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Examining the Lived Experience of Students with Reading Comprehension Learning

Disabilities and the Perceived Value of the Accommodations Received

by

Katie M. Dodge

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education

_____
Ron Opp, Ph.D., Committee Chair

_____
Cynthia Beekley, Ed.D.

_____
Penny Poplin Gosetti, Ph.D.

_____
Richard Welsch, Ph.D.

_____
Patricia R. Komuniecki, Ph.D., Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

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An Abstract of

Examining the Lived Experience of Students with Reading Comprehension Learning
Disabilities and the Perceived Value of the Accommodations Received at a Midwestern
Community College

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Students with learning disabilities, including a reading comprehension learning

disability, are attending higher education institutions at an increasing rate. As a result,

higher education institutions will need to be prepared to accommodate these students,

especially with those accommodations perceived as most valuable by the students who

use them. This phenomenological study gave a voice to the lived experiences of eight

Midwestern community college students diagnosed with a reading comprehension

learning disability. Interviews with these students identified the perceived value of the

accommodations they receive and how these accommodations contribute to their self-

efficacy and perceptions of academic success. Study conclusions will provide

institutions of higher education with knowledge as to the accommodations students

diagnosed with a reading comprehension learning disability perceive as most valuable

to their academic success.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

Federal legislation has made it possible for greater numbers of students with learning disabilities to enroll in higher education institutions (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005; Hadley, 2007; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Rath & Royer, 2002; Runyan, 1991; Scott, 1997). These legislative acts include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. These acts have made it possible for qualified students with disabilities to receive accommodations in higher education institutions.

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding faculty perspectives on providing accommodations to students with learning disabilities (Cress, 2008; Leyser & Greenberger, 2008; Runyan, 1991; Scott, 1997; Skinner, 2007). Although the aforementioned acts require accommodations for higher education students with learning disabilities, research indicates educators have implemented these accommodations with reservation out of concern that accommodations will compromise the academic integrity of their program, college, or university (Cress, 2008; Leyser & Greenberger, 2008; Runyan, 1991; Scott, 1997; Skinner, 2007).

There are eight distinct areas in which students with a learning disability can be categorized. The categories include: Oral expression, Written expression, Listening comprehension, Basic reading skills, Reading fluency skills, Reading comprehension, Mathematics calculation, and Mathematics problem solving (IDEA, 2004). Currently, there is a deficit in research specific to the reading comprehension learning disabled

1

population in higher education. Surprisingly little research exists concerning the viewpoints of higher education students with learning disabilities regarding the accommodations they receive (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005; Hitchings et al., 2001; Kurth & Mellard, 2006). What research there is uses a quantitative approach to the types and frequency of accommodations used; it does not investigate the lived experience of students with learning disabilities on higher education campuses. Quantitative data collected on this population provides information concerning different facets of the education experience of students with learning disabilities. However, quantitative data does not provide the rich detail regarding students' perceptions, feelings, and experiences as it relates to having a learning disability and attending a higher education institution.

Higher education institutions need to be prepared to effectively educate students with learning disabilities as they will continue to see increasing numbers of these students on campus. A deeper understanding of students with a reading comprehension learning disability in higher education will help inform college offices of disability services regarding the accommodations these students perceive to be most valuable. Gaining the perspectives of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities can help lead "to an understanding of individuals with disabilities" (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, p.196) so that they may receive better services. By conducting qualitative, phenomenological research, this researcher will focus on giving a voice to "people who have been historically silenced or marginalized" (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 199).

This study examines the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and the students' perceived value of the accommodations they receive at a two-year community college. This study also explores how these accommodations contribute to the self-efficacy of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and whether accommodations contribute to their perceptions of academic success.

Background of the Problem

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was passed. This law ensured that students with disabilities in primary grades through high school had access to schools with accommodations (Lerner, 2003). EAHCA was updated on three occasions: as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, the IDEA of 1997, and as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (also known as IDEA 2004). IDEA 2004 ensures that students aged 3-21 have access to free and appropriate education, regardless of their disability. As federal law, educational institutions in all states must comply with the act's guidelines (Lerner, 2003).

Another major act to change the field of higher education for individuals with disabilities was the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities and ensures "equal opportunity in employment, state and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 41). The ADA also protects adults with disabilities in educational settings by ensuring that students with disabilities have access to accommodations at higher

education institutions. Recent revisions to the definition of disability changed the name of this law to the ADA Amendments Act of 2008.

In 1998, the Assistive Technology Act was passed as a revision of the 1988 Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act. The goal of this law was to provide access to assistive technology for individuals with disabilities (Bryant & Seay, 1998; DePoy & Gilson, 2004). Assistive technology is defined as "devices or services [that] allow users to develop compensatory skills so that disabilities in a particular area (e.g., reading, writing) can be bypassed and material becomes accessible that could not have been accessed previously" (Bryant & Seay, 1998, p. 4; as cited in Bryant, Rivera, & Woodman, 1998). Bryant and Seay (1998) state "many children and adults with LD [learning disabilities] can benefit from AT [assistive technology] devices and services in school and in the workplace" (p. 9). Depoy and Gilson (2004) believe "assistive technology has the capacity to render the atypical as typical" (p. 40). Examples of assistive technology used with students with learning disabilities include "word processors with spell checking, proofreading, abbreviation expanders and outlining software programs. Also available are variable speech-control tape recorders, [and] optical character recognition systems" (Day & Edwards, 1996, p. 486).

IDEA 2004, ADA, and the Assistive Technology Act make it possible for students with disabilities to have equal access to education as non-disabled students. Through these legislative acts, it has become a federal mandate that higher education institutions provide accommodations to students with disabilities. Some higher education institutions accommodate students with learning disabilities by asking them

to choose from a list of available accommodations, while others provide accommodations based on a student's specific needs and educational goals, therefore creating individualized plans (Kurth & Mellard, 2006).

Research indicates that students are most often diagnosed with learning disabilities in the area of reading comprehension, one of the eight learning disability categories (Stanovich, 1999). A reading comprehension learning disability impacts the student's ability to understand and internalize information that is read, regardless of the subject area (Lerner, 2003). Simmons and Singleton (2000) explain reading comprehension further, stating:

> To understand sentences, one must be able to syntactically process them (identify the linguistic structures), and then infer the meaning from the linguistic and non-linguistic context. One must then integrate the sentence meanings to produce a coherent picture of the situation they describe (p. 180).

Without accommodation, reading comprehension learning disabilities make comprehension difficult and school a challenge.

Statement of the Problem

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities may not receive the accommodations they perceive to be the most valuable at higher education institutions. Researchers have studied faculty perspectives and student perspectives on accommodations, but the perspectives of students with a reading comprehension learning disability have yet to be researched. Researchers have also not interviewed this population to determine how the accommodations they receive contribute to their self-efficacy and to their perceptions of academic success. Through this phenomenological research, a lens will be provided to help understand the world as seen by the respondents. The researcher can understand and capture the points of view

of other people without predetermining those points of view. This study provides a new perspective on accommodations to fill a substantial gap in the research literature on the reading comprehension learning disabled population.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to give a voice to the lived experience of students with a reading comprehension learning disability. In sharing their lived experience, this "qualitative research contributes to the fields of special education and disability studies by capturing involved people's perspectives and by adding to our understanding of discourses that shape social life in schools and society" (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 202). Additionally, this research aims to determine what accommodations students perceive to be most valuable, how accommodations contribute to student self-efficacy, and how accommodations contribute to student perceptions of academic success. The data gathered from this study will enable offices of disability services in higher education institutions to put the most valuable accommodation policies and practices in place for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Research Questions

1. What is the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college?

2. What accommodations do students with reading comprehension learning disabilities perceive to be most valuable at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college?

3. Why do students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college perceive these accommodations to be the most valuable?

4. How do these accommodations contribute to students' self-efficacy?

5. How do these accommodations contribute to students' perception of academic success?

Significance of the Study

The data gathered in this study provides offices of disability services within higher education with student perceptions of the most valuable accommodations, self-efficacy, and academic success. Offices of disability services can use this data to evaluate accommodation policies, practices, and procedures for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Currently, research involving higher education students with reading comprehension learning disabilities is inadequate and insufficient. This study will help to fill in this research gap. From this research, educators and disability service providers will be better informed regarding the perceptions of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities in regards to the accommodations they perceive as most valuable and how these accommodations contribute to student self-efficacy and academic success at one community college. Understanding student perceptions will help educators and disability service providers to understand the experience of being a student with a reading comprehension learning disability.

Midwestern Community College

A Midwestern community college under the pseudonym King Community College was chosen as the location for this study, as the research shows many students with a learning disability attend a two-year junior, vocational, or community college to obtain a two-year degree or before entering a four-year institution (Finn, 1999;

7

McCleary-Jones, 2007). Finn (1999) suggests this is due to the fact that "two-year institutions often provide a wide range of services to address the underprepared learner" (p. 630).

King Community College serves approximately 12,000 students, roughly 300 of whom (2.5%) self-identify as having a learning disability (C. Monroe, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Currently, data on the percentage of students at King Community College with a reading comprehension learning disability are unavailable.

King Community College is located in close proximity to the researcher, allowing for easy access to participants for this study and a flexible interview schedule.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory analyzes people's interpretation of their well-being, motivation, and accomplishments (Bandura, 1995). Bandura and Adams (1977) contend that "perceived self-efficacy affects people's choice of activities and behavioral settings, how much effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (pp. 287-288). Self-efficacy theory has four components from which self-efficacy is developed: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy is a key component to being successful in life. Having a greater sense of self-efficacy allows individuals to accomplish more concrete and difficult goals, to be resilient in the face of failure, and to remain motivated (Bandura, 1995).

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities often struggle in the face of adversity. They have difficulty comprehending what they have read in all

subject areas. Using Bandura's self-efficacy theory in this study will determine if students with reading comprehension learning disabilities perceive that the accommodations they receive contribute to their self-efficacy.

Limitations

King Community College is the only institution that was used in this research study. The findings represent only those students with a reading comprehension learning disability at King Community College who participated in this study. The participants are not representative of all students with reading comprehension learning disabilities; therefore, the results are not representative of every student with a reading comprehension learning disability at every community college.

The researcher believes this is an important study, but she may have biases due to her career. She is an elementary educator who has taught special education and general education classes, and many of her students are diagnosed with reading comprehension learning disabilities. Her professional work experience brings with it some preconceived notions regarding how students with reading comprehension learning disabilities learn and comprehend and what accommodations are most valuable and efficacious. These preconceived notions could influence the researcher to probe the participants with questions regarding the accommodations she feels are the most valuable in an effort to ensure agreement.

Another limitation of this study is the assumption that participants will share their honest, lived experience, which may not be the case if they are guarded, indifferent, or afraid to disclose. This is a limitation because the data used in this study

is participant feedback; if participants are not honest and open or do not share as much

detail as they can, the data are incomplete.

Glossary

1.   Accommodations – Services, adjustments, and modifications provided to make

educational classes/programs more manageable for students with disabilities.

Accommodations are mandated for students with disabilities under Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Examples of

accommodations include extended time on tests, note takers, and audiotapes of

textbooks (Lerner, 2003).

2.   Achievement – Refers to the student's present performance level in academic

skills (Lerner, 2003).

3.   Disabled – A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or

more major life activities (ADA, 2008).

4.   Learning disabled – This condition exists when there is a gap in student

potential and achievement. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004,

a learning disability exists when the student has difficulties in one or more basic

psychological processes, shows difficulty in learning, and the problem is not related to

any other causes. Learning disabilities can exist in the following categories: oral

expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading

comprehension, mathematics calculation, and mathematics reasoning (IDEA, 2004).

5.   Meaning Unit – Significant statements about how individuals are experiencing

the topic (Creswell, 2007).

6.   Potential – Refers to the student's potential for learning and is usually measured

by administering an intelligence test. (Lerner, 2003).

7.   Reading comprehension – A person's ability to understand, process, and interpret what they have read (Lerner, 2003).

8.   Self-efficacy – Refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act (Bandura, 1995).

Summary and Preview of Next Chapter

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the problem, as well as a brief background of disability laws in America. The purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and theoretical framework were also outlined. The chapter concluded with the limitations of the study, a glossary, summary, and preview of the next chapter.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed explanation of disabilities in America, an in-depth review of Bandura's self-efficacy theory, and a thorough review of the literature regarding learning disabilities and reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature related to the topic of study, beginning with a comprehensive review of the history of disabilities in America. This is followed by a detailed explanation of learning disabilities in America. Next, research relevant to the field of learning disabilities is examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, a review of the research on reading comprehension learning disabilities, and the research gap this study aims to fill.

Background on Disabilities

It was not until the mid- to late-20th century that individuals with disabilities began to receive rights in America. Prior to this time, individuals with disabilities were reportedly disrespected and faced many trials (Garland, 1995, Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, Longmore & Umansky, 2001). Discrimination against these individuals dates back at least 2,000 years (Longmore & Umansky, 2001).

Around 750 BC, the Greeks and Romans kept individuals with disabilities as hidden and invisible from the rest of society as possible, save for a handful of blind prophets (Garland, 1995). During this era, it was mandated that children born with a disability must be murdered (Garland, 1995). A socially acceptable way to accomplish this was to tie or stake the disabled child in the sun until he or she died from exposure (Garland, 1995). Persons with disabilities were also used as entertainment for those in power, a practice common in Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, and Pre-Colombian America (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

The situation for individuals with physical and mental disabilities improved little until the mid- to late-20th century. It was not unusual for individuals with disabilities to be locked up for years against their will (Burch & Sutherland, 2006; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Longmore & Umansky, 2001; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). Some parents sold their disabled children to traveling sideshows (Burch & Sutherland, 2006; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Longmore & Umansky, 2001; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). Disabled individuals provoked such panic in society, they were "killed, exiled, neglected, shunned, used for entertainment, or even treated as spiritual manifestations, both good and evil" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 27).

Individuals with disabilities were also shunned by organized religion (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Shapiro, 1993). The Old and New Testament of the Bible equated "disability with the divine punishment or evidence of immoral behavior" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 27). Many faiths, such as Hinduism, struggled to accept individuals with disabilities due to their belief in reincarnation (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). It was typically believed in Hinduism that a disability was punishment for something a person had done in a previous life. Individuals with disabilities were not afforded rights or respected for their differences (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

History followed this pattern of treating individuals with disabilities unequally for centuries. In America, small progress was made for individuals with disabilities to have rights equal to their non-disabled counterparts. In 1679, Phillip Nelson, a tutor and the first person to attempt special education, tried to teach deaf student to communicate (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Winzer, 1993). His work was quickly halted

and his life threatened when a local church accused him of attempting to perform a "miracle" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Winzer, 1993).

In 1752, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Bond opened the first hospital in colonial America to offer care and rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). In 1776, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed equality for all–except the disabled (Dahl, 2001; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

Following the Revolutionary War, two federal laws relating to the disabled were passed, providing compensation and medical care for soldiers who returned from war with a disability (Longmore & Umansky, 2001). A basic pension plan was also made available to some U.S. citizens with mental disabilities (Longmore & Umansky, 2001). This marked the true beginning of affording rights to individuals with disabilities at the same level as persons without disabilities.

The 1800s brought about a gradual shift in societal attitudes and behaviors toward individuals with disabilities. In 1812 and 1817, private educational institutions opened for students with visual and hearing impairments (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994). During the mid-1840s, asylums were opened to treat people with mental disabilities (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994). Alexander Graham Bell popularized special education institutions, as well as the phrase 'special education' itself (Longmore & Umansky, 2001). In 1846, Eduoard Sequin's *The Moral Treatment, Hygiene, and Education of Idiots and Other Backward Children* was first published. Sequin's article was revolutionary in that it was first to propose that individuals with disabilities could be educated (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

Sequin's article marked a shift toward a more accepting and tolerant light for persons with disabilities. Helen Keller, who was both deaf and blind, was a public role model and societal example of a capable individual with disabilities. She proved to the world that individuals with disabilities are educable, and that, through education, much is possible. With the help of her teacher, Annie Sullivan, she learned to read, speak, and write (Loewen, 2007; Longmore & Umansky, 2001). Keller graduated from Radcliff in 1904 and became an advocate for "the rights of women, racial minorities, the poor, and, of course, persons with disabilities" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 33; Loewen, 2007). Keller was an influential woman with disabilities who persevered to become a role model and advocate for others.

During the mid- to late-1800s, institutions or asylums became residential facilities for individuals with disabilities. Individuals who lived in these facilities remained permanently on their grounds, which were often located on the outskirts of a community (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). The purpose of these institutions was not to educate residents, but to serve instead as holding cells (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). Individuals with disabilities, including those with hearing, speech, and visual impairments, were regarded as having limited intellect and were thus removed from society and remanded to these institutions (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993).

Eugenics was the next popular notion to impact persons with disabilities and society's attitudes toward the disabled. Eugenics was a theory about human development created during the mid-nineteenth century by British scientist Francis

15

Galton (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). A cousin of Charles Darwin, Galton put forth his theory without sound research or concrete evidence, yet, his theory was accepted with the utmost respect (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Schweik, 2009; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). Galton asserted "only certain people had the right to perpetuate their genetic materials through reproduction, and therefore, reproduction should be regulated based on an individual's characteristics and endowments" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 34). These ideas were well received in America.

In the United States, the study of eugenics led to an unfortunate change in the treatment of individuals with disabilities. As a result of Galton's theory, legislators and policymakers offered many alarming proposals, including "placing all individuals with disabilities on an island by themselves (isolated by gender), permanently locking away all individuals with disabilities in institutions, or segregating them from the rest of society in an isolated part of a sparsely populated state" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 35).

In 1914, 38 of America's 48 states had laws that prohibited marriage for individuals with disabilities (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). Some states allowed women with disabilities to marry only after they could no longer reproduce (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). Individuals who violated these laws were imprisoned (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

During the 1910s, most states had laws in place that transferred people with physical, emotional, or mental disabilities to institutions referred to as 'villages' (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). Individuals with disabilities were also

subjected to such acts as lobotomizing portions of the brain and removing functioning

reproductive organs (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). In 1915, a doctor from Indiana

performed between 600-700 vasectomies on unwilling men with disabilities (Jaeger &

Bowman, 2005; Noll, 1995). Between 1916 and 1917, one institution performed 80

hysterectomies on healthy women with disabilities (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Noll,

1995). In many states, these sterilization laws are extant to this day (Jaeger &

Bowman, 2005; Noll, 1995).

Although distaste toward disabled citizens remained in America, the

government continued its work to protect disabled veterans. The Smith-Sears Veterans

Act was passed in 1918, providing vocational rehabilitation for World War I veterans.

