school, subsequent	LD
Terry	f	26	2	Early childhood, special education	11th grade	LD, ADHD, *childhood health problem*
Tom	m	30	4	Anthroposophy, early childhood	Post high school	dyscalculia

Population – pedagogic supervisors or master teachers

Each participant will be asked to choose a pedagogic supervisor or master teacher with whom they have worked closely, to be interviewed about their impressions of the trainee. Some trainees choose to disclose their disability to their supervisor or master teacher, others do not, therefore it is necessary to proceed with sensitivity and discretion, and to ask each trainee to choose which supervisor or master teacher to interview, and whether they have disclosed. Although this choice is likely to be motivated by a desire to appear favorably, the questionnaire is structured and uniform, thus presumably yielding an objective picture. Elbaz-Luwisch supports such a choice (1997)

"We know that if you want to work with people and for change, you have to begin from their strengths, from a positive point of view. The researcher has to balance the desire for inclusiveness against complex pragmatic and interpersonal consideration. This may create a view of the teacher that appears idealized; it does not necessarily g\follow that the teachers' voices have been 'selectively appropriated' " (p. 80).

Interviews

The interviews with the trainees took place at the college, in a quiet, empty room near the support center office, conducted only by me. A time was chosen convenient to each participant. Follow-up interviews were conducted to cover issues not dealt with in the first interview. Names were changed to protect confidentiality. The participants were told that I was undertaking some research about teacher trainees with LD, and were asked to tell about themselves, speaking freely and associatively, choosing their own topics, chronology and issues, relating to themselves with LD or not. Each initial interview lasted approximately one hour. During the interview or in a follow-up interview, after analysis of the data, additional questions were asked.

The interviews with the trainees were recorded in Hebrew (except for the one English native speaking student), using a digital recorder, and transcribed by an independent scribe. Each participant was asked for consent to use and publish the data. They were given a copy of the transcribed interview for comment and revision.

The topics which I was particularly interested in were their descriptions of their experiences and feelings with LD at school and in other areas, significant teachers (both positive and negative), other significant related events, when they were diagnosed and

their feelings about this, their reasons for choosing to become teachers, their experiences throughout their training with special reference to their teaching practice and manifestations of their LD during practical work, degree of self awareness, difficulties, strengths, coping strategies, faculty attitudes and their requests from the college.

The interviews with the pedagogic supervisors will take place at a later date and the data will be analyzed qualitatively, correlated one-to-one with the trainees' self-perceptions. They will be given a structured, checklist type questionnaire which serves the MOE to assess all novice teachers, which will be followed by an open question about their impressions of the trainee's functioning during teaching practice, and whether they have noticed any unique qualities in the trainee. This will preferably be conducted as a short face to face interview.

Research approach

The research approach adopted here is qualitative, using a narrative analysis of participants' life stories, with the analysis conducted using grounded theory, building up emergent concepts and relations in the process of analyzing the life stories (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). I am interested in inductively following the emergence of new connections and other data, to generate a theoretical framework to understand the impacts of a person's lived experiences with LD on their career choice and professional functioning, as well as their needs during their practical training. To strengthen the impressions and theories generated, the trainees' stories will be triangulated with the impressions and assessment from their pedagogic supervisors or master teachers.

Triangulation

In order to triangulate the subjective information from these trainees' narratives regarding their functioning in the field, their pedagogical supervisors will also be interviewed. A standardized questionnaire checklist will be given to the supervisors to assess the skills and qualities demonstrated by the trainee, and to the trainees as well in order to check the match between their perception and their supervisor. Different checklists exist for early childhood teachers, elementary and junior – senior high school, and will be administered according to the trainee's level of teaching practice. The questionnaire is in use with the MOE to assess all novice teachers' functioning during their induction (*staj*) year, and as such relates to the skills and qualities that are perceived as relevant in the Israeli classroom and school system. A further open-ended question can be added orally, regarding the general impression formed about the trainee, without at any time referring deliberately to LD, but rather during analysis, extrapolating this from the supervisor's responses. The supervisors' responses will be compared to the responses of the trainees or to their self-perceptions in their narratives, in order to add an extra dimension regarding the accuracy of their self-awareness generally and self-assessment on the professional level, and to reinforce the possibility to learn about the needs and functioning of trainees and possible changes in training.

Data collection and analysis
Each trainee's interview was transcribed by an independent scribe, read and re-read, and analyzed for content, paying attention to categories which emerge from the participants' narratives, as well as to linguistic devices (vivid and figurative language, emotive expressions, repetitions or hesitations). The interviews were read, coded for concepts, compared to each other to begin generating certain basic units for theory building, creating of categories, and evolving propositions showing relationships between categories and their concepts, and between categories.

