Children with an Identified Learning Disability

and their Understanding of the Social World

by

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Children with an Identified Learning Disability and their Understanding of the Social World

Introduction

Social skills are learned behaviours. Individuals with identified learning disabilities frequently have difficulty demonstrating, acquiring, and understanding the importance of behaviours that are deemed social skills and in abiding by social scripts and norms. The development of social skills evolves through interaction with others. Most children who do not have an identified learning disability pick up on social cues through interactions. They quickly become aware of what is socially acceptable and what is not socially acceptable by understanding the context and social reactions of others to what is going on in the world around them. Children with cognitive exceptionalities commonly struggle to understand the cues communicated by others and their emotional state as well as the nuances within their social environment. For example, according to Semrud-Clikemean, Walkowik, Wilkinson, and Portman Minne (2010), children with autism spectrum disorder, specifically Aspergers Syndrome, Attentional Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and children with a non-verbal learning disability commonly experience difficulty understanding emotional and non-verbal cues. For this reason, they frequently miss the signs that determine the appropriate social behaviour for the environment in which they find themselves.

Rose-Krasnor (2006) defined social competence as the capacity to interact effectively with others as a function of the adequate development of the social-cognitive skills, acquisition of social knowledge, and ability to display emotional control in specific contexts. The ability to demonstrate adequate competence in the social environment is a skill that children with an

identified learning disability may more often be unable to manifest compared to typically developing peers (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010). Social competency is essential because it allows access to community environments and may ultimately lead to enhanced personal adjustment by increasing independence and reducing passivity and isolation (Baumgart & Anderson, 1987).

Similarly, Northway (2002) suggested that integration is defined as the socialization of people previously segregated requiring them to adjust to social norms. It is common for children with special needs to be segregated to varying extents in educational settings in particular. Inclusion suggests that society is a diverse gestalt.and that education must deal with that reality. Inclusion or inclusive education is described by UNESCO as education that:

challenges all exclusionary policies and practices in education; is based on a growing international consensus of the right of all children to a common education in their locality regardless of their background, attainment or disability; [and] aims at providing good-quality education for learners and a community-based education for all (Vislie, 2003, p. 18).

There are continuing controversies about whether 'integration' and 'inclusion' mean the same or different things. The view adopted here is that 'inclusion' is a broader term than 'integration' (Farrell, 2000) and refers to inclusion for all students:

Inclusion *is*:

- a process (rather than a state), by which a school attempts to respond to all

pupils as individuals;

- regards inclusion and exclusion as connected processes; schools developing more inclusive practices may need to consider both;

- emphasizes the reconstructing of curricular provision in order to reach out to all pupils as individuals;

- emphasizes overall school effectiveness;

- is of relevance to all phases and types of schools, possibly including special schools, since within any educational provision teachers face groups of students with diverse needs and are required to respond to this diversity. (Vislie, 2003, p. 21).

Integration and inclusion are the processes by which children with special needs are enabled to overcome social and other barriers posed by segregation. Education policy makers become an enabling force for integration and inclusion of children with special needs. However, attempts at integration and inclusion can also be self-initiated when an individual has achieved a certain level of competency in their social skills.

In the current study, children who have been formally identified as having a learning disability are compared to their non-learning disabled peers in terms of level of social competence in their interpretation of diverse social scenes portrayed in a series of media clips. The scenes depict social situations in which social cues of varying levels of explicitness are embedded. Using these media clips, the notion of the alleged social incompetence of children with a learning disability is assessed and more specific detailed information is gathered about the nature of their purported difficulties in interpreting social situations.

Many researchers in the special education field hold that children who lack a fundamental understanding of social skills and appropriate social communication may continue to be deficient in these skills throughout their adolescence and into adulthood. Lacking adequate development of social skills may lead to future problems such as securing or maintaining meaningful employment that matches one's intellectual abilities (Rumsey & Hamburger, 1988).

This study reveals what a group of children with an identified learning disability understands about social skills and where their understanding of complex cues leads to a misinterpretation of the social scene. I specifically look at whether the children in my sample identified as having learning disabilities have trouble interpreting non-verbal and verbal social cues presented in media clips and what their reactions to the social scenes depicted in these clips reveal regarding their likely response to actual stressful social situations.