While the act was instituted to protect veterans, it offered no protections to civilians

with disabilities (Longmore & Umansky, 2001). The Smith-Fess Act of 1920, also

known as the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act, provided a 50% match to "state

rehabilitation programs for counseling, vocational training, and job placement for

civilians with atypical physical activity explained by medical diagnosis" (Depoy &

Gilson, 2004, p. 34).

The Social Security Act of 1935 made the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation

Act permanent. The act gave "funds and income supports to states to assist blind

citizens, indigent dependent children, and elderly parents" (Depoy & Gilson, 2004, p.

34). The support provided by this act, however, was minimal, as it was passed during

the Great Depression, with no specified amount of financial support.

While war veterans and some individuals with disabilities were beginning to

gain support through legislation during this time, there remained a lack of acceptance of

17

individuals with disability in society at large (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Winzer, 1993). The act of sterilizing the disabled is such an example of society's rejection of the disabled (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Winzer, 1993). California, Virginia, and North Carolina were the leaders in sterilizing disabled persons, and their sterilization procedures continued well into the 1970s (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Winzer, 1993).

After World War II, the disabled population in America rose dramatically. War veterans had access to better medical care, increasing the population of individuals with disabilities who would have previously died from war-related injuries (Barnartt & Scotch, 2001). Not long after World War II, the Civil Rights Movement began, which focused on obtaining equality for all races and both genders. The Civil Rights Movement gave individuals with disabilities the courage to begin to advocate for themselves and to fight for their legal rights (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

In the 1960s and at the urging of parents, legislators and other government officials began to examine the unique educational needs of children with disabilities. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was established to provide funding for education (DePoy & Gilson, 2004). Amended in 1966, the act authorized "funds to states to assist states in the initiation, expansion, and improvement of programs for the education of handicapped children." With passage of the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act in 1968, students with disabilities were guaranteed even more educational rights. The act made pre-school-aged children eligible to receive an education as well as diagnostic treatment (DePoy & Gilson, 2004).

Soon after, a major court case, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971, 1972),* ruled that students with a

disability had a constitutional right to receive an education (Carey, 2009; Jaeger &

Bowman, 2005; Trent, 1994). The jurist in the case, Masterson, "ruled a 'zero-reject'

rule, giving all children the right to a free public education regardless of competence,

ability to benefit, or productivity" (Carey, 2009, p. 9). This ruling led to even more

legislative protections to students with disabilities.

Following *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971, 1972)*, Section 504

of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 granted specific legal rights to individuals with

disabilities, becoming the first law to protect individuals with disabilities from

intentional and unintentional discrimination (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). Section 504

also mandated that recipients of federal funds could not discriminate against individuals

with disabilities (Longmore & Umansky, 2001).

While the Rehabilitation Act became law in 1973, it was not implemented for

some time. Nixon signed "the Rehabilitation Act into law and then did absolutely

nothing to implement or enforce the law" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 40). In fact, a

delay in writing the guidelines to Section 504 meant it could not be implemented.

Nixon did not have the guidelines for Section 504 completed during his administration,

nor did President Ford—writing the guidelines and instating the law was not a priority

(Longmore & Umansky, 2001).

During the Carter administration (1977-1981), meetings were finally held to

create the guidelines for Section 504. These meetings, however, were closed-door and

held without representation from persons with disabilities, or the organizations that

advocated on their behalf. Members of disability organizations were upset that Section

504 was signed into law in 1973 and, by 1977, was still not implemented and its guidelines still unwritten (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

Eventually, a protest ensued in the San Francisco office of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Shapiro, 1993). Sixty individuals, representing various disabilities, participated in the protest, occupying the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare office for 25 days (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Shapiro, 1993). During the protest, government officials decided the protesters should not have food or access to communication outside the office (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Shapiro, 1993). Two U.S. Representatives, Phillip Burton and George Miller, made sure food reached the protestors (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Shapiro, 1993). When Section 504's regulations were finally signed, the demonstrators left the federal office victorious, their mission accomplished (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was passed in November, 1975 by President Ford (Winzer, 1993). The purpose of this law was to ensure that primary through high school students with disabilities had access to schools and were provided accommodations (Lerner, 2003). In 1990, EAHCA was updated to become the Individuals with Disabilities Act. It was revised yet again, becoming the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, then revised again as IDEA 2004. From this progression of legislation, students aged 3-21 have access to education regardless of their disability, ensuring a free and appropriate education for all children (Lerner, 2003).

The 1988 Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act was revised in 1998 to become the Assistive Technology Act. Assistive technology is

any device or service to help students achieve success in learning. Individuals with disabilities were granted greater access to assistive technology because of this law (DePoy & Gilson, 2004).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities and ensures "equal opportunity in employment, state and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation" (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 41). This law was recently revised, becoming the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. Changes to the law revised the definition of disability to "more broadly encompass impairments that substantially limit a major life activity" (US Access Board, 2008).

The United States grants all citizens equal treatment due to legislation. These legislative acts cited here guarantee rights for education, employment, marriage, homeownership, and a fulfilled life for all individuals, regardless of ability or disability.

History of Learning Disabilities in America and the Federal Definition

Students with disabilities were considered uneducable and viewed as needing institutionalization during the mid-1800s to early 1900s (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Trent, 1994; Winzer, 1993). These students were placed in schools that were separate and disparate from the general education population (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Trent, 1994; Wamba, 2008; Winzer, 1993). The term 'at-risk' was used to identify students who had learning difficulties, as well as students from families with low socio-economic status (Wamba, 2008).

Parents of students with learning disabilities followed the examples set forth by Civil Rights activists and began to protest on behalf of their children's rights to an

education in the courts and through legislation (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Shapiro, 1993; Wamba, 2008). Two pertinent court cases, *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971, 1972)* and *Mills v. Board of Education (1972),* made it clear that all students have a right to an education, regardless of ability (Lerner, 2003; Wamba, 2008).

With passage of the EAHCA in 1975, Congress learned "more than half of the children with learning disabilities in the country did not receive appropriate education services and that one million of them were entirely excluded from the public school system" (Wamba, 2008, p. 7). This law set the guidelines for special education in America. Winzer (1993) explains EAHCA as follows:

> The law defined the requirements for reaching and enriching the lives of individuals not adequately served by traditional educational means. School systems could no longer exclude students suffering physical or intellectual handicaps, nor could they doom students to inappropriate placements and inadequate curricula. Under this legislation exceptional children were, for the first time, accorded the right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. Their parents or guardians were given the right of due process and confidentiality, and school boards mandated to provide a range of educational services, an individual education plan for every exceptional student, and culturally fair testing (p.382).

This law genuinely made education a reasonable expectation for all students with learning disabilities, as well as other disabilities.

As difficult as it was for individuals with disabilities to be recognized as educable members of society, it has been equally difficult to determine a working definition of a learning disability. Eligibility requirements for having a learning disability were set forth in IDEA 1997 as a gap between potential and achievement, which was determined through intelligent quotient (IQ) testing (Wamba, 2008). IQ is defined as a student's academic potential or what he or she should be capable of doing

academically (Lerner, 2003). Achievement is the student's current level of academic success. Where there is a gap between potential and achievement, a student is not reaching his or her academic potential. Typically, a gap of two standard deviations is considered significant enough to identify a student as learning disabled. This model of identifying if a student has a learning disability is referred to as the Discrepancy Model.

The revision of IDEA in 2004 introduced the Response to Intervention method as a means to determine learning disability eligibility. Response to Intervention (RTI) focuses on early intervention, uses formal progress monitoring, and insists that student achievement is consistently measured and recorded (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004). The National Center on Response to Intervention describes RTI as:

> Integrat[ing] assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. (Donaldson, 2010)

The two methods used to determine a learning disability, the discrepancy model and RTI, complicate the certification process and make understanding learning disabilities more difficult for parents, teachers, and administrators as there is no "professional agreement on what constitutes an LD" (Wamba, 2008, p. 12).

The definition of learning disabilities most widely used first appeared in EAHCA and was later incorporated into IDEA 1990. Recall, IDEA 1990 was amended in 1997 and again in 2004. The current definition of a specific learning disability is described in IDEA 2004. This definition, although long, is explicit in describing the requirements necessary for a student to be diagnosed as having a learning disability (not just a reading comprehension learning disability). Below is the definition for a

specific learning disability described from IDEA 2004:

> The child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or State-approved grade-level standards:
> - Oral expression.
> - Listening comprehension.
> - Written expression.
> - Basic reading skills.
> - Reading fluency skills.
> - Reading comprehension.
> - Mathematics calculation.
> - Mathematics problem solving.
>
> The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified in 34 CFR 300.309(a)(1) when using a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; or the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, State-approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the group to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments, consistent with 34 CFR 300.304 and 300.305; and the group determines that its findings under 34 CFR 300.309(a)(1) and (2) are not primarily the result of:
> - A visual, hearing, or motor disability;
> - Mental retardation;
> - Emotional disturbance;
> - Cultural factors;
> - Environmental or economic disadvantage; or
> - Limited English proficiency.

Relevant Research on Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities continue to be a growing population on higher education campuses (Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Kirby, Silverstri, Allingham, Parrila, & La Fave, 2008; McCleary-Jones, 2008; Murray, Wren, Stevens, & Keys, 2009). In 1999, an estimated 1.61% of undergraduate students had a learning disability (Kirby et al., 2008). Research shows the population of students with learning disabilities will continue to rise on campuses. Thus, appropriate and valuable accommodations need to be available to students with learning disabilities in order to

24

yield successful graduation rates (McCleary-Jones, 2008).

Students with learning disabilities are ensured accommodation on higher education campuses, so long as they have professional documentation of their disability (Thomas, 2000). Once this documentation is provided, the student will receive accommodation. Accommodations for students with learning disabilities typically include the option of using "readers, note-takers, extra time to complete exams, course registration, and/or alternate test formats" (Hadley, 2007, p.10). This list of accommodations is not exhaustive; other accommodations or individualized accommodations may be offered as well. Accommodations are useful for students with learning disabilities because they allow these students equal access to education (Hadley, 2007; National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities, 1999).

Higher education institutions use different formats to determine the accommodations to make available to students with learning disabilities. Research shows "there is little consistency in the way that institutions provide[d] services to students with learning disabilities" (NJCLD, 1999, p. 263). It is commonplace for students with a learning disability to need to advocate for themselves by informing their professors of their disability and by requesting that accommodations be made available (Hadley, 2007). Trainin (2002) found that students with learning disabilities are more likely to succeed in higher education if they are specifically taught self-advocacy skills. Not all college students with learning disabilities choose to self-identify as being learning disabled, but those who do should receive the most effective accommodations possible. Students who do not choose to self-identify as learning disabled revoke their rights to receive accommodation and choose to attend school without any education

supports.

Accommodations help to ensure the success of students with any type of learning disability. Legislation mandates that higher education institutions provide accommodations for students who choose to self-identify as being learning disabled. In a phenomenological research study on students with learning disabilities, Black (2005) found that only 10% of students who needed accommodations actually chose to receive them. She also found that these students felt their work was of a lesser value if they received accommodation. Lastly, she learned the major "struggle these students face in school resides in their being fearful or discouraged from using accommodations" (p.242).

To help students feel safe enough to use the accommodations they are entitled to receive, faculty members must understand, appreciate, and be willing to provide accommodations for this population. Unfortunately, research indicates that this historically has not been the case (Kurth & Mellard, 2006, Murray et al., 2009, Scott, 1997). Faculty members fear that academic integrity and coursework expectations are negatively shifted when accommodations are provided to students with learning disabilities (Scott, 1997). It has been noted that faculty members lack an understanding of learning disabilities, the disability's manifestations, and how accommodations support students without lessening the rigor of the education experience (Kurth & Mellard, 2006). Additionally, it has been noted that faculty members lowered their academic expectations of students with learning disabilities, once they became aware of their disabilities (Murray et al., 2009).

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education began a

program in 1999 entitled *Demonstration Projects to Ensure Quality Higher Education for Students with Disabilities* to help foster disability awareness among higher education faculty (Murray et al., 2009). Based on the implementation of this program, it is clear that faculty at higher education institutions need to be educated about students with disabilities and how to provide accommodations. The lack of disability awareness exhibited by faculty members leaves students feeling misunderstood and frustrated (Murray et al., 2009).

Research indicates that faculty perspectives toward students with learning disabilities greatly impact the education a student receives. Cornett-DeVito and Worley (2005) state "teacher attitudes and behaviors have a direct and dramatic impact on learning" (p. 316). Students with learning disabilities experience a loss of self-esteem, confidence, and motivation when they do not feel understood and accepted in the classroom environment (Clark, 2007). Even when faculty provide appropriate accommodations and build a positive relationship with the student, negative faculty interactions have a dramatic impact on the student (Beilke & Yssel, 1999). In fact, Beilke and Yssel state "negative attitudes of faculty are cited as a primary reason that students with disabilities fail at the postsecondary level" (p. 365).

Qualitative research conducted by Beilke and Yssel (1999) on students with learning disabilities and their perception of the higher education classrooms indicated that faculty members were not welcoming. Barga (1996) further explained through qualitative research that students with learning disabilities experienced labeling, stigmatization, and gatekeeping as barriers to higher education. Faculty members are responsible for creating these barriers when they label and place their perceptions on

students with learning disabilities (Barga, 1996). Additionally, faculty members act as gatekeepers when they deny students accommodation or make them feel inadequate for requesting accommodation (Barga, 1996).

Accommodations, for which these students must self-advocate, should be easy to obtain from faculty members. Students with learning disabilities struggle to attain these accommodations when they perceive a negative relationship with their professor (Denhart, 2008; Thomas, 2000; Murray et al., 2009). One student in Cornett-DeVito and Worley's (2005) phenomenological study on accommodations and faculty perspectives stated it was not "fair to expect me to learn the same way the rest of the students learn" (p. 326). This situation is further complicated when the accommodations students with learning disabilities receive are ineffective or not helpful.

In *Student perceptions of the accommodation process in postsecondary education,* Kurth and Mellard (2006) examined the accommodation selection process and its effectiveness. They determined that students with disabilities should be looked at as whole learners, and the accommodations available to students should not simply be chosen from a pre-designed list (Kurth & Mellard, 2006). Furthermore, they found that students want to feel successful, independent, part of the classroom community, and involved in choosing the most effective and individualized accommodation for their success (Kurth & Mellard, 2006). Student satisfaction with selecting accommodations from a pre-designed list was "rated as ineffective at least 25% of the time" (Kurth & Mellard, 2006, p. 81).

Self-determination and self-efficacy play a major role in the success of students

with learning disabilities at higher education institutions (Hitchings et al., 2001).

Sarver (2000) conducted a mixed methods study of self-determination and the academic success of students with learning disabilities and found "students with learning disabilities who are able to plan and act on their plans, and who score higher on a measure of self-determination, are the students who also experience greater academic success" (p. 124). Sarver further explained that students who have a higher level of self-determination or efficacy are "able to conceptualize their needs, make decisions about possible solutions to their problems, and seek and utilize appropriate accommodations" (p. 132).

Dunlop's (2002) mixed methods study found that female students with learning disabilities were more likely than males to seek academic help. Participants in this study were found to not understand the benefits of accommodations. Furthermore, the hours of availability for receiving assistance did not meet the needs of students with learning disabilities who attend class at night.

Finn (1999) found that staff at higher education institutions who helped students with learning disabilities had a dramatic impact on the "students' perception, attitudes, and successes" (p. 637). Finn also found it was more difficult to learn about and access services at larger public universities than at community colleges or four-year, private universities. Students who attended larger public universities also had a harder time receiving books on tapes and tutors.

Prevalent studies on students with learning disabilities in higher education were identified above. Mainly this literature review determined that faculty members need to be trained in disability awareness and open to accepting students who require

accommodation. Additionally, students who are able to advocate for themselves and who have a higher level of self-efficacy and self-determination are more likely to be academically successful.

Relevant Research on Reading Comprehension Learning Disabilities

Reading comprehension learning disabilities create a deficit in a person's ability to understand and process text. These deficits are "results of many factors such as limited vocabulary, limited background knowledge, and deficits in active reading comprehension skills" (Crabtree, Alber-Morgan, & Konrad, 2010, p. 187). Students do not have difficulty reading the text, yet, struggle understanding what they have read (Catts & Kamhi, 1999; Lerner, 2003). Although reading disabilities are the most prevalent, specific learning disability (Stanovich, 1999), little research exists on students with reading comprehension learning disabilities in higher education. Most of the research on this population has focused on elementary and secondary students.

Reading disabilities affect the majority of students with learning disabilities in K-12 classrooms. In fact, "about 90% of students with learning disabilities demonstrate significant difficulties acquiring reading skills" (Crabtree et al., 2010, p. 187). Reading disabilities include three categories: basic reading skills, reading comprehension, and reading fluency. The majority of research studies relevant to reading comprehension in K-12 centers upon strategies to improve reading comprehension. Otherwise, the research on reading comprehension is either subject- or disability-specific. Some of the relevant research involving students with reading comprehension learning disabilities follows.

Crabtree, Abler-Morgan, and Konrad (2010) found that three high school

30

seniors with reading comprehension learning disabilities had increased levels of

comprehension when they actively self-monitored their reading. In the study, students

were asked to stop at three points in their reading to answer five questions regarding

story elements (Crabtree et al., 2010). This self-monitoring strategy yielded positive

increases in each student's level of reading comprehension (Crabtree et al., 2010).

Students were not as successful when expected to self-monitor their reading without

answering predetermined questions (Crabtree et al., 2010). These three students with

reading comprehension learning disabilities needed scaffolding to assist in learning

how to self-monitor (Crabtree et al., 2010).

Fritschmann, Deshler, and Schumaker (2007) taught the Inference Strategy to

eight students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. The Inference Strategy

consists of five steps

> designed to cue students to attend to their prior knowledge, to attend to
> the type of inference they were being asked to make, to attend to key
> words in the questions that would help then search for clues in the text,
> to search for those clues, and to problem solve once they had gathered
> the clues to make inferences about the information in the passage (p.
> 248).

After teaching the Inference Strategy to the eight students with learning disabilities,

Fritschmann et al. (2007) found the students were able to correctly answer inferential

questions more often. The students in this study were also able to read more

strategically and at a higher grade level after learning the strategy (Fritschmann et al.,

2007).

Simmons and Singleton (2000) conducted a study to compare the reading

comprehension abilities of dyslexic university students to their non-dyslexic university

peers. Their study found that "dyslexic students in higher education have reading

31

comprehension difficulties that cannot be accounted for by an inability to decode individual words in the text" (Simmons & Singleton, 2000, p. 178). Simmons and Singleton (2000) suggest "extra time in examinations and assignments are justified" in higher education (p. 187). They also believe it is beneficial to teach metacognitive strategies (Simmons & Singleton, 2000).