A computer software program, Narralizer, was used to organize the trainees' data. (www.narralizer.com. Accessed 3.11.08). This software is ideally suited to manage databases and build grounded theories, allowing for coding, memoing and categorization in a simple, efficient and speedy manner, while also enabling change and addition as the need arises.

The interviews with the pedagogical supervisors will be based on an existing questionnaire, validated and used by the MOE to assess novice teachers both formatively and summatively. They will serve a one-to-one comparative purpose, relating to the subjective perceptions and spontaneous reflections of the individual trainee, tallied with the standardized and objective observations of the supervising teacher or mentor, and the correlation between them. The emergent match or mismatch may reveal information about the current or future functioning of the trainee, as well as attitudes and expectations held by supervising teachers, whether they know about the trainee's LD or not.

Researcher status
My status as researcher is a multi-layered one, positioning me somewhere between outsider and insider, objective interviewer, professional teacher educator, and committed service provider. The student participants all know me as the director of the support services at the College of Education, and have already received assistance through me. (I do not perceive them as beholden to me, i.e. they have already received the support which they requested; receipt of support is not linked to whether they agree to participate in my research, nor to the nature of their information. Furthermore, they do not receive grades from me). In addition to coordinating support for students with special needs, I teach courses and work as a teacher educator in one of the departments at the same college – two of the student participants studied with me in the past. However, the focus of this study is not my action but the students' perceptions and actions, therefore it seems to me that my degree of participation is marginal, aligning my status closer with that of an objective observer than a participant.

Additionally, I bring other experience and insight (dealing with upholding professional standards while also catering to different needs) as a mainstream school teacher, department head at school, in-service teacher supervisor and pre-service pedagogic educator. In this capacity I perhaps have vested though conflicting interests – to assure that the students get a fair chance to acquire their profession of choice, but simultaneously assuring too that academic and professional teaching standards are upheld

with integrity. I am aware of the delicate balance between individual and institutional rights and responsibilities.

Moreover, as a parent to a young adult with LD, I am aware that I may carry certain (semi)-insider biases, sensitivities and insights too. Although my son periodically reminds me that I can never really know how he felt at school, I do think that, thanks to him, I have gained a certain perspective lacking to someone who has not lived with another person with LD. Being aware of all this, I attempt to conduct this research, to use this knowledge with sensitivity and empathy, but not to be blind to the needs of maintaining standards with integrity.

Rationale for research approach

Since individuals' feelings, perceptions and identities are the underpinning of the study, it seems highly appropriate to approach the gathering of data through a humanistic-sociological, ethnographic, qualitative approach, initially using the (personal, subjective) life stories of the trainees themselves. As Burgess (1985), Ghesquière and colleagues (2004), Denzin & Lincoln (1998) and Fine (1998) point out, qualitative research is a tool for examining social processes and meanings – to see how individuals attribute meanings to social processes; a tool to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them; researching for social change. Goodley (2004) calls this making the strange familiar, Atkinson (1998) – making the implicit explicit. In other words, it is a process which enables the researcher / audience to see into Others' natural, human realms, be exposed to Others' perspectives and perceptions, their hurts and happiness, congruencies and incongruencies, successes and failures, in their own right, often with the intent of change and betterment or emancipation from minority inferiority.

Lieblich (1998) explains that the interest of narrative research is in the behavior of humans, while its goal is to predict and control, to explore and understand the inner world of individuals. One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world of individuals is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality - people's identity and personality. Stories simultaneously imitate and reflect life and present an inner reality to the outside world, while shaping and constructing the narrator's personality and reality. The story *is* one's identity; it is created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know and discover ourselves and reveal ourselves to others by the stories that we tell. Atkinson (1998) enumerates the qualities and processes of the life story: we increase our working knowledge of ourselves therefore we discover deeper meaning in our lives through the process of reflecting. We make our lives coherent, understandable and meaningful. Our lives consist of a series of events that are drawn from experiences that are common to all human beings, so in the process of telling, we understand our own path, learning something new about ourselves we also share important personal truths as we see them, and in doing so create vital links with those who participate in the exchange.

There is a personal power in not only telling but retelling, or composing and recomposing, recasting and reframing one's own story and especially in getting to one's deeper or larger story. It is a way to let people's voices be heard, to let them speak for and about themselves from a vantage point that allows them to see and express their life as a whole, subjectively. It enables one to be heard, recognized and acknowledged by others. Moving from an inward focus outward, sharing one's story, can also create a sense of community, where we learn that we have more in common with others than we think and can develop a group identity and group voice (see below regarding disability discourse). This in turn may allow one to be an inspiration to help not only oneself but others too to change. It has an emancipatory element (Butt et al, 1992). And finally, by understanding our past and present we clarify our perspective on goals for the future (relevant, among other issues, for career choice).