This research will provide insight into the specific nature of social skill deficits that may be experienced by a sample of children between the ages of 8-13 who have been formally identified as having a learning disability. This will be accomplished by analysing their discussions about media clips depicting social scenes compared to the discussions regarding the same clips amongst children not identified as learning disabled. The study thus compares what a child with an identified learning disability might understand about social cues in the *same* social situations with the *same* available social cues in contrast to their non-learning disabled peer. The fact that media clips are being used rather than actual social situations in which the subjects are involved creates a limitation. That is, we cannot be certain that children would react in the same way in an actual social situation but the evidence is suggestive that they would react similarly. This strategy is necessary however, in order to ensure consistency of the social cues provided across both

focus groups (children with an identified learning disability versus children without an identified learning disablity). Understanding the child's social learning deficits is a necessary precondition for developing effective educational interventions that can train skills required for successful social interaction. Individuals who have an identified learning disability may misunderstand the "rules" of the social world. The objective of this study was to investigate the level of understanding a child with an identified learning disability has of his or her own social skills and of his or her social world.

Literature Review

Learning disabilities greatly impact the capacity to socialize and develop appropriate social skills. Since social reasoning also requires cognitive skills, learning problems also affect social competence at least for some if not many children identified as having learning disabilities. This literature review thus examines current research on social competence, learning disabilities, and the relationship between the two. I also discuss current studies that use media as a modality for investigating social competence.

Learning Disabilities

According to Kozey and Siegel (2009), provincial legislation in Canada defines learning disabilities as a discrepancy between intelligence test scores and academic achievement (average or above average I.Q. test score but academic achievement in one or more areas significantly below average). Research in this area, however, does not support this as an adequate basis for identifying learning disabilities. Learning disabilities greatly impact the capacity to socialize and develop appropriate social skills. Since social reasoning also requires cognitive skills, learning problems also affect social competence at least for some if not many children identified as having learning disabilities. The Canadian Learning Disabilities Association created a definition in 2002 that seven of the Canadian provinces accepted in part or in whole which states that learning disabilities may be caused by genetic, neurobiological factors or injury that affects brain functioning; though aspects of the definition are controversial. According to this definition, individuals with an identified learning disability may demonstrate average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning but are unable to perform in oral language (e.g. listening, speaking,

understanding); reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension); written language (e.g. spelling and written expression); and/or mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving) at an adequate level equivalent to their peers. The Canadian Learning Disabilities Association also suggests that learning disabilities can cause difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective-taking. Perspective-taking involves the skill of being able to look at a situation from someone else's perspective.

While part or all of the Canadian Learning Disabilities Association's definition for learning disabilities is reflected in many provincial education statutes and regulations dealing with children with special needs, many other definitions exist. Current academic definitions of learning disabilities are not only inconsistent but also seem to be crafted for the research context in which they are applied. For example, according to Kavale, Forness, and Lorsbach (1991), available definitions of learning disabilities are "best viewed as providing stipulative meaning by representing information agreed upon by particular groups. What is stipulated, however, cannot be considered either true or false but only useful for practical purposes" (p. 257). Thus, any broad definition of learning disability may not capture the unique characteristics of the learning disability for all individuals affected.

According to Blashfield (1998), a child is diagnosed with an identified learning disability when it becomes evident that the individual struggles to understand one or more of the five primary skill areas which include: communication, information retrieval, description, prediction, and theory formulation. Typically, children are assessed for a learning disability by a registered clinical or school psychologist. According to the provincial legislation guidelines for Learning Disability Assessment, an assessment usually consists of an initial interview, tests of ability,

information processing and academic achievement, and a feedback interview where test results and professional recommendations are discussed with the guardian.

Hallahan, Lloyd, Kauffman, Weiss, and Martinez (2005) reviewed previous studies on the behavioural and emotional functioning of children with learning disabilities. They suggest that many but not all students currently diagnosed with learning disabilities will exhibit behavioural and emotional problems, albeit often mild ones. Further, Hallahan et al. (2005) stated that these emotional or behavioural problems may in fact be secondary to the identified learning disability. For example, problems may arise due to the child's difficulties in coping with the stress of having an identified learning disability and/or being identified as having a learning disability.

Brueggemann, Kamphaus, and Dombrowski (2008) suggest that what is needed is a diagnostic model based on the principles of academic and functional impairment. They propose a method for diagnosing learning disabilities that evaluates symptoms of "below average academic achievement" (p. 424) and other associated disabilities in other domains including social competence. This method includes evaluation of competency deficits in behaviour and emotional coping, interpersonal relations, and self-care and fulfillment.

Walker and Nabuzoka (2007) found that children with an identified learning disability had developmental problems with literacy and numeracy skills as well as social relationships. They also found that children with learning disabilities lack adequate social competence and tend to misread social cues. This may be, Walker and Nabuzoka hypothesize, because children with learning disabilities are often educated separately from their peers at some point or another. In these cases the children identified as learning disabled are found often to be socially rejected and stigmatized. Hence, the social deficits of some children with an identified learning disabled may

often be related to such factors as educational segregation and the consequent lack of experience of these children in interacting with typically developing peers rather then to the learning disability per se.