Runyan conducted a similar study to determine if extra time on a reading comprehension test made a difference on the performance results among higher education students with and without learning disabilities. Runyan's (1991) study involved 15 participants with a learning disability and 16 participants without a learning disability. The Nelson-Denny Reading Comprehension and Reading Rate Test were administered to all students in the study. Runyan (1991) found "students with learning disabilities score significantly lower than normally achieving individuals under timed conditions on reading comprehension" (p. 107). The results of this study indicate that extra time on examinations and assignments is a worthwhile accommodation for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Research on students with reading comprehension learning disabilities, though limited, indicates that these students should learn to self-monitor while reading, use metacognitive strategies, and, if possible, use the Inference Strategy. Additionally, research suggests it is important to allow students with reading comprehension learning disabilities extra time on assignments and examinations.

Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is "a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation" (Cherry, 2010, p.1). Mainly, self-efficacy centers on goal attainment or lack

of attainment. Self-efficacy looks at how much effort, perseverance, and resilience a person expends to achieve a goal.

The higher the person's level of self-efficacy, the greater the person's chance of obtaining his or her goal. Bandura (1995) states "a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways" (p. 71). He continues to explain that a high self-efficacy allows a person to handle stress, failure, and set-backs with control and a quick recuperation rate (Bandura, 1995). Also, he explains that a highly efficacious person sets challenging goals and achieves them (Bandura, 1995). Bandura states "people who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think, and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as inefficacious. They produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it" (Bandura, 1986).

Low levels of self-efficacy lead a person to have lower aspirations and weak goal-setting and attainment skills (Bandura, 1995). A person with low self-efficacy struggles to recover from the set-backs and failures they experience (Bandura, 1995). Furthermore, a person with low self-efficacy often lacks confidence and avoids challenging tasks (Cherry, 2010).

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is composed of four main components or forms of influence. Mastery experiences, the first component, occur when a person performs a task successfully. Whereas successful mastery experiences build a person's level of self-efficacy, failure diminishes his or her level of self-efficacy. The more often a person has successful mastery experiences, the higher his or her level of self-efficacy becomes. Bandura states "after people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By

33

sticking it out through the tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity" (Bandura, 1995, p. 3). This study will explore the mastery experiences of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities who have lived with adversity.

The second component of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is vicarious experiences. Basically, people tend to judge themselves based on what they see other people with the same perceived abilities do (Bandura, 1995). If a person believes he or she is an adequate singer and sees someone with similar capabilities become a famous singer, that person will also believe he or she is capable of reaching this goal. Similarly, if a person believes he or she will fail a math test and knows a peer of similar capabilities has already failed the exam, that person's failure is near certain. Vicarious experiences give people a gauge of their abilities or inabilities and contribute greatly to their levels of self-efficacy.

Social persuasion, the third component of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, contends that the more positive feedback a person receives regarding his or her capabilities, the higher the person's level of self-efficacy. Equally, the more negative feedback a person receives regarding his or her capabilities, the lower the individual's level of self-efficacy.

The final component, physiological and emotional states, refers to a person's ability to determine his or her own mood and state of being. The more positive a person is, the greater his or her sense of self-efficacy. He or she also will have a lower level of stress, and a healthier body, mind, and spirit. Individuals with a negative outlook will suffer greater self-doubt and depression, impairing their ability to reach the goals they set for themselves, according to Bandura's theory.

34

Self-efficacy functions use four major processes to regulate human functioning (Bandura, 1995). Cognitive processes allow people to set and achieve goals, remain task oriented, and be resilient. Motivational processes give people the ability to stay focused and have the tenacity to reach their goals. Affective processes indicate a person's perceived ability to cope with stress. Selection processes allow people to choose the environment that will best suit their goals and cultivate their lifestyles. These four major processes can be positive or negative, depending upon a person's level of self-efficacy.

In this study, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory will help to explore how accommodations contribute to a student's self-efficacy as well as how accommodations contribute to a student's perception of academic success.

Summary and Preview of Next Chapter

Currently, minimal research exists on the lived experience of students with learning disabilities and the perceived value of the accommodations they receive on a community college campus. Furthermore, research on students with a reading comprehension learning disability in higher education is lacking. This research study aims to add relevant data to help fill the current gap in literature.

People with disabilities were not always granted equal access to education in America. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act brought forth access to a free and appropriate education for all people regardless of their disability.

Currently, students with a learning disability are attending higher education institutions at a greater rate. Faculty members have struggled to accept this population

and to provide appropriate accommodation. For students with reading comprehension learning disabilities, negative faculty perspectives and a lack of appropriate accommodations have made higher education a difficult environment in which to succeed.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory centers upon how people achieve goals. His theory consists of four components that are the sources from which self-efficacy is developed and four processes that develop a person's level of self-efficacy. People with higher self-efficacy are more likely to achieve challenging goals than people with low levels of self-efficacy.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology used in this study. This chapter will explain the rationale for using qualitative and phenomenological methodologies, the sample population and research location, a review of the literature, data collection and analysis methods, and the study's limitations. The chapter will conclude with a summary and preview of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to conduct this study. First, the rationale for using a qualitative research design and phenomenological methodology is described. A discussion of the sample population and research site follows. Next, data collection methods and data analysis are explained. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, a summary, and a preview of Chapter 4.

Students with learning disabilities, including a reading comprehension learning disability, are attending higher education institutions at an increasing rate (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005; Hadley, 2007; Henderson, 2001; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Rath & Royer, 2002; Scott, 1997). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to give a voice to the lived experiences of college students with a reading comprehension learning disability. Additionally, the perceived value of accommodations rendered by students with a reading comprehension learning disability and how these accommodations contribute to student self-efficacy and perceptions of academic success are explored.

Obtaining a deeper understanding of the lived experience of this population and the perceived value of the accommodations rendered can provide educators with knowledge as to which accommodations are most valuable to offer at higher education institutions.

Research Questions

To understand the phenomenon that exists between students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and the perceived value of the accommodations they receive, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What is the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college?

2. What accommodations do students with reading comprehension learning disabilities perceive to be most valuable at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college?

3. Why do students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college perceive these accommodations to be the most valuable?

4. How do these accommodations contribute to students' self-efficacy?

5. How do these accommodations contribute to students' perception of academic success?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research "investigates the quality—the distinctive, essential characteristics—of experience and action as lived by persons" (Fisher, 2006, p. XVI). The lived experiences are the data collected and measured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fisher, 2006). One tenet of qualitative research is that it centers on giving meaning to social experience and explains different phenomena that exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fisher, 2006). Researchers who use qualitative methodologies do not look for

statistical data; they aim to understand the lived world of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fisher, 2006).

Quantitative research uses variables to gather statistical data to answer research questions. As such, quantitative research does not lend itself to gathering data from the lived experience of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fisher, 2006). Researching the lived experience of different people in different situations helps researchers to understand different phenomena. The lived experience is important because it "is the breathing of meaning" (VanManen, 1990). Using lived experiences as data allows researchers to understand a person's depth, feeling, and retrospective perspectives. Quantitative research is not capable of gathering this type of data. Thus, for the purposes of this study, qualitative research is the most appropriate methodological approach.

Rationale for Phenomenological Methodology

Given that this study is best researched through a qualitative lens, phenomenology is the most appropriate qualitative approach to use. Phenomenology hopes to unfold a detailed, descriptive analysis of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 1994). Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) describe phenomenology as a way "to achieve an analytic description of the phenomena not affected by prior assumptions" (p. 98).

Phenomenology focuses on how humans communicate their feelings and experiences using their personal, individualized frame of reference. From VanManen (1990), "The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive

reliving and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (p. 36). Trzcinski (1999) states, "Phenomenology is a significant methodology developed to investigate human experience. It is [a] method to capture the rich descriptions of experience and culminate in a comprehensive statement illuminating the gestalt of the experience" (p. 27). Phenomenology will allow participants in this study to share with the researcher their lived experiences as students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and their perspectives on the value of the accommodations they receive.

Research Sample

The Midwestern community college selected for this study has 12,000 students in attendance, of which 326 students self-identify as learning disabled. The institution, under the pseudonym King Community College, offers a multitude of accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Using a community college to determine the most valuable accommodations for students with a reading comprehension is logical, given that many students with learning disabilities attend two-year colleges before transferring to four-year colleges (Finn, 1999; McCleary-Jones, 2007).

Criterion-based sampling is used when the individuals being researched must meet certain criteria. This type of sampling "works well when all the individuals studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). For this study, the criteria for selection of participants was that they must (a) have a reading comprehension learning disability, (b) attend the community college being researched, (c) access the accommodations made available on campus for at least one semester, and (d) have attended King Community College for at least one semester.

As this is a single-institution study, the participants are site specific. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities were identified by the college's Equal Access Counselor who obtained approval to access student records. Upon admission, students are asked to provide legal documentation that states they have a disability. To find students who met this criterion, the King Community College Equal Access Counselor randomly drew files of students with learning disabilities. He then pored through each file to identify students with reading comprehension deficits. In all, 112 students with reading comprehension learning disabilities were identified. Students in this study may have other disabilities that exist concurrently with a reading comprehension learning disability.

Students identified as potential candidates for this study were then contacted via email by the Equal Access Counselor, inviting them to participate. Those students interested in participating were invited to click on a link embedded within the email. This link took the student to a demographic survey where he or she could input contact information. The researcher desired to have 15 students agree to participate. Ultimately, eight students agreed to participate.

Data-collection Methods

Data for this study was gathered from a demographic survey, interviews, field notes, member checking, document analysis of paperwork used to determine accommodations and procedures for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities, and contextual background of King Community College's policies and procedures on the provision of student accommodations. Triangulation of the interviews, member checking, and document analysis were conducted to obtain a

deeper understanding of the phenomena researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fisher, 2006).

Students who completed the demographic survey embedded in the invitation to participate were also asked about their age of special education eligibility, the types of accommodations currently being used, and, through open-ended questions, the perceived value of these accommodations (see Appendix A). The open-ended questions sought to "tap into personal experiences and shed light on participants' perceptions" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 82). The demographic survey also asked students about their preferred availability for an interview. Based on this information, a research date and time was arranged by phone and a reminder call placed the day before the scheduled interview.

Phenomenology focuses on understanding the lived experience of the subject being studied, and the interview is the most effective research methodology in which to do so. Research states that a major benefit of collecting data through one-on-one interviews is that interviews offer the potential to truly capture a person's perspective, beliefs, and experience (Creswell, 1994). Therefore, data for this study will be gathered from participant interviews.

A narrative interview was conducted with each participant. The interview was tape recorded and lasted between one and two hours. Interview questions were designed so that participants could convey their lived experience as higher education students with a reading comprehension learning disability. Additionally, specific research questions from the interview protocol were asked regarding the perceived value of the accommodations participants' currently receive (see Appendix B). Also,

42

questions were asked to learn how the accommodations they receive contribute to their level of self-efficacy and their perceptions of academic success.

Prior to the interview, participants signed an informed consent form, stating they were aware the interview would be tape recorded. The consent form also identified the potential risks to participating in a research study. A consent form was also completed when the student submitted his/her demographic survey. Interviews were conducted once the informed consent paperwork was signed. The interviews continued until all formal questions from the interview protocol and all informal questions were exhausted and the research participant had nothing further to contribute. After each interview, a verbatim transcription was made.

The researcher took extensive, descriptive field notes during each interview. Field notes detailed facial expressions, body gestures, and hand movements. These notes also described the "physical appearance, dress, mannerisms, and style of talking and acting" of each participant interviewed for this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 120). Following the interview, the researcher compiled these field notes to help aid in data analysis. The researcher may even have added "ideas, strategies, reflections, and hunches, as well as note patterns that emerge" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 118). The field notes ultimately help the researcher by detailing the sensory experiences a tape-recorded interview could not reveal.

Once interviews were transcribed, the researcher held a follow-up meeting with each participant. The purpose of this follow-up meeting, or member checking, is to review the transcript with the research participant. Member checking is used to "increase the trustworthiness of the research they [qualitative researchers] conduct; that

is, how much trust can be given that the researcher did everything possible to ensure that data was appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1103). Member checking is also used to ensure participants were heard correctly and that their lived experience had not been misinterpreted. This step allows for clarification, if necessary, as well.

During the member checking phase, the participant was provided with a transcript of his or her interview. The researcher and participant then carefully reviewed the transcript. The participant was asked to "verify their accuracy" and "edit, clarify, elaborate, and at times, delete their own words from the narratives" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1105). Member checking allowed the researcher to confirm the accuracy of the research and the research participant to acknowledge that he or she was accurately represented.

Documents gathered at King Community College were analyzed to determine the types of accommodations available and how students could access them. Examples of these documents include service possibilities, an accommodation letter sent to faculty, a classroom accommodation memo, a testing accommodations memo, and any other relevant documents that could be obtained. During the interviews, students were asked about the procedures used at King Community College to obtain accommodations. The documents provided validity and confirmation as to the protocol students with learning disabilities are expected to follow to access accommodations.

Lastly, contextual information regarding King Community College was gathered to help the researcher understand the research site more clearly. Information regarding available accommodations, the process used to render the accommodations,

student body, campus, class size, and staff training regarding students with disabilities was researched. The college's Equal Access Counselor was also interviewed for additional contextual information and further perspectives on the accommodation process.

Method for Data Analysis

As each interview was transcribed verbatim, the researcher was provided with significant amounts of interview data for analysis. Upon completion of all transcriptions, meaning units were determined through open-coding. A single, whole copy of the transcription was kept, while four copies were cut up and placed into folders based on meaning units. Each folder was labeled with the title of the meaning unit, the letter that accompanied that specific meaning unit, and the number used to identify the research participant (Fisher, 2006).

Each transcribed interview went through this process. Some meaning units were used repeatedly at the same time new meaning units continued to emerge. These meaning units were then combined, collapsed, and removed to make categories. From these categories, themes emerged.

Limitations

Whether qualitative or quantitative in nature, all research has its limitations. This research was be carefully planned and executed so as to minimize these limitations.

Qualitative research relies on the person conducting the research to remain objective and to conduct the study without biases, hypotheses, perceptions, or assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Given that the researcher teaches students

with reading comprehension learning disabilities in the K-12 setting, this is a limitation. The researcher has experience working with this population and understands how to effectively accommodate for this learning deficit. Additionally, the researcher has preconceived notions as to how best to educate this population and, by extension, may try to draw similar themes from the research data.

Interviewing and taking field notes is a procedure that requires skill and experience. The researcher conducting these interviews is a first-time researcher, which is another limitation because the researcher has not fully developed skills on how best to conduct research and interviews or analyze data.

A single Midwestern institution was used in this research study. The findings are a limitation because they apply only to students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at this institution. This research will not be representative of all community colleges, nor will it represent all Midwestern community colleges because of the small sample size of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities who participated in the study and the fact that it is a single-institution study.

Summary and Preview of Next Chapter

This chapter detailed the research methodology used in this study. Qualitative research was conducted using a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and their perceptions of the value of the accommodations they receive at King Community College. Data were gathered from surveys, interviews, field notes, member checking, document analysis, and contextual information. Participants were interviewed for between one and two hours. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim. With the

researcher, participants then participated in member checking by reviewing the transcript to ensure their lived experience and feelings toward accommodations at King Community College were accurately represented.

Chapter 4 thoroughly analyzes the data collected and reports the research findings. The chapter specifically explains the process used in analyzing the data, including how it was reduced, coded, and categorized.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter focuses on analysis of the qualitative data gathered for this study. It begins with a description of the community college used in this study and is followed by a description of each research participant. Next, the chapter describes how data were gathered, analyzed, and grouped into categories, followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from those categories. A discussion of the document analysis is then presented. The chapter concludes with a summary of the data and a preview of Chapter 5.

King Community College Description

The study was conducted at a Midwestern community college given the pseudonym King Community College. Accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the college offers continuing education courses as well as courses toward associate's degrees and professional certifications (King Community College Course Catalog, Fall, 2011-2012).

All research, except for two interviews, took place in the library on the college's main campus, which was identified by participants as the preferred location to conduct the interviews. The library has five rooms available for group-study use, one of which was used to conduct interviews. The room included a table, swivel chairs, a window overlooking the outdoors, and windows to see into the library. The room also featured ledges and electrical outlets for computers. Lights in the room were fairly dim. The walls of the rooms were quite thin. When adjacent rooms were occupied, sound

traveled easily, sometimes making it difficult to hear the interviewee. Overall, the atmosphere of the room was comfortable and conducive to the interview process.

One participant whose interview did not take place at the library was interviewed in an elementary school classroom in the same city as King Community College. The classroom featured 12 student desks, rocking chairs, and walls decorated with student works and inspirational and academic posters. The interview took place after school hours, so the building was quiet and the interview proceeded without interruption. The classroom was a cozy environment and felt very comfortable for an interview.

A second interview took place outside the campus library. The interview with the college's Equal Access Counselor took place in his office. The office had one window, overlooking the outdoors, and a large desk. It was a very comfortable interviewing environment for the Equal Access Counselor. During the interview, his computer and files were available to readily retrieve information as needed.

The King Community College student population is not highly diverse. Statistics from 2007 show 85% of the student body was White non-Hispanic, 6% African American, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic, and 4% other (U.S. College Search, 2011). By comparison, participants in this study reflected a more diverse sampling than the student population. Of the eight participants, six were White non-Hispanic, one was Hispanic, and one was African American.

Data were gathered between February and October, 2011. During this time, I visited the campus 24 times. In total, eight students and the college's Equal Access

Counselor were interviewed. Data were also collected from the online archival library and from documents provided by the Equal Access Counselor and the college Marketing Director.

Research Participant Profiles

According to Moustakas (1994), essential criteria for the selection of participants for a research project include affirmation that a participant has:

> Experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview (and perhaps a follow-up interview), grants the investigator the right to tape record, possibly videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications (p.107).

All participants selected for this study had been diagnosed with a reading comprehension learning disability, had used accommodations at King Community College, and had attended the college for at least one semester. To recruit participants, the college's Equal Access Counselor sent emails to students who met these qualifications, inviting them to participate in the study. Interested students were asked to complete an online, demographic survey. Those who did so were then contacted to arrange an interview date and time. To ensure confidentiality, each participant has been given a pseudonym.

Participant number one, Kim, was a Caucasian female in the 18-20 year age range. She smelled of cigarettes, appeared somewhat unkempt, and was late for the meeting. During the interview, Kim was both excited and nervous to share her story. She dodged questions and clammed up when asked about her self-reported history of "getting into mischief" (personal communication, March 8, 2011) and the impact this may have had on her education. She grew up in a single-parent home with her mother and younger brother. Academics came easily for her brother who would, at times, tease

50

Kim about being slow. Kim attended an alternative high school her senior year. Her mother recently re-married. Kim reports that both her mother and step-father are helpful and support her academic studies. Kim lives independently, but does not work. She receives state aid and help from her family. She has attended college for one semester. She hopes to earn a degree in general/child psychology and to move to Texas.