This study examines three overlapping social strands – living with LD, factors influencing career choice, and the experiences of teacher trainees with LD. In each of these fields the use of qualitative research has become acceptable not only in understanding phenomena, but also in shaping policy and governance. It has become increasingly common to encourage such people to give voice to their unique issues, to tell *their* stories in *their own* voice and not that of the researcher, with regard to subjective, lived human issues and not as (mere) objective statistics, and thus my choice – the use of the narrative, life stories.

Narrative in disability discourse

Qualitative research has a commitment to represent the actions of the relatively unknown, perhaps oppressed and ignored insiders of a given social group (Goodley, 2004). These social groups are frequently discriminated-against minorities, whose narratives express their unheard voices (Lieblich, 1998). Their stories may be educative for them as members of a specific knowledge community, sharing a common conceptual framework and a common language for talking about their experiences (Anderson 1997). Beyond strengthening individual identity and bonding in-group solidarity, the commonality of group stories may also serve to inform and alert the outsiders, those in the privileged, dominant culture, those who previously conducted the authoritative discourse, the prevailing cultural scripts, the Grand Narrative, and aid them in developing insight into a counter-culture and alternative discourse. Life story research " illuminates … power as imbued in the representation of realities in a narrative… (it) raise(s) voices to the fore, out of the hidden cultures, into the (supposedly) hallowed arena of research text" (Goodley, 2004, p. 90).

One such group that has been "oppressed and ignored" (Goodley), or "frequently discriminated-against" (Lieblich) is people with Learning Disabilities. Within the broader society, people with handicaps are often an underprivileged, marginalized group – how much more so those with an *invisible* disability like LD which often opens them to suspicion and criticism of posing and pretending? In fact, due to its invisibility and often inconsistent manifestations, and a degree of mystification surrounding it, disclosure (talking about one's "dyslexic self") has been likened to "coming out of the closet", similar to the process and status of homosexuals (Valle et al, 2004).

Telling about LD as an insider enables the individual with the disability to develop this alternative discourse, to inspect, reframe, challenge, accept or reject (fully or partially), the external, outsider definitions and assignments regarding LD. Ferri and colleagues (2005) point out that "LD cannot be known outside of the person who experiences it; to create meaning requires engagement with another. LD cannot be known as an abstract, disembodied construct, divorced from lived experience" (p. 75). Therefore by telling non-LD Others their lived experience with LD, these people both consolidate their own identity and act as mediators or emissaries for the outsiders. By telling to others with LD, they enable a sharing, comparing and modeling for people with similar problems.

Narrative in teacher education

Regarding teacher training, according to Atkinson (1998) narrative can inform approaches to teaching and learning, provide opportunities for deepened relationships with others, springboards for ethical action, new insights, compassionate judgment, the creation of shared knowledge and meanings that can inform professional practice, an expanded vision of responsibility as a professional, understanding moral identity, and illustrating possibilities for human action and feeling. Butt and colleagues (1992) develop the use of biography and giving voice, claiming that relations between insiders and outsiders constitute a learning enterprise, power and emancipation, and can represent both the unique individual and the collective voice characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups. Indeed, what is true of teachers as a group is true of other groups too. Doyle (1997) sees narrative as a means of generating knowledge about the phenomena of teaching and the preparation of teachers. He states that "scientific communities prize 'truths' as the most important outcome of inquiry; in education these truths have been used for prescribing practices and judging the adequacy of what teachers do. But practice seems to defy both universalistic understanding and extrinsic regulation" (p. 93). Therefore he recommends narrative as a source of knowledge about teaching and teacher education, a powerful pedagogical tool for capturing aspects of teaching and the image of teachers; in ascertaining how they understand their work. He advises seeking not an objective truth, but an understanding about teaching and teachers, using shared understanding from the impressions of insiders.

Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) proposes that through narrative research one may "gain increased understanding of the multitude of meanings that are created by practitioners and by researchers worming together, and to thereby empower all the participants in the process. This empowerment, in turn, will inevitably bring about changes in schooling, but the changes cannot be foreseen in advance, and are not in themselves goals of the narrative process" (p. 78). She also points out that narrative research "constitutes an alternative way of conceptualizing human nature", which ties in well also with emancipatory issues.