Social Skills

Social skills are the skills used to interact positively within social relationships. This description reflects earlier interpretations of social skills described by Durkheim (1895/1982). Emile Durkheim's perspective on society suggests a basis for understanding social skills and their impact on an individual's actions. Durkheim suggested that social skills influence the way individuals act in various social contexts. As such, social skills can be taught because these skills are recognizable and distinct and lead to observable outcomes.

Another earlier interpretation of society, social skills and socialization was that of Georg Simmel in the early 1900's. Simmel's work provided insight into social boundaries and how social competence requires modulations within any particular social context. According to Simmel, socialization refers to the individual regulating his or her personal relations to others in varying social environments. When socializing; individuals must modulate their personal qualities in order to be sociable (Levine, 1971). In other words, socialization, or acquiring social skills, requires having a balance between the individual and his or her needs and personal qualities on the one hand and regard for others' needs and personality characteristics on the other. Therefore, an individual, in order to be socially competent, needs to be aware of his or her relationships and the relevant personal characteristics of the individuals with whom he or she is interacting.

Expanding on these earlier theories of social skill development, McGinnis and Goldstein (1997) argue that social skills in the school context can be categorized into five fundamental areas:

1) Classroom Survival Skills: Asking for help, Listening, Following instructions.

2) Friendship-Making Skills: Sharing, Joining in, Apologizing.

3) Skills for Dealing with Feelings: Expressing feelings, Recognizing another's feelings, Showing understanding of another's feelings.

4) Skill Alternatives to Aggression: Using self control, Problem solving, Avoiding trouble.

5) Skills for Dealing with Stress: Accepting no, Making a decision, Dealing with group pressure.

(p. 88-89)

Each of these fundamental areas encompasses specific behaviours which, for the most part, are learned and which can enable individuals to be socially competent in particular settings. For example, an individual who lacks a strategy for dealing with embarrassment or displaying self control may struggle socially in school relationships with peers.

The Relationship Between Cognitive Exceptionalities and Deficits in Social Competency

Since social skills are learned behaviours, and learning disabilities affect children's ability to understand social cues, social skills are often not adequately acquired by children with learning disabilities unless opportunities for socialization are increased. Often, alternative teaching methods are used and families work with educators to find a way to help these children with an

identified learning disability acquire these social opportunities and develop social competencies. Sugai and Lewis (1996) acknowledge that learning happens across a variety of settings. They suggest that social learning occurs for some children with special needs involving cognitive exceptionalities because they have had the opportunity to benefit from relatively informal models of learning. In this section, I explore the relationship between cognitive exceptionalities (including learning disabilities) and social skills with particular reference to studies that explore the impact of socialization experiences on children diagnosed as having learning disabilities.

According to Kavale and Mostert (2004), "social skill deficits have become a defining characteristic of students with a specific learning disability" (p.31) The authors suggest deficits in social skills occur when a skill is not learned or a competing deficit such as anxiety inhibits performance. Further researchers Meadan and Halle (2004) reported that students with a learning disability have difficulties with social skills because of the unique way they process social information.

Bauminger and Kimhi-Kind (2008) studied children with a learning disability and their understanding of three central tenants of social skill development i) emotion regulation, ii) security of attachment and iii) social information processing. Bauminger and Kimhi-Kind compared a hundred boys in grades four to six. Fifty participants had a learning disability while the other fifty participants did not have a learning disability. They found that the participants with a learning disability demonstrated difficulties with social information processing, security of attachment and emotional regulation compared to the participants without a learning disability. The researchers reported that the deficits in social competence and emotional regulation of children identified as learning disabled were associated with the problems these

children experienced in identifying important situational cues within the social context.

In earlier research in social skill development Dimitrovsky, Spector, Levy-Shiff, and Vakil (1998) studied children aged 9-12 to examine the participants ability to identify facial expressions. The study consisted of 48 participants without a learning disability, and 76 participants with a learning disability. The researchers showed the participants black and white images of men and women expressing emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, disgust, and a set of neutral faces. These researchers found that overall the group of participants without a learning disability were better at interpreting facial expressions than the participants with a learning disability.