Participant number two, Carrie, was a Caucasian female in the age range of 26-30. She was early for the meeting, wore athletic clothes, and wore her hair in a ponytail. She appeared shy and apprehensive, evidenced by lengthy pauses before answering questions and by asking that many questions be rephrased. She shared her story, but provided few details. Carrie lives at home with her parents and works two jobs while attending school. She hopes to live on her own someday. She said she has no friends and does not socialize outside the home, unlike her younger brother, who she described as very social (personal communication, March 14, 2011). She reports that her family, mostly her mother, is very supportive of her educational career. Carrie has already graduated college with a child development certificate and is finishing a Special Needs Paraprofessional Associate's Degree. She has attended college for eight years.

Participant number three, Scott, was a Caucasian male in the 21-25 age range. He was punctual, neatly dressed, and well groomed. Scott appeared nervous about sharing his story. He had many concerns with the accommodations and resources available to students with a reading comprehension learning disability, and he offered several suggestions as to how accommodations might be improved. Scott's father died when Scott was 10. Shortly after, Scott was diagnosed with a learning disability.

Scott's only brother never finished high school. Scott works one job while attending school. He has been a King Community College student for three years, hoping to earn an Associate's Degree in Business.

Participant number four, Nicole, was a Caucasian female in the 18-20 age range. She was punctual, well groomed, and interested in sharing her story. Nicole loves to cook, volunteering as a chef at a summer camp for children in New York. She has one job. Nicole lives with her mom and has an older sister who helps her with schoolwork. She has been a student at King Community College for one semester, working toward an Associate's Degree in Child Development.

Participant number five, Miracle, was an African-American female in the 18-20 age range. Arranging an interview with Miracle was difficult as she rescheduled the appointment several times. She arrived late the day of the interview. Once the interview began, she was open and interested in sharing her story, hoping it would help other college students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. She was nicely groomed for the interview. Her mother drove her to the library and waited outside while the interview took place. Miracle lives at home with her mom. She reported a family history of dyslexia. Miracle did not work while she attended college. She attended only one semester and has no plans to return. She is currently enrolled in an eight-month program to become a medical assistant.

Participant number six, Lisa, was a Caucasian female in the age range of 21-25. She was early for the meeting, dressed in appropriate summer clothes, and greeted the interviewer with a smile. She presented herself as laid-back and easy-going. She lives at home with her mom, dad, and brother, all of whom are helpful, she reported, when it

comes to helping her with her schoolwork. Lisa volunteers at a local hospital, transporting patients in wheelchairs. She has been a student for four years, hoping to earn a Medical Assistant's Associate's Degree.

Participant number seven, Mark, was a Caucasian male in the 36-40 age range. He was punctual, tall, and well-groomed. He had a positive attitude and wanted to share his story so as to help others. Mark is married and has one son. He grew up in a home with parents who emigrated from Italy. He reported a family history of mental illness and abuse. He reported having little support from his family while growing up, but his wife is very supportive of him now. Currently out of work, Mark takes care of his son and attends classes. He has been a King Community College student for two years, working toward an associate's degree in Biomedical Engineering Technology.

Participant number eight, Maria, was a Caucasian/Hispanic female in the 18-20 age range. She was early for the meeting, personable, and nicely dressed. She was very understanding when we had to wait for an available interview room. She lives at home with her mom and dad, has three half-sisters and one half-brother, and is the only child her mom and dad produced together. She deeply desires to move away from home and has even considered joining the military to do so. She currently works one job to save money to move out. She has attended King Community College for three years and intends to transfer to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, to earn a bachelor's degree. She would like to be the first in her family to earn an associate's degree.

King Community College's Equal Access Counselor also was interviewed. Prior to his employment at the college, he worked for 25 years at a government agency,

placing adults with disabilities in jobs. He has worked as the Equal Access Counselor

for more than 10 years. He enjoys his job and finds great joy in helping students

achieve success.

Table 1 lists each participant's pseudonym, age range, gender, race/ethnicity,

program of study, and length of time as a student of King Community College.

Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Age Range	Gender	Race/Ethncity	Program of Study	Length of Time at Community College
Kim	18-20	Female	Caucasian	General/Child Psychology	1 semester
Carrie	26-30	Female	Caucasian	Special Needs Paraprofessional	8 years
Scott	21-25	Male	Caucasian	Business	3 years
Nicole	18-20	Female	Caucasian	Childcare	1 semester
Miracle	18-20	Female	African American	Medical Assisting	1 semester
Lisa	21-25	Female	Caucasian	Medical Assisting	4 years
Mark	36-40	Male	Caucasian	Biomedical Engineering Technology	2 years
Maria	18-20	Female	Caucasian/-Hispanic	Liberal Arts	3 years

Data Analysis Process and Coding

All interviews were coded by hand. The verbatim transcripts were reviewed, and relevant statements that pertained to the texture or structure of the participant's experience were highlighted. These highlighted statements were then given a title to represent the meaning unit they encompassed. This was done through open coding. From this process, 85 meaning units emerged (see Appendix D). Next to each meaning unit is the letter used to identify the unit while coding the transcripts.

During the coding process, I took phrases, paragraphs, and words to group data into meaning units. In addition to reading and re-reading the transcripts, I immersed myself in the data by listening to the interviews a second time. Some meaning units overlapped from one transcript to the next while other meaning units were specific to an individual interview. From this, a sense of each interview's major themes emerged.

Next, the meaning units were reviewed again and clustered into categories that could be collapsed into a single theme. Appendix D features a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements from participants that represent the invariant horizons or meaning units from the categories that emerged. This list does not include every meaning unit that emerged in the study. The categories were then labeled as themes that represent and express the phenomenon of being a college student with a reading comprehension learning disability.

Interviews

Prior to each interview, approximately 10 minutes was spent in relaxed conversation to allow the research participant and myself to develop positive rapport. The questions used were open-ended, and allowed spontaneous sharing from

participants. The researcher carefully responded to the natural rhythm of thoughts,

feelings, and perceptions. Moustakas (1981) describes the encounter of rhythm as:

> [Feeling] into bodily states; we remain open to what is actual, with whatever range of motions and directions at whatever depth is essential. We wait, we intuit, we enter into the dance, respectful of the tone, quality and force or all that exists between ourselves and others. The challenge is to be aware organically, to make effective contact, and to encourage the other to be, always moving toward a synthesis (p. 9).

I used responses from each participant to guide my inquiry within the framework of the

interview protocol.

Core Themes of Students with Reading Comprehension Learning Disabilities

Using the phenomenological methods of reflection and analysis, core themes

were identified from categories that emerged from the meaning units. Below are

descriptions of each core theme. Where quotes are provided, close attention was given

to the participants' own words and to the accuracy of his or her rich description.

Family support. The core theme of family support emerged from each

participant's interview. Family support describes family interactions with academics in

the lives of participants. The experience of family support was different for each

participant. Some participants reflected on the support their family gave to them during

elementary, middle, and high school, while others discussed the support their family

currently provides. Overall, the majority of participants had helpful and supportive

families. For the purpose of this study, family members are considered parents, step-

parents, siblings, step-siblings, and spouses.

The majority of participants in this study stated their mother was the key

support in their lives, either emotionally or academically. However, one participant's

family abused him physically and emotionally because of his reading comprehension learning disability.

Kim receives academic support during college from both her mother and step-father. They help her to decide which topics to write, assist her with proofreading papers, and calm her when she becomes overwhelmed with her studies. She explained their help in the following way:

> My mom helps me a lot. Like, when I can't think of something with my papers, she'll give me something to write about 'cause my teacher just tells you to write a paragraph, but he doesn't tell you what to write about. It can be anything. And for me, it's easier if you give me something to write about. And then my step-dad actually will over-read [*sic*] it, and he'll cross out or fix something, and then my mom will over-read [*sic*] it, and whatever he missed, she got [*sic*] (personal communication, March 8, 2011).

Kim's family acts as an academic support system by providing assistance at home. Her family is an extended accommodation to her success.

Miracle's mother is also a beacon of support. Miracle describes her mother as patient. While completing her homework, Miracle often becomes frustrated and agitated, and her mother helps to calm her down. To do this, Miracle said her mother, "Won't, like, get frustrated if I'm taking so long, if I don't understand it" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Miracle said her mother says things like, "Calm down, take a deep breath" (personal communication, May 26, 2011), which helps Miracle overcome the frustration. Miracle also said, "It was just kind of a struggle throughout school, and I would just have my mom help me. I didn't have nobody [*sic*] else like the teachers or none of that. So it was just hard for me" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Miracle's mother supports her emotionally with her schoolwork. Without this emotional support, she said she would not be as successful in college.

Lisa receives ample support from her mother with her educational endeavors, and her father and brother help if they are available. Lisa described how her family helps her. "They'll help me just, like, read the questions to me. If I have homework and there's a question I don't understand, they'll help me, you know? That kind of helps me understand it better," she said (personal communication, July 21, 2011). Her mother also proofreads her papers. Lisa's family further supports her by listening to her tape-recorded lectures with her. She stated:

> I'll go home, and I'll listen to it. I'll just listen to it. Sometimes, I'll write notes down, I'll take notes off of it. I'll pause the recorder, and I'll just write down what she [the professor] says. Sometimes, I'll even have my parents help me and listen to it, listen to the lectures, and they'll even tell me, 'Oh, that's important. You should write that down' (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

Lisa's family supports her academically by assisting her with her schoolwork and teaching her note-taking skills. They provide her with a foundation for success by teaching her the building blocks to be a successful student.

Carrie's family supports her in ways similar to Kim and Lisa's families. Carrie said, "They want me to get through school, so they try and help when they can. My dad's schedule is really crazy, so he's not there that much. But my mom's always there" (personal communication, March 14, 2011).

Maria felt more supported by her mother than her father. She explained her father's lack of support:

> My dad is on my back every single day. 'Did you do your homework? You're home and you haven't done your homework?' 'Dad, I'm 20 years old. . . . I know what needs to be done.' But every single day, he's like, 'I don't see you reading. I don't see you doing homework. When are you going to do your homework?' Every single day, constantly, he's on my back about homework. . . . He doesn't have any patience (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Maria does not feel supported by her father. She believes he nags her and does not have faith that she is a responsible, conscientious student.

The participants in this study expressed a strong connection with their mothers when it came to support with school. Mothers were considered to be the most supportive person in their lives by being encouraging, assisting with homework, and being consistently present for the participants.

Siblings are also important anchors of support for participants. Kim had difficulty with her younger brother while growing up. She said, "My brother would pick on me about it [having a learning disability], because he was always smarter than me" (personal communication, March 8, 2011). She explained that this hurt her feelings, and although he no longer treats her this way, the scars of his comments remain. Miracle also had difficulty with her brother. He was supportive of her and willing to tutor her, but he would "kind of, like, rush to tell me to do this and do that, and I'm confused. It's like, slow down. And if you slow down, then I'm understanding more, and he just rushes through it" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Nicole's sister is supportive and helps her with schoolwork. Nicole said, "My sister, Vanessa, helps me out a lot" (personal communication, May 25, 2011). The participants expressed a need to feel academically valued in the family network as well as to be treated kindly by siblings.

Support was defined differently for Scott and Maria. They felt their families were emotionally supportive, but they did not receive academic support from their families with their homework. Scott stated, "They're supportive, but, like, they don't really sit down to do my homework with me or anything like that. They never have

time" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Scott knows his family is available should he need anything. Having a support network at home provides a sense of relief for participants in helping to achieve their academic responsibilities.

Members of Maria's family often tell her how proud they are of her, which makes her feel supported. She described the feeling:

> I want something good for my life because I'm the only one out of, like, all my siblings to actually graduate from high school, and I'm the only one in my family to actually get their [*sic*] associate's, almost. . . . My mom didn't graduate, my dad went to trade school after high school, and I'm the only one that went to school. My sister tells me how proud she is and—so my parents, telling me how proud they are, that just makes me want to do more and, knowing and seeing where my family doesn't really go to school, they only have, like, a high school education, it kind of like pushes me 'cause I want to—I want to have money, I want to, like, be the first one to, like, get my associate's and get my, my—bachelor's and whatnot (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Confirmation of pride and encouragement in students with reading comprehension learning disabilities allows them to feel supported and encouraged to continue pursuing their academic endeavors.

While most participants had positive support systems within their families, Mark did not. His parents were immigrants from Italy, and he believes their Italian culture impacted how they responded to his learning disability. According to Mark, his parents were both physically and emotionally abusive toward him because of his learning disability. He believes they lacked the capacity to understand that his disability was not his fault. He explained:

> It was constantly, you know? We'd go to friends' houses, and their kids were doing well in school and this and this, and, 'Why can't you be more like her, or more like him?' or 'See what they're doing? Oh, they're smart; you're stupid.' You know, I—they always used to call me 'stupid.' And they—it wasn't, you know, bite their tongue or anything. It was demoralizing. It was, you know, kicking you. I mean literally—I remember my brother had to stop my parents because it was like almost those things that you see as a gang initiation where—

I remember I was on the floor in my bedroom, up against the wall, and my mom and dad were just standing there just kicking me, kicking me, and beating me (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

Mark did not receive academic or emotional support from his family. This lack of support led him to doubt himself and his academic capabilities.

Conversely, Mark's brother was highly regarded because he did not struggle in school and was, as Mark described, "Mr. Honor Society" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). His brother's academic achievements were very difficult for Mark. Mark felt his parents constantly compared him to his brother and that Mark was always a disappointment. He said, "Everyone would like praise and glorify my brother, you know? He was Mr. Honor Society. He was—he was the success" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Mark went on to explain:

So, here I am, against my brother, you know? He was four years older than I was, and it was rough. That and dealing with parents who came from Italy. So they weren't aware of what was wrong with me, they didn't comprehend fully (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

When Mark's parents compared him with his academically talented brother, he felt inadequate. These feelings of inadequacy carried over into how he viewed his intelligence, the potential for his future, and his self-worth.

Mark is currently married and has one son. He receives support from his wife in his college pursuits. She is very understanding of his reading comprehension learning disability and is always willing to lend a hand with his studies. Mark said:

When I first started out, she helped me with English, you know, hard one. My two English classes, math, and so on. I'll try to do something like story problems . . . and I might not be able to comprehend what they're asking for, so I'll ask her (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

Mark believes, "If it wasn't for my wife, I don't think I would be here today . . . in the capacity that I am now. I can honestly say she's probably been the greatest support in

61

my life" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). The relationship between Mark and his wife illustrates the importance of having support at home. It is evident that students with reading comprehension learning disabilities need someone at home who is willing to support and encourage them to be successful.

For two participants, family illness had an impact on the capacity of their families to be supportive. Mark's father struggled with disease in 1989. Luckily, his father recovered and was able to resume functioning. His father was sick for a long time, which he believes impacted how invested and supportive his family could be of his education. It also affected his social life as he spent many hours at the hospital, seeing to his father's health.

In addition to his father's condition, Mark's mom had mental health issues. He described her as "clinically depressed, schizoid, I would even say multi-personality" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Mark's mom had attempted suicide on several occasions, which negatively impacted his ability to work and to attend school so that he could take care of her. He felt as though she could not support him academically or emotionally because she was so consumed by her own issues.

When Scott was 10 years old, his father died. Around this time, Scott was placed in special education. He remembers being unhappy with special education, feeling as though he was learning the basics all over again, all while trying to process his father's death.

Most participants had an emotionally and academically supportive family network. In most cases, the strongest supporter of the participants was the mother. Mothers played a vital role by supporting, encouraging, and assisting their children's

academic pursuits. Family support allowed participants to feel safe in pursuing

academic endeavors, knowing they would have additional support at home. Family

support acts as an additional accommodation for students with reading comprehension

learning disabilities.

Family support appeared essential in the academic development of students with

reading comprehension learning disabilities. Support from family members led

participants to have a stronger sense of academic confidence. The families in this study

helped with homework completion, note-taking, study skills, proofreading papers,

reading work aloud, mathematics problem solving, computer assistance, and emotional

support.

Physical and mental health issues. The physical and mental health of the

participants impacted their educational journey. Two participants struggled with

speech issues. One participant identified herself as having Obsessive Compulsive

Disorder (OCD). Another said she had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), while another dealt with drug and alcohol abuse,

which led to a suicide attempt.

Speech and language deficits occur in the areas of articulation, receptive

language, and expressive language. Lisa said she received speech therapy following

testing by a speech pathologist, although she did not disclose the nature of her speech

and language deficit. Lisa understood she needed support both academically and with

her speech. She said, "I was so young, I don't think it really bothered me. But, I mean,

I guess I was glad to get the extra help, if I needed it" (personal communication, July

21, 2011).

Speech and language deficits affected Maria's ability to correctly pronounce sounds and words, a deficit in the area of articulation. She believed her speech and language impairment played a role in her difficulties with learning to read. She stated, "I think it's the whole speech thing where I can't pronounce words the same. Like, I have a really hard time, pronouncing words and reading the words because, when I read them, it sounds different to me" (personal communication, September 22, 2011). She received speech services from elementary through high school, which meant she was often pulled out of class and missed instruction. She explained:

> I seen [*sic*] Ms. B for my speech. . . . I was in regular classes, and then, I think, every day, I went to see the special class, and then once a week, I'd go to the speech therapy. Like, I would get pulled out of my class to go see Ms. B., again, for speech (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Instructional time was compromised when Maria left class for speech and language therapy. Although speech and language therapy was necessary, she lost valuable classroom instruction in reading and other subjects.

ADHD impacts Miracle and her ability to focus on her learning. ADHD is still a problem for her as a college student, although she does not take medication. She took medication during her high school junior year. Miracle said, "I'll wander off, and I can't stay focused. I did take the ADHD medicine, but I didn't really like it. So, I had to get off it. . . . I'm not hyper, I'm just—I don't know how to stay calm" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). She said she has to work hard to pay attention and to focus on professors without getting distracted. She also explained that part of her dyslexia is related to her ADHD because she cannot focus on the letters. When she learned she had dyslexia, Miracle said:

> I wasn't shocked, I was just, like, 'What is that? I don't even know what that is.' I thought I just switched words around just 'cause I couldn't really focus on

64

the stuff because I have ADHD. So it's kind of hard for me to focus. So I was just like, 'Naw, I don't think I had [*sic*] it.' And so she's [the instructor's], like, 'Yeah, you have it.' And I was, like, 'Oh, wow' (personal communication, May 26, 2011).

ADHD impacts Miracle's success such that she must find different strategies to remain focused. Coping strategies are necessary when dealing with ADHD and trying to be a successful learner.