Doyle (1997) also points out that the subtleties and nuances of teaching can only be known through story, i.e. through rendering of the events within which teachers, students and curriculum are mutually engaged, story gives provisional models which teachers can use to comprehend situations or episodes and invent locally effective interventions. Anderson (1997) describes an insider-outsider discourse – "teachers inhabit and operate within professional knowledge landscapes which ... contain the knowledge derived from teachers' experience and expressed in practice. On these landscapes teachers learn how to think

and act in particular ways, typically ways that are sanctioned by people in the 'conduit' (policy makers, teachers, teacher educators and administrators)" (p. 131). The conduit supplies the information and policy, a 'rhetoric of conclusions' – abstract, non-grounded conclusions and political implications torn from their historical narrative contexts, while professional knowledge landscapes are best understood by concrete stories which teachers live and tell. Sacred stories, those taken for granted, are dominant in teacher education programs, passed on from generation to generation, but they need to be countered by competing or conflicting stories, generated by teachers but not for the benefit of the conduit, and which may either engender discussion or cause uncertainty and distress.

Studying teachers lives (through their own stories) should "represent an attempt to generate a counter-culture which will resist the tendency to 'return teachers to the shadows'; a counter-culture based upon a research mode that above all takes teachers seriously and seeks to listen to 'the teacher's voice' ...(heard, heard loudly, heard articulately)" (Goodson, 1992, p. 10). Furthermore, all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate (much like the demands of people with LD and other counter-cultures). McEwan (1997) follows this by highlighting the multi-function of narratives in education – they are both coercive and emancipatory. Coercive narratives inhibit thought and constrain belief to those values that are often held by established or dominant communities, unexamined assumptions, prejudices; controlling behavior, belief and values, which persuade us to do nothing differently. Emancipatory narratives free our thought from the oppressive grasp of conformity, express new meanings, give expression to personal experience, are process oriented, inform social values, generate emotions, shape moral outlook, express an ethics of caring, connectedness and collaboration.

Kelchtermans (2005) suggests that teachers' reflection cannot confine itself to a technical and instrumental effort of linking means to ends, assessing mainly "performativity" but has to include the moral, emotional and political aspects of teaching as well as the beliefs and representations teachers have about themselves and teaching. Finally, Ghesquière and colleagues (2004) note that the richness of qualitative case studies captures the complexity of school and classroom practice, shows the complex connections amongst diverse factors, and provides explanations at different levels (e.g. the teacher, the pupil, the classroom, the school and its context). It provides the necessary thick descriptions that allow the reader to transfer the results of one study to other particular situations, also providing external validity, contributing to theories about educational innovation, and perhaps constitutes a starting point for specific measures to optimize changes in teaching.

Narrative in career choice

The final strand of this study is the use of narrative to examine and clarify career choice. Christensen and Johnston (2003) claim that clients who approach a career counselor hold stories that they themselves are trying to live out in the world of work, and that the process of this counseling is to focus on assessing the vocational identity, identifying occupations that will be a good fit for the client's identity (regarded as an objective career), and to examine the client's own perspective of what a career may look like (subjective career). A career narrative is the story that connects the protagonist's past to the present, conveying how the protagonist came to be what he/she is presently, and what

future is expected for him/her to enact based on his or her particular past and present being.

Riessman (1993) says that individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives. They narratize particular experiences in their lives, often when there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society. A primary way individuals make sense of experience is by casting it in narrative, especially difficult life transitions and trauma. Choosing a career is one of the identities that people assume, and a successful choice will have extremely significant ramifications regarding the individual's self-perception.

Unfortunately, one of the less controllable, yet extremely powerful supporting or hindering components is social perceptions of people with LD at work, and particularly of teachers or trainees with LD. I can report having heard comments from school principals, school inspectors, teachers and parents voicing suspicion, antagonism and doubt regarding the worthiness and competence of people with LD as teachers. When dominant social discourse is negative, judgmental and stigmatizing, this needs to be addressed in order to facilitate the individual's full professional functioning and in order to allow the education system to reap the full benefits which may be forthcoming. Developing tools and enlightened discourse to counteract this prejudice is vital to enhance the success of adults with LD in their career paths.

Combining three strands – the person with LD, teacher trainee, and a person's career choice and aspirations – gives even greater weight to the use of life story as a mode of research and an ability to see into the workings of both mind and heart.

Expected outcomes

Based on incidental discussions with trainees with LD, and from intuitive expectations, I would hope to learn about unique abilities which these students perceive in their teaching thanks to their LD. I hope too that they are able to identify natural supports and facilitators to help them cope with impacts of their LD, and offer concrete suggestions for improving or shaping the training provided by teacher education frameworks.

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