Maria has been diagnosed with OCD, which she believes helps her to be organized with her school work and deadlines. She explains her organization system as, "I just use sticky notes on everything. Like, I need to do this or this needs to be done by this date, and—just to keep organized" (personal communication, September 22, 2011). Organization comes naturally to her, which she believes has contributed to her success in school. Maria stated:

> Being organized allows you to have everything in the right order. Like, I'll have this subject here, another subject in, like, a different spot, and I'd be, like, 'Okay, this is what needs to be done for this class by this date.' And then I think, 'If you're unorganized, you don't really know when something's due, you don't really know where's [*sic*] this paper at. Where is the sheet this professor gave me?' And it's just chaos. Like, I've seen my friends—a lot of my friends are not organized, and they don't do that good [*sic*] in school (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

She believes her OCD diagnosis is an asset when it comes to her learning, and she has learned to use OCD to her advantage so that it contributes to her success.

Mark had a difficult period in his life when he abused alcohol and other drugs and got into trouble with law. He explained the problems he encountered:

> I was probably under the influence of something. I had a case of beer in the back of the car, in the trunk. So I got rear-ended. The person who rear-ended me took off . . . totaled out. My mom—I remember, you know, like, going home, the cops brought me home and said that there was an accident. He had this, that and this. . . . I said that I had a buddy of mine, he had—he got a hold of these taser guns, so he—he left 'em in there. And at the time, I was, you know, babysitting my niece, and she had her toy guns in there. It was a

calamity cluster 'cause I was already on probation. I had a car that I had tried to have someone burn—to get the insurance money and get a new vehicle. And then I got charged with malicious mischief. I got very, very lucky with that one. Things could have ended up a lot differently (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

Mark described another encounter with the legal system:

Basically, a guy I knew, I didn't know anything—I didn't know that he had what he had until it was too late. We were driving around, and we dropped someone off, and I was, like, 'That's so and so's house,' and he didn't like the guy, and I didn't like the guy. And the next thing you know, he's—jumps out of the car and just starts shooting. I did not know that he had a gun. So I ended up dropping him off that night, and that's how they caught me. I went back around—'cause I wanted to make sure everyone was alright (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

After run-ins with the law, Mark dropped out of college. During the interview, he said he reported feeling depressed, eventually attempting suicide. The attempt followed an exchange with his mother following one of his arrests. He reported his mother told him, "You're a worthless piece of shit. Get the hell out of here. You're not worth anything. Get—get—leave" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). After the exchange, Mark said he walked "up to the store and bought a bunch of pills and just started taking 'em as I was walking. I bought myself a soda and started taking 'em 'cause it was, like, pointless to me" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). When his mother learned of the attempt, he said she told others, "Let the son of a bitch die. Let him die. Let him die. . . . My mom didn't care about me" (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

Mark sought behavioral health therapy to work through his issues. Mental health issues impact a student's ability to focus on his or her studies. These issues must be dealt with so that students can achieve success in college.

Other participants appeared to have struggled with emotional and behavioral health issues as well. Some participants during the interviews exhibited signs of anxiety and insecurities. Several said they had attended restrictive special education programs during K-12, indicating the possibility of other disabilities. One participant exhibited what appeared to be a processing disorder due to the significant amount of time needed to answer each interview question and how frequently she needed the interview question restated or rephrased.

Physical and mental health issues were reported by four participants. It is highly likely that the other participants also struggled with physical and mental health issues. They experienced speech and language impairments, ADHD, OCD, and mental health issues. Such physical and mental health issues impacted the educational experiences of participants in both negative and positive ways. In addition to having to cope with a reading comprehension learning disability, the lives of these participants are further complicated by other issues, making academic success even more difficult.

Importance of relationships with educators and/or service providers. A core theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of relationships between students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and the educators and/or service providers who assist them. The participants discussed many different types of academic relationships throughout their experiences of being students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. The relationships discussed ranged from elementary school until the present and included the following educators and service providers: classroom teachers, counselors, special education providers, speech therapists, faculty members, tutors, and the King Community College Equal Access

Counselor. Participants discussed how negative and positive interactions with educators and/or service providers impacted the emotional and academic safety they felt. They also discussed how misconceptions of reading comprehension learning disabilities and language barriers made relationships with educators and service providers more difficult to develop.

All participants commented on their relationships with educators and/or services providers. Some gave examples of how wonderful their experiences have been, while others discussed the negative relationships they have encountered. Nicole said:

> If you have a good relationship, it's easier for you to be able to come to them if you have a problem. If you don't have a good relationship, you're gonna [*sic*] be, 'Man, I don't want to talk to her,' you know, or 'him' (personal communication, May 25, 2011).

Relationships with educators and/or service providers were also viewed as a tier of support for some participants. Lisa said when her teachers gave her positive feedback, she felt they "believed in me, and they're being supportive of me" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). She described most of her college professors as "helpful. . . . They [faculty] were just really supportive. They did whatever it took to help me to pass the class" (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

Nicole received help from her college child development teacher. She explained:

> She really helped me because there wasn't a writer for me to take my tests, and I have a hard time writing. So I went back to her, and she sat down and wrote exactly what I needed on my tests, and she made sure I had a reader and writer the next couple of times. I totally–I mean her–she has a lot of homework, and it was pretty hard work. But she's really willing to go out of her way to help you, and I really like that about her. She was really good (personal communication, May 25, 2011).

This experience allowed Nicole to feel supported by her teacher. She felt the teacher was willing to give her extra help, which made Nicole feel safe and encouraged.

Maria said her college geography teacher "took me into this room, and she talked to me about the tests and everything that can accommodate me" (personal communication, September 22, 2011). Carrie described her learning disabilities tutor as "always willing to help . . . she understands what the kids need" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). When faculty take the time to make a personal connection with students with reading comprehension learning disabilities, students feel emotionally and academically safer in the classroom.

Carrie said she did not have a consistent service provider or counselor throughout her K-12 experience. Carrie explained, "Too many people [service providers and counselors] that I really liked would get moved somewhere else, and then, I would never see them again. So then I'd have to find somebody new, and that person would leave right as I got to know them" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). She said her high school special education counselor "had no idea what any student needed. He didn't care. You could tell" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Relationships are important building blocks to feeling secure in academia. Carrie never felt secure in her relationships and, therefore, felt neglected and left behind.

Some participants felt educators and/or service providers lack investment in the students, making it difficult for students to develop relationships that foster success. Miracle stated, "All the rest of the teachers sort of, like, put it under the rug, like, they didn't try to help me" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). She went on to say,

"The teachers could have put more effort in it. Well, my English teacher should have put more effort in trying to get somebody to read my tests so I don't really get a bad grade in that class" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Kim described an encounter with her college English teacher where she felt she was not being supported:

> It's really nervous and nerve-racking, especially when I tell him I can't take the test. I need to have it sent to somewhere else so it can be read to me. And then he'll [*sic*] be like, 'Oh, why didn't you tell me?' I'm like, 'When I came in the first day of class, I told you that I got special accommodations and stuff and asked if you had the paper.' And he's like, 'I don't read 'em.' I'm like, 'Oh, okay.' I was shocked. Especially since he's, like, 'I can't hear you, speak up.' I'm like, 'There's people sitting right there, and I don't want to say this out loud.' It was embarrassing (personal communication, March 8, 2011).

Mark did not have a positive relationship with one teacher due to the teacher's demeanor and apparent lack of investment in the students' education. He stated, "He was very, 'I'm just here for a paycheck' deal. I mean, he knew his stuff, he knew how to do things. But he didn't have any tact and diplomacy, really" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Mark described one interaction where he felt this teacher displayed a lack of understanding regarding the sensitive nature of having a reading comprehension learning disability and the importance of keeping this information private. Mark stated:

> One time, I was walking in [to class] and he [the professor] goes, 'Do you need to go to the Testing?'—it was before—I couldn't even—didn't even sit—sit down. He was standing in front of the whole class. He goes, 'Do you need to go to the Testing Center and take your test?' So you go into class the next time and you get, 'So, why do you have to go to the Testing Center?' And that—I'm to a point in my life where it's, like, 'Okay, listen, this is what is wrong with me.' It—it—it peeved me off because it's like you have no right to say that [in front of the whole class]. And there's part of me that's, like, 'Okay, this is— this is along the lines of, in a sense, doctor/patient privileges.' And it's like, 'Wait a minute, you are violating this completely' (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

70

Participants expressed a strong need for positive working relationships. These relationships brought forth a stronger sense of safety and desire to be successful. When these relationships were lacking, participants felt frustrated, alone, and unsupported. It is also essential that educators are discreet in handling conversations about accommodations.

Developing positive relationships was difficult for participants when the educator or service provider did not understand their disability. Scott explained:

> I had a business law teacher. He was a pretty good teacher, but when I told him about my learning disability with the reading and all that, he told me that he's still gonna have me read [to the class] because it's gonna build my confidence in class. But when you're reading, it's like, he might as well just read it 'cause he's gonna be [*sic*] trying to fix everything I'm trying to say anyways (personal communication, March 30, 2011).

Scott's professor did not understand the nature of his disability. The professor hoped that building Scott's confidence would improve his reading abilities. Scott felt frustrated and misunderstood. Scott believes there "should be a program where there's specialized teachers that can teach, and [students] are able to ask questions while they're teaching, because that's how I feel some people learn" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Educators need to understand the nature and educational impact of all disabilities so that they can serve these different populations effectively.

Miracle had difficulty understanding a faculty member because of his accent. Because of this, she felt she could not build a relationship with him. She stated, "I just didn't do that [disclose learning disability] with my math teacher 'cause he had an accent, and I really didn't understand him" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Communication is key to building relationships. Educators need to be willing to

71

express to students with reading comprehension learning disabilities a desire to engage with them and build a relationship beyond any language barrier.

Relationships with educators and service providers are important to the participants in this study. The relationships that develop impact how the participants perform and view their educational experiences. It is essential that educators and service providers understand the nature of the disability as well as the impact it has on the student. Educators and services providers need to be willing to offer assistance and must be compassionate and discreet. They must provide the student with support and encouragement. When educators and service providers act in this manner, students with reading comprehension learning disabilities are more likely to feel safe in the academic setting and will strive to perform at a higher level.

Accommodations.   Accommodations emerged as a core theme in this research study. Participants used a variety of accommodations throughout their academic career, and they described which accommodations they perceived as valuable and which were not. They reported using extended time on tests, having an alternate location to work in and to take tests, having their tests read aloud, having breaks during the day, and having modified tests. Accommodations also available to participants included Scantrons, a writer for test taking, notes provided by the professor, use of a laptop, use of a smartpen, tape recorded lectures, use of an in-class note-taker, use of a calculator, and use of books on compact disk (CD). Not all accommodations were used by all participants. Each used a variety of the accommodations listed.

During elementary, middle, and high school, participants reported having special resource and academic rooms available to them for support. Maria expressed that the best part about going to the academic room to takes tests was:

> There would be other people taking their tests, and you would just ask them [questions about the test], or you could talk to the teacher, and the teacher would kind of, like, help you in the right direction, like—pretty much hint to you what the answer is. . . . I loved it. I don't think it was really different from any other class (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Some participants had a positive view on the accommodations they received and found them to be helpful. Carrie's outlook was that she "didn't care. . . . I figured if that's what helped me, that's what I need to do. . . . It's actually not that bad" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Kim explained that she liked receiving accommodations "because I feel like I get more time on tests, and I feel like I do better on the tests if I can re-read them and just really think about the question" (personal communication, March 8, 2011). She also stated that she preferred receiving accommodations in high school versus elementary school because in high school, educators had a better understanding of what she needed. She expressed this by stating that, "It seems like elementary school was just trying to get you to understand the point. As with high school, they're trying to actually help you" (personal communication, March 8, 2011). Accommodations gave participants a sense of security to achieve their academic goals.

Scott explained his feelings about receiving accommodations in the following way, "It just felt like they didn't want to teach me, you know? Like, they wanted to do the basics" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Scott did not feel as though he actually received accommodations until college. In high school, he felt as though

teachers gave him too much support to ensure his success versus accommodating him based on his needs.

Nicole expressed her feelings about accommodations, stating:

I went to special ed classes, and it was basically the same type of work, though it was a lot easier—it was, like, simple work. And I—I still struggle with it, and you know, I had a really hard time with it (personal communication, May 25, 2011).

Participants understood the difference between supportive accommodations and educators completing the work for them.

All participants felt testing accommodations were the most valuable accommodations they receive at King Community College. They felt the Testing Center was important because they could have their tests read, have someone write answers for them, they were not required to use Scantrons, they received extended time on tests, and they were able to take tests in a room other than the classroom. Kim described the Testing Center as, "A quiet area" (personal communication, March 8, 2011). Carrie said that in the Testing Center, "I don't have all the distractions of the other students leaving" (personal communication, March 14, 2011).

Participants found the accommodation of having their test read aloud quite valuable. Carrie explained the test reader "reads all of the questions on the tests and the answers. . . . They just read it off the paper . . . as many times as you want" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Kim expressed, "When it comes to tests, I freak out, and I'll just, like, not understand the questions. But it's easier when someone's reading it to me" (personal communication, March 8, 2011). Miracle stated, "I can read it, but it didn't want to come out right when I read it. But when somebody else reads it, I'm like, 'Oh, I understand it now'" (personal communication, May 26, 2011).

Participants found extended time on tests a valuable accommodation. Mark explained that he appreciates this accommodation because, "I think it's more anxiety when I don't get that extra time" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Lisa said, "I do better on the tests when I get extended time because I have more time to look over the questions and think about 'em, and I just feel like I can do more, I can be more successful in class" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). Maria explained the value of extended time for test taking as an accommodation:

> I can't just rush through the tests. I have, like, this picture kind of memory where I stop and close my eyes or something and just try to picture that page in the book, or that note, and trying to do the elimination or trying to think hard, and especially if there's short answers, things you gotta [*sic*] kind of—because a lot of times, they do the short answers or essay questions, and you have to like think about how you want to phrase it, what you want to start off with, and stuff like that (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Maria also feels she needs the extra time to process her thinking and to organize her responses.

Scantrons have caused difficulties for some participants in this study. Used during test taking, students fill in the Scantron as opposed to completing the answers on the actual exam. The college Testing Center accommodates students by offering to complete the Scantron on a student's behalf. Kim stated, "It's really hard for me to use Scantrons . . . 'cause if I skipped an answer, it would, like, mess up the whole Scantron" (personal communication, March 8, 2011). Mark explained that Scantrons are "a little bit difficult because the—the—because they're so tightly spaced together—you know? It kind of blends together" (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

The testing center provides a sense of security and a safe place to take exams and to work in a quiet area. Additionally, the testing center offers several layers of academic support that builds confidence among participants during testing. This

accommodation is vital for participants as it levels the playing field and helps them to feel capable of meeting their academic goals.

Most participants found note takers to be the least valuable accommodation available. The King Community College note taker is a fellow classmate whom a student with reading comprehension learning disabilities must approach and ask to take notes during class. Carrie and Lisa explained they do not use note takers because of the anxiety of approaching a fellow student and asking that student to take notes. Carrie stated, "Basically, you need to know somebody in the class to really have the note taker. And me, I don't really know that many people. . . . I just kind of figured out how to take notes myself" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Lisa felt worried that she:

> Wouldn't really understand their notes 'cause everyone writes notes—'cause some people abbreviate their notes, or they'll, you know, they'll make 'em shorter or they'll—I just—I'm afraid I won't, like, understand 'em as well as I understand my own notes (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

Kim disagreed with Carrie and Lisa and found value in using the note taker as an accommodation. She explained:

> 'Cause when I write my own notes, I'll write 'em all differently, and I won't understand them, and I'll confuse myself by my own notes, surprisingly. But when someone else writes them for me, it seems to be a lot easier for me (personal communication, March 8, 2011).

Kim was the only one who found a note taker to be a valuable accommodation. The participants had difficulty self-advocating for a note taker.

Other accommodations participants in this study considered to be the least valuable included using a laptop in class, using a tape recorder in class, and listening to books on CD. Scott felt that books on CD do not "really do much because when you're reading, sometimes it goes too fast, some disks you can't slow down. But other than

76

that, that's the only thing that would read to me" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). He said the way in which books on CD are formatted makes them difficult to use. Accommodations that require participants to take the initiative proved more difficult to manage and less desirable for participants.

Accommodations are a vital support to help students with reading comprehension learning disabilities succeed. All students in this study use accommodations available through King Community College. They agree testing accommodations are the most valuable to their success as students. Accommodations provide a sense of security and even the academic playing field for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. If students with reading comprehension learning disabilities need to self- advocate for an accommodation, such as a note taker, they are less likely to use it. Accommodations need to be readily available and accessible.

Strategies for success. All participants reported using strategies to assist them with their goal of being successful in college. These strategies included study groups, individual tutoring, tutoring on campus, government agencies, writing center, Job Corps, study skills, and reading outreach programs. Each participant's attitude toward school was also considered a strategy for success.

On-campus tutoring is available for students. Students do not need to sign up for this service; the service is available on a drop-in basis. Most students felt this was a nice idea, but it was ineffective. Scott explained, "You would have too many people in there at all times, and so, you just never really go there and get what you needed done" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Mark stated, "You're sitting there, and

you're trying to figure something out, and then here comes a different person to help you out with this one, and then a different person—different, different, different" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Scott and Mark felt frustrated and discouraged with their experiences. Lisa's experience was much different. On the few occasions she used the service, she worked with one tutor specifically and found the experience helpful. About the tutoring center, Lisa said:

> I've only done it [used the tutoring service] a few times, but so far, it's been pretty good. I had a really good tutor for English my first year here. She was really good. I forgot her—I think her name was Debbie, but she was really good. She helped me write a paper, and it was really helpful (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

The Tutoring Center was a valuable resource to students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. Participants found it more valuable if they use the same tutor versus a variety of tutors at a given time.

Many participants said they would like to have the option to work with free, one-on-one tutors. They felt King Community College should make such a service available, which, as Nicole said, other local universities do. She stated, "I wish there was more individual tutoring. That would be very helpful, I think" (personal communication, May 25, 2011). Scott's comments reflected Nicole's. "Some people, I've learned, need one-on-one," he said (personal communication, March 30, 2011). One-on-one tutoring is an accommodation participants' wish was more readily available.

Participants have developed personal study habits that act as strategies for success. Some participants use note cards, some re-write their notes, some write the material over and over again, some re-read the material, and some have family members quiz them. Maria said, "We might get a study guide, and then you just go

over every single question to hit the right points that are on the test. Then the chapter reviews in the back of the book usually helps, the summaries" (personal communication, September 22, 2011). Lisa prefers to "rewrite out something like a million times on a piece of paper just so that it sticks in my head" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). Several participants mentioned the importance of studying harder than their non-disabled peers and spending more time with homework. Study strategies are important for the success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Nicole studies with a friend and classmate. Once a week, they meet to go over classroom notes together. Other participants found study groups distracting due to the desires of the group to socialize. Carrie participated in a study group once, but, she said, "It kind of fell apart because half the people don't show up for class anymore" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Study groups are only effective if participants work toward an academic goal.

Personal outlooks and perspectives of schooling and the difficulties associated with learning are other factors to consider when discussing school success. The participants in this study had many feelings about attending college, but mostly, they were optimistic about their ability to succeed. Optimism is considered a strategy for success.

A sense of hope and a positive outlook firmly encompassed seven of the eight participants. Carrie said, "I always think I can do a good job. It may not always happen, but I try" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). The participant who did not have a positive outlook about school was Scott. He presented in a more negative

fashion and was frustrated by past and present circumstances. When asked whether his

attitude toward school had an impact on his educational success, he replied:

> No, because of the fact that, no. I know that if your attitude's really, really good, and you're in a good mood and you go there, no matter what, that's not gonna control me or what happens throughout the class. If something, you know, don't [*sic*] go my way, the way my brain works, being in a good mood isn't gonna help. It's just gonna [*sic*] take—take it away (personal communication, March 30, 2011).

Having a positive outlook allowed participants to remain resilient when they

encountered academic setbacks.

Participants used a plethora of strategies to ensure success in school. Making a

commitment to use these different strategies helped participants be more successful in

their education. Participants feel that, to be successful, they have to work harder than

their non-disabled peers. Free, one-on-one tutoring is a highly desirable strategy for

success that is currently not available at King Community College.

Motivation. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities in this

study found the feedback they received from teachers an important motivator for their

success. The feedback they received, whether negative or positive, influenced their

level of motivation and confidence to succeed.

Positive faculty feedback was identified as valuable to six out of seven

participants (one of the eight participants interviewed for this study chose not to

comment on this area of inquiry). Participants referred to faculty feedback as "teacher

feedback." Kim said teacher feedback "makes me feel really good 'cause if I did a

good job, that means the next one's [assignment] going to be probably good, too. It's

just gonna make you want to work harder" (personal communication, March 8, 2011).

The other five participants who commented on teacher feedback agreed that when

faculty members gave positive feedback, it made them work harder. Lisa said positive feedback "makes me want to work harder at that class . . . it really impacts on how I want to do in the class" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). Positive teacher feedback pushes students with reading comprehension learning disabilities to strive for a higher level of success and makes them feel valued.

Scott said positive feedback from his professors made him "push a little harder" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Nicole stated, "It makes me feel so good. I get, like, I laugh, I get so happy. So it makes me feel wonderful and it makes me feel good" (personal communication, May 25, 2011). Miracle said positive professor feedback made her feel "happy—put a smile on my face—be [*sic*] happy for the rest of the day" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Maria said, "To me, it feels so good, and that's what I live for" (personal communication, September 22, 2011). Positive feedback from faculty members made participants try harder and made them feel good internally.

Some participants felt that negative feedback from faculty members made them try harder. Other participants felt that it did not motivate them to try harder.

Lisa said when she receives negative feedback from professors, "depending on when it is, sometimes, you know, I feel bad, and I want to try harder. Sometimes, it will boost me, and it just makes me want to try harder. Sometimes, I'll get down on myself, and then I'll want to try even harder than that" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). Kim explained how she responds to negative faculty feedback:

> If it's just a paper I didn't really care about or something like that, it doesn't
> really impact me at all. But if it was something that I really worked hard
> towards or something, it can sometimes get me really upset, and I'll start crying.
> And then, it would just make me be [*sic*] really, really mad and frustrated, and

81

by the time the next paper comes, it's just, 'I'll start writing it, and then I'll read it.' I'll be [*sic*] like, 'This sounds like crap.' And I'll just get really frustrated and—I get angry and flip out and—then my mom has to try to calm me down and stuff. It makes me work a lot harder, but it's just not helping (personal communication, March 8, 2011).

Negative feedback from faculty had a negative impact on the participants' emotional state, but also motivated them to continue to work harder.

Scott had mixed feelings regarding negative feedback from his professors. He stated, "It just, like, another kick in the—the skull. It's like, 'Okay, what can you do?' I'll try to work harder" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). He continued to explain that negative feedback also "makes me not try at all, really. Like, it makes me want to give up" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Scott lacks a sense of self worth and a lack of belief in his academic abilities. Negative feedback from faculty members brings these feelings to the forefront.

Nicole said negative feedback from professors does not motivate her to try harder. She said, "I'm getting a bad grade, and I would try, and I'd just—I just didn't care anymore, you know? 'Cause I felt like, 'What does it matter?' You know? So when it's negative, [feedback from a professor] like, I don't—I quit trying sometimes" (personal communication, May 25, 2011). For Nicole, negative feedback affected her motivation for success.

Lisa said all feedback from faculty members, whether positive or negative, is important. This is how she explains her thinking, "I know that they're [professors], you know, they believe in me, and they're being supportive of me when they give me positive feedback, or even if they give me negative feedback. They want me to succeed" (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

Participants were impacted by the negative and positive feedback they receive from faculty members. They felt more optimistic and motivated when faculty members offered positive feedback on their work. It is important for faculty members to provide feedback, whether positive or negative, to students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. When feedback is provided, students feel the faculty member is invested in their learning and it helps to build a stronger working relationship with students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. Based on participant responses, it would appear students with reading comprehension learning disabilities need more positive feedback from educators than their non-disabled peers.

Feelings of embarrassment. Each participant in this study has been diagnosed as having a reading comprehension learning disability and each expressed feelings of embarrassment associated with having this disability. Feelings of embarrassment were associated with the participant's ability to read, peer relationships, being in special education, receiving accommodations, the academic level of the curriculum, and teacher relationships.

Kim said she reads slowly to help her comprehension. She does not like to read in front of others and becomes upset when asked to do so by teachers. She also likes teachers to read to her. She said, "I read slow, like, really slow, to help myself. And it's always really embarrassing" (personal communication, March 8, 2011).

Miracle describes herself as dyslexic. She reported struggling with word recognition, switching letters around, spelling, and understanding what she has read. Like Kim, she does not like to read aloud in groups, which caused great difficulty and anxiety for her during school. Miracle recounted the following:

83

I hated reading out loud in the middle school. . . . Every time when a teacher picked me, I was just, like, quiet, like, 'No, I don't want to read.' And then I'm, like, forced to read. And it's like, 'Oh,' like, 'I don't want to read.' Like everything, I would just start freezing up, that's all. When people at my middle school found out that I couldn't read the big words, but I could read, they kind of made fun of me. . . . I really don't feel like people laughing at me when I read out loud (personal communication, May 26, 2011).

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities feel shame and embarrassment regarding their reading abilities. They would prefer to keep their struggle to themselves and not have to read to an audience.

While Scott is frustrated by his reading comprehension learning disability, he feels he must accept it. He stated:

It blows, but it is what it is. You can't change it. You got to live with it. You got to try to make it better because, if you don't, then you really can't make it. It's like survival because you got to work, like, three times as hard as the person that's right next to you (personal communication, March 30, 2011).

He continued: "My general attitude some days are [*sic*] good, some days aren't. You know, some days, it's just a struggle. Other days are, like, easier . . . just because of how I learn and all that good stuff" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Acceptance of having a reading comprehension learning disability is an important strategy in coping and moving past feelings of embarrassment.

Maria found her reading comprehension learning disability to be most frustrating and embarrassing in elementary school. She reported:

In elementary school, it was terrible because I would get so aggravated. I would get so stressed out. I didn't understand it. And if I didn't understand it, that was just, like, it, like, I didn't understand it. . . . I remember getting frustrated so much in elementary school over something that I couldn't read, couldn't understand. And then I slowly, you know, started being more open to listening and trying to work on it (personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Participants often compared themselves to their non-disabled peers by focusing on their

deficits versus their individual strengths. It is important for these students to develop

self-acceptance.

Some participants discussed comparing themselves to their non-disabled peers

and the feeling of inadequacy they experienced. Lisa said, "When they finish the tests

before me, sometimes, I'll feel a little pressure, like, 'Oh, my gosh, I'm slow'"

(personal communication, July 21, 2011). Nicole said, "Everybody know [*sic*] you

were in special ed, so they'd say things, so it was kind of embarrassing" (personal

communication, May 25, 2011). She explained:

> It makes me depressed sometimes because I want to be like them, but, like
> people say, you can't compare yourself to others because it's not gonna help
> you at all. You have to be who you are because everybody is different in their
> own way. So I shouldn't do it, but I do do [*sic*] it a lot, and that's probably my
> weakest moment. That's my weakest (personal communication, May 25, 2011).

Kim tried to keep her reading comprehension learning disability a secret from

peers. She said, "I didn't really tell anyone. I kind of acted like it was never there"

(personal communication, March 8, 2011). Lisa felt the same way as Kim. She stated:

> I didn't really say anything, and I didn't really feel like it was anyone's
> business, except my teachers and my parents and maybe a few really close
> friends. So, I didn't really make it obvious that I have a learning disability
> (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

Several participants felt embarrassed and frustrated about being placed in

special education. Initially, Miracle was excited about the idea of receiving the extra

help she needed from a special education class, but her feelings quickly changed. She

said:

> I told [the teacher], 'I really want to be in special ed,' 'cause I thought I really
> needed the extra help. So when I got there, I realized that I really didn't need to
> be in there, and it was a little bit too late for me to get out. So when I went to
> that school, they made me feel weird, awkward, like I didn't feel right. I felt

85

different. And plus, they kind of have you, like, blocked off. You wasn't [*sic*]
mixed with all the other kids. So, I really kind of felt out of place. I didn't feel
comfortable (personal communication, May 26, 2011).

The stigma attached to being in special education was difficult for Miracle to accept.

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities need additional emotional

support to deal with the internal struggles they encounter.

Like Miracle, Scott felt excluded from other students at his school, stating

special education felt like a "mini-prison" (personal communication, March 30, 2011).

While in high school, Maria did not like having to go to a different room to take

her tests. About the experience, she said, "I don't know, it was kind of weird and kind

of, like, embarrassing to have to go to a different room to take tests" (personal

communication, September 22, 2011). In college, she has the option to take her tests in

a testing center, but still feels too embarrassed to utilize this accommodation. She said:

Well, here, we have the testing center, which is still kind of weird. I can take
my tests in class, like I did in high school, and then just go up to the professor
when the time's up and be [*sic*] like, 'I need more time.' . . . Sometimes, it
sucks when you're the very last person there. You just see all these people,
getting up and walking away, and you're still sitting there. So, sometimes, it is
better to be in the testing center, but then I don't know, it feels weird if you just,
like, go up to your professor and be [*sic*], like, 'Hey, can I take it in the testing
center?' And, like, people hear that you want to take it in a separate place
(personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities are not always able to self-

advocate for their needs. They need to learn these skills and to be able to move beyond

their embarrassment to request and to accept the accommodations they need to reach

their highest level of academic success.

The participants in this study described feelings of embarrassment associated

with being students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. They

experienced embarrassment on many levels, including peer relationships, feelings of

inadequacy, being honest about their learning disability, relationships with teachers, and self-worth. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities need extra emotional support to deal with the embarrassment their learning disability imposes upon them. They need to learn how to self-advocate and to have acceptance of themselves. For students, feelings of embarrassment associated with a reading comprehension learning disability begin at an early age and continued throughout their educational careers.

Measures of success. The core theme of Measures of Success emerged from the interviews, providing an explanation as to how students with reading comprehension learning disabilities measure success. Participants identified several avenues they use to measure success, including graduating from college, passing classes, grade point average (GPA), the amount of available time devoted to studying, and having a job.

Kim explained that her measures of success were getting good grades and finishing college, which is why she requested accommodation. Miracle measured success as "getting through school . . . getting good grades" (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Lisa also felt that completing school and passing classes was a measure of success. She said success "means that I can graduate and go on with my career and be successful in life" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). To accomplish this level of success, Lisa said she must pass "all my classes and [take] advantage of all the accommodations that I get" (personal communication, July 21, 2011). Completing college and passing classes was a strong measure of success for participants.

GPA was identified as another participant measure of success. The eight participants in this study provided information as to what they believed was a successful GPA (Table 2).

Table 2

Participant GPA

Name	GPA Considered Successful	Current GPA
Kim	3.0	Not Provided
Carrie	3.0	2.8
Scott	2.0	2.8
Nicole	3.0	1.9
Miracle	2.0	Not Provided
Lisa	2.0	2.8
Mark	4.0	3.6
Maria	4.0	3.6

At King Community College, the following scale is used in place of actual letter grades.

Table 3

King Community College Grading Scale

Grades	Grade Scale
Excellent Performance	4.0-3.5
Very Good	3.4-3.0
Good	2.9-2.5
Average	2.4-2.0
Below Average	1.9-1.5
Poor	1.4-1.0
Failure	0.0

Carrie used her GPA as a firm measure of success. To be successful, she said she needed to earn a GPA of "3.0 or higher" (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Maria also uses her GPA to measure her success and feels that she needs to earn "like a [*sic*] A, like a 4.0. Not an A-, but like an A" (personal communication, September 22, 2011) to be successful. Miracle also relies on her GPA as a measure of success. She has a broad range of acceptable grades and feels anything ranging from an A to a C is successful.

For most participants, the GPA they consider successful is not commensurate with their current GPA. Nicole explained:

> My GPA now is a 1.999 'cause I failed those classes. But next semester, I'm going to retake those two classes, and I hope to have, like, a 3.0. That's—that's what I want to have 'cause that's an average, that's above average (personal communication, May 25, 2011).

Lisa said she believes her current 2.8 GPA is:

Pretty good 'cause I'm taking—considering the classes are pretty hard, and I have to work really hard, especially the biology classes here, and the coding classes are hard, but I think I'm doing pretty good for all those hard classes (personal communication, July 21, 2011).

Scott measures success differently than other participants. For him, success is determined by how much he has to struggle in each class. He describes this in his own words:

I always got [*sic*] to check in with them [teachers]. I mean, because they figure it's college, you know? They figure we're all grown adults. I mean—and that's true, but it comes to the point where we're not all, like, the same, like, so it don't [*sic*] work that way, as in, like—'I may be an adult, but I'm still struggling from falling through the cracks through previous schools.' So— 'What can you do?' But—and I don't think teachers understand that well. Some might, but—well, you know that you're not—well from my—from my situation, if you're not struggling, you can't be successful (personal communication, March 30, 2011).

Nicole feels that measuring success does not exclusively involve attending college. She believes that it also involves having a job and being able to have continued employment. She explained, "If you don't want to go to college, it's not your thing. It doesn't mean you're not successful" (personal communication, May 25, 2011). When asked how she measures her own success, she responded, "I think it's just doing your best. You know, if you're sitting there and bull crapping, but if you're really trying hard and you don't do as good as you think you can, I still think you're successful" (personal communication, May 25, 2011). Success in life goes beyond education. Success is also determined by maintaining a career and doing your best in life.

Personal Descriptors

Success is unequivocally important to each research participant in this study. They may all have different ways in which they internally measure success, but each student with a reading comprehension learning disability desires to have a GPA of 2.0 or higher and wants to complete college. Grades and GPA are a great determiner in the level of success felt by students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. It is important that these students put forth enough effort into their academic endeavors to meet their personal level of success so that they maintain a drive to succeed. The more success they experience, the more success they will desire.

Each research participant was asked to think of three words or phrases that they would use to describe themselves. Some research participants described themselves academically, while others described their personality as well. Table 4 features the words and/or phrases each participant used to describe him/herself. From their vicarious experiences, the ways in which participants describe themselves may reflect criteria they use to evaluate their peer's success, and, by extension, their own success.

Table 4

Participant Descriptive Words/Phrases

Participant	Descriptor #1	Descriptor #2	Descriptor #3
#1	Hard-worker	I pay attention	I try to get my work done as much as possible
#2	Creative	Quiet	On-time
#3	Trying	Pushing	Struggling
#4	Slacker	Hard-worker	I don't take good [*sic*] tests
#5	Average student	*No response*	*No response*
#6	Hard-worker	Responsible	Dependable
#7	Content	Excited to get home and spend some time with my son	Very Happy
#8	Determined	Successful	Prepared

Document Analysis

Upon visiting King Community College, I obtained documents that explicitly

addressed the policies regarding accommodations available for students with

disabilities. The 2011-2012 course catalog states:

> Appropriate accommodations [are available] for students with documented
> physical, learning and emotional disabilities. Arrangements are designed to
> meet individual needs and are facilitated through an Equal Access Counselor.
> Services include, but are not limited to, specialized counseling, application
> assistance, referrals, adaptive equipment, textbooks on compact disks, testing
> accommodations, interpreters, note takers, tutoring, facility liaison and
> modifications of computer and classroom facilities.

This excerpt stands as the only mention of services and accommodations available to

students with disabilities in the catalog's 201 pages.

Another paragraph in the course catalog addressed the college's policy on

discrimination:

> King Community College does not discriminate on the basis of disabilities in
> recruiting and admitting students, recruiting and employing faculty and staff, or
> operating any of its programs and activities, as specified by federal laws and
> regulations. The designated coordinator for college compliance with Section
> 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is the Vice President and Chief Financial
> Officer.

The policy regarding the discrimination of students is listed in both the college

catalog and on the school website. The college's policy reads:

> No person shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, marital
> status, creed, or disability, be subjected to discrimination during or be excluded
> from participating in or be denied the benefits of any program or activity or in
> employment.

Documentation from the Equal Access Counselor that is provided to each

student identified as having a disability includes the following information sheets:

Accommodations Services for Students with Disabilities, Testing Accommodations,

Instructor Disclosure Sheet of Students with Disabilities, and note-taking paper.

The Accommodations Services for Student document explains each

accommodation available to students with disabilities. This list is for all students with

disabilities, not just students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. The Testing Accommodations document explains the procedures students with disabilities must follow to receive testing accommodations. The locations of the Testing Center for the main campus and the extension center are also listed. The Instructor Disclosure Sheet of Students with Disabilities is a copy of the memo sent to faculty, stating that a student has a disability. Finally, the note-taking paper is a blank copy of the note-taking paper that is used by students with disabilities in the classroom. All of these information sheets are enclosed in a King Community College folder along with a business card for the Equal Access Counselor.

These documents were useful in gathering information on the policies against discrimination at King Community College. Also, information on disability services and accommodations were made available from these documents.

Summary and Preview of Next Chapter

Chapter 4 discussed the results of this research study. The chapter began with an in-depth description of King Community College's location, campus, and the library. Next, there was a description of each research participant. Following that, the themes that emerged from the data analysis were described. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the document analysis.

Chapter 5 will begin with a brief summary of the entire study. This will be followed by a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study. The chapter will end with recommendations for future research, the limitations of the study, and an explanation of how this study contributes to the literature on students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Findings

This concluding chapter begins with a summary of this study. Next, a summary of the themes that emerged and the answers to each research question is presented. The conclusions drawn from the study's findings are then discussed. Following this, the limitations of the study are shared. Additionally, implications for policy and practice for community college faculty and administrators regarding students with reading comprehension learning disabilities are explained. Furthermore, implications of the study's findings for the theoretical framework are detailed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and a discussion of the contributions of the study to the research literature.

Summary of the Study

Students with learning disabilities are attending college at a higher rate than documented in previous years. Accommodations must be made available to these students as required by federal legislation, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act of 2004.

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities may not be receiving the accommodations they perceive to be the most valuable at higher education institutions. While researchers have studied faculty perspectives and student perspectives on accommodations, the perspectives of students with a reading comprehension learning disability have yet to be researched. Researchers also have not

interviewed this population to determine how the accommodations they receive contribute to their self-efficacy and perceptions of academic success.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to give a voice to the lived experience of students with a reading comprehension learning disability. Additionally, this research aims to determine what accommodations these students perceive to be most valuable, how the accommodations contribute to their self-efficacy, and how the accommodations contribute to their perceptions of academic success. The participants in this study were self-selected. In total, eight students agreed to participate. All participants attended the single institution, King Community College, which was used in this study.

Minimal research currently exists in the literature related to community college students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. This study provides a new perspective on accommodations to fill a substantial gap in the research literature on the reading comprehension learning disabled population.

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Phenomenology centers on developing a detailed descriptive analysis of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 1994). To participate in this study, participants had to be currently enrolled in King Community College, must have used available accommodations, have completed at least one semester at King Community College, and have been diagnosed with a reading comprehension learning disability.

The equal access counselor identified potential participants. He reviewed files and determined if students met the requirements to participate in this study. The equal access counselor sent 112 email invitations to potential participants. Eight participants

completed the demographic survey embedded in the email, expressing their desire to participate in the study.

Once students completed the demographic survey, they were contacted by phone to set up a time, date, and location for the interview. All student interviews except one took place in group-study rooms in King Community College library. The interview that did not take place in the library was conducted at a local elementary school. Each interview lasted from one to two hours. Interviews were tape-recorded so that they could be transcribed upon completion.

At the beginning of each interview, approximately 10 minutes was spent in relaxed conversation to allow the research participant and myself to develop a positive rapport. The questions used in this research study were open-ended and allowed spontaneous sharing from participants.

Once interview transcripts were available, a second meeting was arranged with each participant to conduct the member-checking portion of the study. Member checking ensures the research participant was heard correctly—that his/her lived experience had not been misinterpreted—and allows for clarification of the participant's comments, if necessary.

Interview transcriptions were then coded by hand, using an open-coding process. The researcher read each transcript, highlighting statements that pertained to the texture or structure of the participants' experience. These highlighted statements were then given a title to represent the meaning unit they expressed. Eighty-eight meaning units emerged from this process. Meaning units were assigned letters to identify the unit while coding the transcripts.

During the coding process, phrases, paragraphs, and words were grouped into meaning units. The interview recordings were also listened to for a second time. Some meaning units overlapped from one transcript to the next, while other meaning units were specific to an individual interview.

The meaning units were reviewed again and clustered into categories. The categories were based on meaning units that could be collapsed into a single theme. The categories were then labeled as themes that represent and express the phenomenon of being a college student with a reading comprehension learning disability. In total, seven themes emerged from the study.

Emerging themes. The themes that emerged from this study included family support, physical and mental health, importance of relationships with educators and/or service providers, accommodations, strategies for success, feelings of embarrassment, and measures of success. Below is a brief description of each emerging theme.

Each participant described his or her family support. Families supported participants emotionally and academically. Family members assisted by reading textbooks, proofreading papers, teaching study skills, listening to tape-recorded lectures, and helping in other various ways. The participants in this study mainly relied on their mothers for support. Family support acted as an at-home accommodation.

Four participants in this study discussed different physical and mental health issues, including speech and language impairments, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and depression. These physical and mental health issues created additional hurdles for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities to overcome. When these physical and mental

health issues are present, it is important that they are addressed, so as not to interfere with the success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Relationships that developed between students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and educators/service providers are vitally important. According to participants in this study, the relationships that developed impacted how participants performed, and how they viewed their educational experiences. To foster positive relationships, educators and/or service providers should understand the nature and impact a reading comprehension learning disability has on students. Educators and/or service providers also should aim to be compassionate, supportive, encouraging, and discreet. When a strong relationship was built between the students and educators/service providers, students in this study were more likely to feel safe and to strive to perform at a higher level.

Accommodations are provided for students with disabilities at all colleges to make learning more accessible. Participants found the testing accommodations provided by King Community College as the most valuable to them. Students appreciated having their tests read, being in a quiet environment, having few distractions, and having a writer available to write answers to test questions if necessary. Participants did not have to self-advocate to receive their testing accommodations; they just presented to the testing center where the accommodations were available. For accommodations to be the perceived as most effective and valuable, they must be accessible and readily available. Participants in this study were less likely to use classroom accommodations that required them to self-advocate for or to ask their peers to assist with, such as using a note-taker.

All participants identified a variety of strategies and organizations used to ensure their academic success, including study groups, individual tutoring, tutoring on campus, government agencies, writing center, reading outreach programs, Job Corps, and study skills. A commitment to using these strategies and organizations allowed participants to achieve a higher level of academic success. Participants felt they had to work harder than their non-disabled peers to be successful, and therefore needed to use these strategies and organizations. Students in this study regarded free, one-on-one tutoring as a highly desirable strategy for success they wished was available. Students were able and capable of acquiring personal one-on-one tutors, but ultimately felt this was a service that should have been provided to them.

Motivation for success was contingent upon feedback faculty members gave participants. The participants felt that feedback, whether positive or negative, showed an investment on the faculty member's behalf, and helped to build stronger relationships. It was important that faculty members consistently and routinely provided feedback so that students with reading comprehension learning disabilities in this study felt valued and motivated to perform at a high academic level.

Having a reading comprehension learning disability has caused participants to feel embarrassed about their academic abilities. They experienced feelings of inadequacy, had difficulty being honest about their reading comprehension learning disability, and reported a low level of self-worth. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities in this study needed to accept themselves and to learn how to self-advocate.

Participants measured their success based on graduating from college, along with completing individual classes with a passing grade. They considered a GPA of 2.0 or higher to be successful. Being a productive member of society and holding a job were other identified measures of success. It is important that these students put forth enough effort in their academic endeavors to meet their personal benchmarks of success, so that they maintain a desire to succeed.

Discussion of research questions. The focus of this study, as well as the first research question, was to detail the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. The themes discussed above and in Chapter 4 create a picture of that lived experience. The themes that emerged were family support, physical and mental health issues, the importance of relationships with educators and/or service providers, strategies for success, measures of success, motivation, and accommodations.

The main findings from the themes that emerged are outlined below. Ultimately, participants in this study expressed a common need to have an emotionally and/or academically supportive family. Four participants reported experiencing mental and/or physical health issues, which included depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and speech and language impairments. They felt that these issues, at times, impacted their success, and they needed coping skills. Participants in this study felt that positive relationships with educators and/or service providers were a key building block to their success and motivation. Participants used several strategies to ensure their success. They used programs provided by the school, relied on friends, classmates, and peers, used outside

agencies, and tried to remain positive. Six participants in this study measured their success by their GPA, completing individual courses, and graduating. Participants in this study also expressed feelings of embarrassment associated with having a reading comprehension learning disability and how it had impacted their learning, peer relationships, family relationships, and relationships with educators. Lastly, all participants in this study agreed the most valuable accommodations are those available at the testing center. These accommodations include extended time on tests, alternate location for test taking, having a reader and writer for the test, and not having to use Scantrons. These emerging themes create a picture of the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities who chose to participate in this study.

Research question number two was: *What accommodations do students with reading comprehension learning disabilities perceive to be most valuable at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college?*

Under federal legislation, students with disabilities must be afforded access to accommodations on campuses of higher education. Accommodations for students with learning disabilities typically include the options of "readers, note-takers, extra time to complete exams, course registration, and/or alternate test formats" (Hadley, 2007, p.10). This list of accommodations is not exhaustive as other accommodations or individualized accommodations may be offered as well. Accommodations are useful for students with learning disabilities, as they allow all students equal access to education (Hadley, 2007; National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 1999).

Participants in this study all agreed that testing accommodations were the most valuable accommodations. Testing accommodations included having the test read aloud, having someone write answers to the test questions, not using Scantrons, taking the test in an alternate location (referred to as the Testing Center at this community college), and having extended time to complete the test.

The third research question explored why participants found the testing accommodations to be the most valuable accommodations. The third research question is: *Why do students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at a public, suburban, Midwestern community college perceive these accommodations to be the most valuable?*

Reading comprehension learning disabilities create a deficit in a person's ability to understand and process text. These deficits are the "results of many factors, such as limited vocabulary, limited background knowledge, and deficits in active reading comprehension skills" (Crabtree, Alber-Morgan, & Konrad, 2010, p. 187). Students do not have difficulty reading the text, but they struggle understanding what they have read (Catts & Kamhi, 1999; Lerner, 2003). Finding accommodations that students with reading comprehension learning disabilities perceive to be the most valuable is an important contributor to their success. If their perceptions are understood, then colleges and universities will be able to provide the accommodations these students perceive to be the most valuable, so that they can be potentially be more successful.

As stated previously, testing accommodations emerged for all participants as the accommodation they perceived to be the most valuable. Participants felt this was the most valuable accommodation for many reasons. The Testing Center, where the testing

accommodations were delivered, was considered important because participants could have their tests read, have someone write answers for them, they were not required to use Scantrons, they received extended time on tests, and they were able to take the test in a location outside the regular classroom.

The testing center is a quiet environment with minimal distractions. Participants in this study found having their tests read to them was valuable because it took pressure off trying to focus on what they were reading and comprehending from written test questions. Additionally, participants felt having a writer alleviated additional stress and pressures of worrying about writing legibly and spelling correctly. Extended time to take the test was also perceived as valuable because anxiety was lessened and more time was granted for thinking and processing test questions.

Research question four investigated how the accommodations used by students with reading comprehension learning disabilities impacted their self-efficacy. Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory analyzes people's interpretation of their well-being, motivation, and accomplishments. Self-efficacy is defined for the purpose of this paper as a belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory has four major components from which self-efficacy is developed: mastery experience, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995; Bandura & Adams, 1977). Self-efficacy is a key component to being successful in life. Having a greater sense of self-efficacy allows individuals to accomplish more concrete and difficult goals, to be resilient in the face of failure, and to remain motivated.

Self-determination and self-efficacy play a major role in the success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities at higher education institutions (Hitchings, Luzzo, Ristow, Horvath, & Retish, 2001). Sarver (2000) conducted a mixed-method study of self-determination and the academic success of students with learning disabilities and found that "students with learning disabilities who are able to plan and act on their plans, and who score higher on a measure of self-determination, are the students who also experience greater academic success" (p. 124). Sarver further explained that students who have a higher level of self-determination or efficacy are "able to conceptualize their needs, make decisions about possible solutions to their problems, and seek and utilize appropriate accommodations" (p. 132).

The following research question investigates how accommodations rendered at King Community College contribute to the perceived self-efficacy of students with a reading comprehension learning disability. Self-efficacy in regards to this study only looks at the perceptions of the eight, self-selected research participants. This study does not look at self-efficacy beyond perceptions.

Each of the four major components of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory will be discussed while analyzing this research question. Research question four is written as follows: *How do these accommodations contribute to a student's self-efficacy?*

The first component of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is mastery experiences. This occurs when a person performs a task successfully. The more often a person has successful mastery experiences, the higher his or her level of self-efficacy becomes. For the purposes of this study, mastery experiences were considered to be goals set and met by participants in this study. The more successful they perceived themselves to be

at meeting the goals they set, the higher they considered their level of self-efficacy. Bandura states "after people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through the tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity" (Bandura, 1995, p. 3).

All participants in this study discussed their abilities to meet goals, and the majority of participants felt this was one of their strengths. To meet their goals, participants used the following strategies for success: the Tutoring Center, outside tutors, study groups, Writing Center, outside reading programs, Job Corps, and government programs. Strategies for success is a theme that emerged during this study. The participants in this study perceived that they had a high level of self-efficacy, based upon their mastery experiences.

The second component to Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences refer to how people judge themselves, based on what they see other people with the same perceived abilities can accomplish (Bandura, 1995). If a person who believes he/she is an adequate singer sees someone with similar capabilities become a famous singer, the individual will believe he/she is capable of reaching the same goal. Similarly, if a person believes he/she will fail a math test, and knows a peer of similar capabilities who has already failed the exam, then he/she will be certain of his/her failure. Vicarious experiences give people a gauge of their abilities or inabilities, and contribute greatly to their levels of self-efficacy.

Seven participants in this study provided information as to how they compare themselves with peers whom they perceive as having similar abilities to their own. Based on whether or not the participants gauged peers of similar ability as successful or

unsuccessful determined, at times, how they did as well. Vicarious experiences were different for each of the participants who responded to this question during the interviews. They each had different feelings about comparing themselves to others academically, but made these comparisons nonetheless.

Social persuasion, the third component of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, contends that the more positive feedback a person receives regarding his/her capabilities, the higher his/her level of self-efficacy. Conversely, the more negative feedback a person receives regarding his/her capabilities, the lower his/her level of self-efficacy will be.

During interviews, participants were asked questions regarding the feedback they received from faculty members and how this impacted their success and effort in the classroom. Faculty feedback and a positive relationship with faculty members were considered very important to participants in this study. Research conducted by Finn (1999) found that the staff at higher education institutions who specifically helped students with learning disabilities had a dramatic impact on the "students' perception, attitudes, and successes" (p. 637). Furthermore, participants felt that it was important that faculty members understood and accepted their disability. With regard to self-efficacy, the feedback faculty members provided, whether negative or positive, impacted the participant's perceived level of self-efficacy for that course.

Research shows that faculty perspectives on students with learning disabilities greatly impact the education a student receives. Cornett-DeVito and Worley (2005) state "teacher attitudes and behaviors have a direct and dramatic impact on learning" (p. 316). Students with learning disabilities experience a loss of self-esteem, confidence,

and motivation when they do not feel understood and accepted in the classroom environment (Clark, 1997). Even when faculty members provide appropriate accommodations and feedback and build a positive relationship with the student, negative faculty interactions and feedback dramatically impact the student (Beilke & Yssel, 1999). In fact, Beilke and Yssel state "negative attitudes of faculty are cited as a primary reason that students with disabilities fail at the postsecondary level" (p. 365).

Social persuasion, Bandura's third component of self-efficacy, was at play with participants in this study. Their perceived levels of self-efficacy changed with each faculty member and course. Participants in this study agreed that faculty feedback, either positive or negative, made them try harder in class. Faculty feedback was also considered by participants as a motivator for success and a motivator to remain in college.

The final component of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is physiological and emotional states, referring to a person's ability to determine his or her own mood and state of being. The more positive a person is, the greater his or her sense of self-efficacy. The individual will have a lower level of stress, and a healthier body, mind, and spirit. A person who has a negative outlook will suffer from more self-doubt and depression, lessening his or her ability to achieve his or her stated goals.

Participants in this study had a sense of resilience about them. They all expressed the ability to ask for help and resources if necessary and indicated they would go to their professor or the equal access counselor if necessary. This was, at times, according to participants, a daunting task. Research by Dunlop (2002) indicates that female students with learning disabilities are more likely than males to seek

academic help. Three participants even sought outside assistance from government agencies, private tutors, and other organizations. Participants in this study did not enjoy having a reading comprehension learning disability, but they have each learned and adopted strategies with which to cope with their disability.

Physiological and emotional states of the research participants in this study were mostly positive. Having a positive outlook and attitude indicates that the participants in this study also had a high level of perceived self-efficacy. The one research participant who presented with a more negative outlook which indicated that he had a lower level of perceived self-efficacy.

Research question five investigates how the research participants' perceptions of success were altered, if at all, by the accommodations they received. The research question being answered in the following section is as follows: *How do these accommodations contribute to a student's perception of academic success?*

Previous research on the learning disabled population conducted by Black (2005) found that only 10% of students who needed accommodations chose to receive them. Black also found that students felt their work was of a lesser value if they received accommodations. Lastly, she learned that the major "struggle these students face in school resides in their being fearful or discouraged from using accommodations" (p. 242).

The participants in this study all felt that accommodations helped them to be more successful and able to obtain their academic goals. McCleary-Jones (2008) explained, through research, that in order to yield successful graduation rates, appropriate and valuable accommodations needed to be available. Participants agreed

with McCleary-Jones and explained that self-identifying as having a reading comprehension learning disability and receiving accommodations was helpful in their ability to be successful at King Community College. Accommodations were vitally important to the perceived success of each participant. The accommodations aided in making participants feel as though the playing field was leveled with their non-disabled peers. Accommodations provided a sense of academic safety and support. Additionally, accommodations allowed participants to feel as though they could achieve success by completing individual classes and potentially graduating.

Conclusions

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities require accommodations to be successful in higher education. Beyond simply using the accommodations available on campus, students in this study felt they had a greater chance of being successful when they had a strong support system. According to participants, the support system should be multi-layered with players from different fields. The support system should be comprised of family members, educators, counselors, friends, and tutors. Participants expressed a need for members of the support system to be willing and able to assist them, both academically and emotionally. When these supports were lacking, students in this study were less likely to believe in themselves, and their motivation to achieve academic success was affected.

Educators must understand the nature and impact a reading comprehension learning disability has on a student. Relationships between students and educators, according to participants, are imperative to the success these students experience.

110

Educators should foster positive, enriching relationships to boost the success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Community colleges are obligated to provide accommodations to students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. In providing these services, the colleges must make the process as streamlined as possible. When the process becomes confusing and/or requires too much work on the student's behalf, the accommodations are used less often. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities have difficulty asking peers to assist with accommodations. This was evident among participants in this study. Although they thought a note taker would be a useful accommodation, they chose not to use it because it required them to ask a classmate to take notes for them. This caused feelings of anxiety and embarrassment. Community colleges should to be mindful of this and should provide note-takers for students without making it the student's responsibility. Educators should try to understand the sensitivity that occurs with having a reading comprehension learning disability, and learn how to be discreet, yet considerate, when interacting with students.

Based on this research, it would appear more important that students with reading comprehension learning disabilities receive the support of their family, than it is for college students who do not have a reading comprehension learning disability. Educators, service providers, and families should aim to understand the importance of supporting students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. Support provides a sense of academic safety and security, and is a key motivator to success. The major take away from this study is the importance students in this study placed on support.

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities will continue to attend colleges at a high rate. Completing individual courses and graduating is the number one goal of these students. With a strong support system, accessible accommodations, and caring educators, completing individual courses and graduating is a strong possibility.

Limitations

All research studies, no matter how well crafted, have limitations, and this study is no exception. Below are the limitations organic to this study.

This study was conducted at a single Midwestern community college. Eight students participated in the study. Of the eight participants, six were Caucasian and six were female. The sample size, racial, and gender make-up are not representative of all students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. The results from the study are also contingent upon the practices at King Community College. All community colleges may not use the same procedures or accommodations as King Community College. Henceforth, the results of this study are not generalizable to all students with reading comprehension learning disabilities attending community colleges.

The students participating in this study self-selected to participate in it. It is likely that the results would have been different if a random sample of the population was interviewed. Since these students were willing and eager to participate, they may have a high level of self-efficacy to begin with, which may have skewed the results. Additionally, the students in this study were actively seeking support, and had a strong desire to be successful. Again, had a random sample of college students with reading comprehension learning disabilities been interviewed, the results of this study may have

been drastically different. The students in this study may have had a high level of self-efficacy, which led to success, or many experiences of success and, by extension, to a high level of self-efficacy. The causal relationship between self-efficacy and success is unclear, which creates another limitation.

Previous exposure of the researcher as one who teaches students with reading comprehension learning disabilities may have created some biases and preconceived notions about the study and its findings. Although the researcher worked diligently to move beyond the limitations of these biases and preconceived notions, it is still possible they may have impacted the study.

Interviewing and taking field notes is a procedure that requires skill and experience. The researcher conducting these interviews was a first-time researcher, which is another limitation, because the researcher lacked fully developed skills on how best to conduct research and interviews or to analyze data. It is possible, therefore, that the data were not analyzed effectively and there may be incorrect reporting of the results.

Another limitation in this study is that the researcher assumes participants shared their honest, lived experiences with her, which may not be the case if they were guarded, indifferent, or afraid to share. This is a limitation because participants are the data in this study. If they are not being honest and sharing as much detail as they can, the data are incomplete.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The results of this study are important for the success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. This is a population that is rarely researched

113

outside the umbrella label of learning disabled. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities are unique because their deficit impacts every academic subject. The accommodations perceived as the most valuable need to be in place for these students, since they create a sense of academic safety and success. Changes and/or modifications to policy and practice can make a difference in the academic success of these students.

Higher education institutions need to actively evaluate the accessibility of the accommodations made available to students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.   Based on this study, testing accommodations are considered to be the most valuable accommodation for this population. Test readers should be able to speak the student's native language and be able to rephrase questions if needed. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities from this study also desired to be able to drop-in, versus making appointments to take their tests. At times, having to make an appointment based on the availability of a reader made this a less accessible accommodation.

Students in this study expressed a desire to have one-on-one tutoring, and community colleges should consider having free, one-on-one tutoring available for this population. Students felt that they would learn better, be more focused, and make greater academic strides if they could have an individual tutor. According to participants, having tutors available for groups is valuable, unless the tutor is overwhelmed with attending to too many students. Therefore, participants felt one-on-one tutoring would be the best type of tutoring to aid in their academic success.

Additionally, community colleges should have a program in place that provides note-takers for these students, instead of mandating that students ask a peer to take notes for them. Participants felt anxiety and fear of rejection when they had to ask a peer to take notes for them. Therefore, this accommodation was rarely used and impacted the likely success of students. The Office of Disability Services should consider paying students to take notes for others or setting up a program where a liaison would sign up a student volunteer to take notes during class. Once the notes were taken, they could be dropped off in a central location to protect the anonymity of the student needing them. If a system like this was in place, it is highly likely that this accommodation would be used more often.

If community colleges provide books on CD for students with reading comprehension learning disabilities, there should be policy in place that allows students to access the book within the first week of class. Currently, students feel it takes too long to receive books on CD, and, as such, students choose not to use this accommodation. Books on CD aid with comprehension of academic content, afford students a sense of independence while reading, and allow for multiple opportunities to review the text without struggling with comprehension.

Educators and service providers need to understand the nature and impact reading comprehension learning disabilities have on students. They need to be actively trained in disability awareness and learn strategies to assist these students. Furthermore, educators and service providers need to know the importance of the relationship they develop with these students to their academic success. It is vital to the success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities that positive

feedback is given to help develop a strong relationship and to motivate the student to succeed. Feedback, whether positive or negative, is a must to maintain a sense of investment on the students' behalf.

In addition, it would be advisable for community colleges to create programs for families to learn the importance of their role in the academic success of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. Families need to be ready and willing to assist students both academically and emotionally. A program that teaches the family study skills, coping mechanisms, and provides basic support would be highly beneficial.

Applications of the Theoretical Framework

This study indicates that, through interview responses, students with reading comprehension learning disabilities have a high level of self-efficacy. This is not a clinically based assessment of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy in this paper is based on student's perceptions of themselves. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory fits nicely into the design of this study as well as with the participants.

Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities, although lacking in self-advocacy, had high levels of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is important because Bandura and Adams (1977) contend that "perceived self-efficacy affects people's choice of activities and behavioral settings, how much effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (pp. 287-288). Based on this understanding of self-efficacy, students with reading comprehension learning disabilities should be able to reach academic success due to their resilience and effort.

Determining the level of self-efficacy beyond responses to interview questions would have been desirable. Although student responses to interview questions were one reliable form of data regarding self-efficacy, it would have been beneficial and a stronger gauge of self-efficacy to also administer a self-efficacy scale. If both the interviews and scale were administered, a more accurate portrayal of self-efficacy would have been gathered.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study lends itself to many future research projects. Further research needs to be conducted specifically on students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. This research needs to be conducted with this population from elementary school through college. Conducting longitudinal studies with this population would depict a clearer picture of the lived experience of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

It would also be informative to reproduce this study at other community colleges, as well as universities. By reproducing this study, a larger population would be interviewed, and the data rendered could then be generalized.

Using a quantitative approach to learn from this population regarding which accommodations they value the most and their levels of self-efficacy, could lead to very different results. Students would need the survey read to them, but it would be interesting to see their results when an interviewer is not involved in the process of self-evaluation.

Additionally, students from each distinct category of learning disabilities deserves to have research specifically dedicated to them. Future research should be

117

conducted to address these different categories, to ensure that the voice of every student with a learning disability is heard.

It would be interesting to interview parents of students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and learn their lived experience, as well as how they support their children academically and emotionally. These interviews would provide information on how families support these students, what recommendations they would make to other families, and how families cope supporting these students. This would allow educators and service providers to learn how to assist families of these students and what supports could be put in place to further help students. Family was a key driver of success for these students, and it would be interesting to see this situation from the family's perspective.

Lastly, students with reading comprehension learning disabilities should have their levels of self-efficacy measured using both interviews and a self-efficacy scale. This would allow for a clearer picture of the levels of self-efficacy among students with reading comprehension learning disabilities.

Contributions to Literature

Although reading disabilities are the most prevalent specific learning disability (Stanovich, 1999), minimal research exists on students with reading comprehension learning disabilities in higher education. This phenomenological research study begins to fill a research gap that currently exists. Students with reading comprehension learning disabilities have not previously been researched through a phenomenological lens. This population has had minimal exposure through research, and this study helps to begin to fill that research gap. Furthermore, this research adds to the literature

related to providing accommodations for community colleges. Lastly, this research

study adds to the literature on self-efficacy using Bandura's theory. Hopefully, this

research will inspire further study in this field.

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Participants who agreed to take part in this research project were asked to

complete the following informed consent form.

	Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
THE UNIVERSITY OF **TOLEDO** 1872	2801 Bancroft
	Gillham Hall Room 5000

ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study Examining the Lived Experience of Students with Reading Comprehension Learning Disabilities and the Perceived Value of the Accommodations Received at a Midwestern Community College

Principal Investigator: *Katie Dodge (Doctoral Candidate)*

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, *A Phenomenological Study Examining the Lived Experience of Students with Reading Comprehension Learning Disabilities and the Perceived Value of Accommodations Received at a Midwestern Community College* which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of *Dr. Ronald Opp.* The purpose of this study is give a voice to the lived experience of students with a reading comprehension learning disability and to determine what accommodations these students perceive to be most valuable, how the accommodations contribute to a student's self-efficacy, and how the accommodations contribute to their perceptions of academic success.

Description of Procedures: This research will take place at a destination of the interviewee's choice. A one-to two-hour interview will be conducted. The interview will be audio recorded so that it can later be transcribed for data analysis.

Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to *audio record* during this research procedure?

YES ☐ NO ☐ _____

Initial Here

After you have completed your participation, the researcher will debrief you about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study. The potential risks include: loss of confidentiality and *feeling upset or anxious answering personal interview questions. You are welcome to stop the interview at any time. There is no financial risk involved in this study.*

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you will learn more about the lived experience of other students with reading comprehension learning disabilities. Also, you will learn what accommodations students with reading comprehension learning disabilities perceive to be the most valuable and how these accommodations contribute to self-efficacy and perceptions of academic success.

Confidentiality: The researcher will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not the researcher from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with the community college you are attending. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation you should contact *the researcher, Katie Dodge, at (***) ***-****.* If you have questions beyond those answered by the researcher or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, please feel free to contact the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board, Dr. Barbara Chesney, in the Office of Research on the main campus of The University of Toledo at (***) ***-****.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today's date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

Name of Subject (please print)	Signature	Date

Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature	Date

Appendix B

University Institutional Review Board Interview Protocol

Prior to the data collection phase that involved one-on-one interviews with volunteer subjects for this research project, the researcher was required to submit the following interview protocol.

<div style="border:1px solid black;padding:1em;">

THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO
SOCIAL, BEHAVIORAL & EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

The research project described in this consent form and the form itself have been reviewed and approved by the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral & Educational Review Board (SBE IRB) for the period of time specified below.

SBE IRB # : _____   Approved Number of Subjects:_____

Project Start Date: _____   Project Expiration Date: _____

_____   Date: _____

Barbara Chesney, Ph.D., Chair

UT Social Behavioral & Educational IRB

</div>

Interview Protocol

What is the past (refers to their personal experience—time frame cannot be defined) lived experience of a student with a reading comprehension learning disability?

1. When did you know you had a reading comprehension learning disability?
2. What was the experience of finding out that you had a reading comprehension learning disability like?
3. What kinds of accommodations have you received prior to attending this community college?
4. What was the experience of using these accommodations like?

5. Which accommodations did you perceive to be the most valuable?
6. Why were these accommodations valuable to you?
7. Were there any accommodations that you received that were not helpful to you?
8. Why were these accommodations unhelpful?
9. You chose to self-identify as having a reading comprehension learning disability prior to entering college, what accommodations were you hoping to receive?

Currently, what is the lived experience of a student with a reading comprehension learning disability?

1. Please describe what it is like to be a college student with a reading comprehension learning disability.
2. What is the process required to receive accommodations at this community college?
3. How do you feel about this process?
4. How do you obtain your accommodations from the faculty at this community college?
5. How has this experience been for you?
6. What steps do you take to ensure your success at this community college?
7. What does being successful at this community college mean to you?
8. How do you perceive your ability to set a goal and obtain it?
9. What steps do you take to meet the goals you have set?

Currently, what accommodations does a student with a reading comprehension learning disability value the most?

1. In your opinion, what accommodation(s) at this community college have helped you the most?
2. Why have you found these to be the most helpful accommodations?
3. In your opinion, what accommodation(s) at this community college have helped you the least?
4. Why have you found these to be the least helpful accommodations?
5. When you access these accommodations, what is that experience like with the faculty at this community college?
6. Are there any accommodations not being offered at this community college that you think would be beneficial?
7. If you wanted to have this accommodation provided, could you ask the equal access counselor to help you obtain it?
8. If you could change any part of the accommodation process or the accommodations offered, what would you change?
9. Why would you change this?

Appendix C

Participant Demographic Survey

King Community College (a pseudonym) students identified as prospective

participants in this study were asked to complete an on-line, demographic survey. This

survey follows.

Demographic Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! Please complete the survey below
and return it through email. Please note that the information collected in this
questionnaire is completely confidential and will only be used for purposes of this
research study.

* Required

My gender is *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender

My age is *

- ☐ 17-20
- ☐ 20-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-40
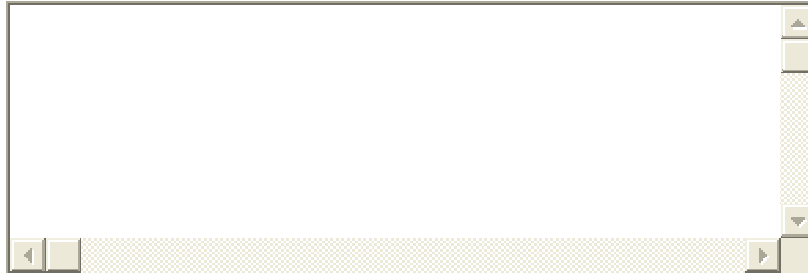- ☐ 41-45
- ☐ 46-50
- ☐ 51+

My race/ethnicity is *

- ☐ White
- ☐ African American
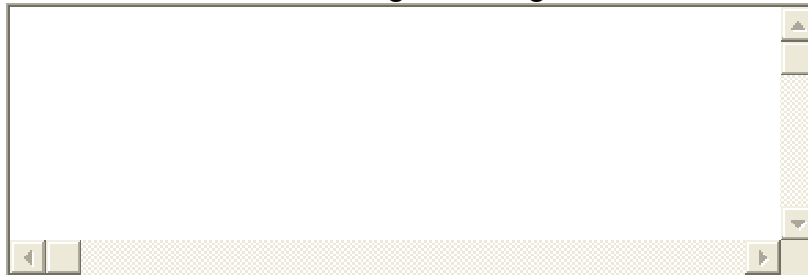- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian

- ☐   Native American
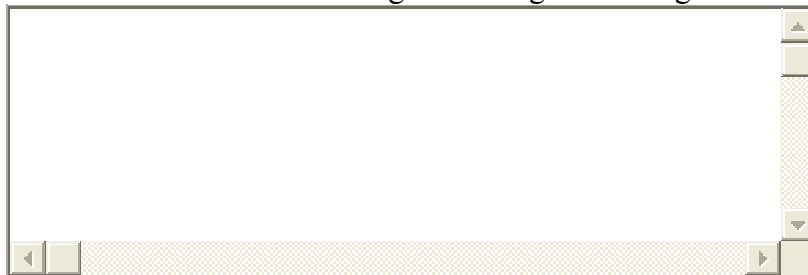- ☐   Other

Occupation *[   ]

Program of study *[   ]

Number of years attending this community college *

[text area]

Number of semesters attending this college*

[text area]

Number of semesters attending this college and using accommodations*

[text area]

What accommodations are you currently receiving on campus?*

What are the best days and times to conduct the two-hour interview?*

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!
Your time and participation are greatly appreciated and will contribute to a growing knowledge base on students with reading comprehension learning disabilities and the perceived value of the accommodations they are receiving at higher education institutions.

Appendix D

List of Participant-identified Meaning Units

From transcripts of interviews with each participant, phrases, paragraphs, and words were grouped into invariant horizons or meaning units. Many of these meaning units reflected the lived experiences of multiple participants. These meaning units were categorized into the single themes that appear below. The letters that accompany each meaning unit are the letters the researcher assigned to each meaning unit for analysis.

Pre-Community College Learning Disability Diagnosis – A

Pre-Community College Effort – B

Pre-Community College Accommodations used – C

Pre-Community College Most Valuable Accommodation – D

Pre-Community College Emotions/Feelings about Accommodations – E

Pre-Community College Teachers – F

Pre-Community College Alternative School – G

High School Accommodations – H

Elementary Accommodations – I

Self-Identify – J

College Feelings – K

Peer Awareness – L

College Accommodations – M

College Teachers and Accommodations – N

Accommodation Process – O

Accommodation Process Feelings – P

Success – Q

Family Support – R

Pre-Community College Peer Self-Identification – S

Goal Setting – T

Pre-Community College Moving Homes – U

Success Compared to Peers – V

Personal Descriptors – W

Teacher Feedback – X

Attitude about School and Success – Y

Community College Most Valuable Accommodations – Z

Problems with Accommodations – AA

Community College Least Valuable Accommodations – BB

Learning Style – CC

Desired Accommodation – DD

Self-Advocacy – EE

How to Change Accommodation Process – FF

Pre-Community College Resource Room – GG

Pre-Community College Testing – HH

Efficacy – II

Tracking Students with Reading Comprehension Learning Disability – JJ

Peer Awareness of Reading Comprehension Learning Disability in Community

     College– KK

Testing Center – LL

College Recruiting – MM

Teacher Interest in Student Reading Comprehension Learning Disability – NN

Changing Counselors/Teachers in High School – OO

High School Teachers – PP

Self-Advocate – QQ

Tutoring – RR

Study Group – SS

Role of Finances/Money – TT

Driving – UU

Moving Out of Parents' Home – VV

Math – WW

Connection with Teacher – Impact on Learning – XX

Self-Analytical Behavior – YY

Effort – ZZ

Scantrons – AAA

Reading Comprehension, Difficulties with – BBB

Types of Tests – CCC

Note Taking Strategies – DDD

Accessibility of Available Accommodations – EEE

Pre-Community College – Inconsistent Support Unit in School – FFF

Michigan Works! – GGG

Elementary/High School Workload – General Education Work Versus Special

Education – III

High School Accommodations versus College – JJJ

Friendships and Their Impact – KKK

College Teachers' Relationships with Students – LLL

Cursive – MMM

Qualities Desired in College Staff – PPP

After College – OOO

Support from College Staff – PPP

Perceptions of Curriculum Relevance – QQQ

Books on CD – RRR

Feelings About Accommodations and Programs Available for Students with Reading

Comprehension Learning Disabilities and How that is Communicated with

Students – SSS

Outside Academic Help – TTT

College Course Load – UUU

Medication/Drug Usage – HHH

Pre-Community College Leaving Special Education – VVV

Feelings about Having Reading Comprehension Learning Disability – WWW

Study Skills – XXX

Abuse – YYY

Family Illness Impact on Education – ZZZ

Pre-Community College Peer Awareness/Bullying – AAAA

Special Education Laws – BBBB

Impact of Another Culture – CCCC

Mental Health – DDDD

Marriage and Impact – EEEE

Learning Diagnosis/Woodcock Johnson – FFFF

Government Program – GGGG