In a longitudinal study by Vaughn, Zaragoza, Hogan, and Walker (1993), 239 students from kindergarten to grade three were examined on a social skills rating scale that focused on the participants' level of social skills and reports of behaviour problem pertaining to these students. The scales addressed 27 items assessing students' social behaviours. The scales were completed by teachers of the participants. The teachers rated participants in three groups. The first group was comprised of participants with a learning disability. The second group was comprised of participants with low achievement. The third group consisted of participants considered average or high achievers. The researchers found that students with a learning disability or a low achievement exhibited significantly lower social skills and higher levels of reported behaviour problems than their peers considered average or high achievers.

Semrud-Clikeman et al. (2010) addressed the understanding of social situations and the differences in development between children with diagnosed learning disabilities versus their non- disabled peers. They found that the children with a nonverbal learning disability or

identified as having Asperger's Syndrome "experienced the most difficulty understanding

emotional and non-verbal cues on the direct measure" in comparison to their typically

developing peers (p. 509). They also showed that these groups of children with identified

exceptionalities (special needs) frequently exhibited significant signs of sadness and social

withdrawal. Similarly, Ozonoff, Rogers, and Hendren (2003) found that children with Aspergers

or non-verbal learning disabilities often struggle to understand the meaning of various social

interactions.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), a defining feature of Aspergers

Syndrome is having difficulty with maintaining and understanding social relationships.

Individuals with Aspergers Syndrome tend to experience problems relating to others. Further,

many individuals with Aspergers Syndrome have difficulty with reciprocal communication

despite their typically having good language abilities (Klin, Volkmar, Sparrow, Cicchetti &

Rourke, 2000).

Barkley (2005) observed that children identified with attention deficit disorder have

difficulty in processing social information due to their inability to focus. Nijmeijer, Minderaa,

Buitelaar, Mulligan, Hartman, and Hokestra (2008) found that children with Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder were found to have social competence deficits. Nijmeijer et al. (2008)

suggest these social competency deficits amongst children with formally assessed attentional and

hyperactivity problems are a result of the poor execution of social skills rather than a lack of

knowledge or understanding of social data.

Based on the previously reported information, it is apparent that individuals must learn

about people, places, and human-environment interactions and discover how their personal

identity is shaped by their culture, by groups, and by institutional influences such as schools, churches, families, and government systems in order to develop adequate social competence. McCoy (2005) examined how the traditional classroom which involves lecture, read, group discussion is likely to fail to meet the social learning needs of many students with learning disabilities. McCoy found that special educators can modify the environment with respect to the classroom to better provide opportunities for social learning. Such modifications encourage teachers to use instructional materials that students can use independently along with peers rather than having to rely exclusively on teacher lectures.

Gormley and McDermott (1994) evaluated a child with an identified learning disability over three years of school. They specifically looked at the positive effects of inclusion in the classroom on that child's social competence and found that inclusion significantly helped the child with his ability to socialize effectively with others his own age. Abosi and Koay (2009) found that students with special needs grew in a social skills program and learned how to interact more positively with their peers.

Seevers and Jones-Blank (2008) reported that most children learn social skills from interaction with others. However, children with special needs may need to learn these skills in addition via more direct social skills teaching approaches. They also argue that, while in the past schools have relied exclusively on families to teach children interpersonal and conflict resolution skills, the current trend is that schools partner with parents to facilitate social learning processes.

Students with a wide range of abilities are receiving instruction in the general education (regular) classroom. This situation often becomes a challenge for students with learning disabilities. According to Steele (2008), teachers can use the results of formal and informal

assessments to determine the content and methods or instruction most appropriate for teaching students both academic and social skills. Appropriate modifications to teaching strategy and curriculum can often enable students with a disability to better succeed academically and socially in the school setting.

Tur-Kaspa, Margalit, and Most (1999) examined the dynamics of peer relations and how these operate in regards to the socialization of children with an identified learning disability. They found that a child with an identified learning disability is commonly rejected by peers or that there may be at least low acceptance from peers. In other words, socialization is more difficult when peers do not accept a child, and a child with an identified learning disability is more often rejected by their peers. According to Tur-Kaspa, Margalit, and Most (1999), "Children who maintained their friendship relationships over a one- year period demonstrated greater social competence than those who left their peer groups or lost their reciprocal friends." (p. 38)

There are several strategies that encourage individuals to behave appropriately when attempting to cope within specific social environments. Growing up in a shared environment may help them to understand social situations from different perspectives. Having an ability to perceive a situation from more than one viewpoint is a behaviour referred to as 'role taking'. Bee, Boyd, and Johnson (2006) point out that "the greater the child or adolescent's ability to look at a situation from another person's perspective, the more advanced [the person is] likely to be at moral reasoning." (p. 351). The competence for empathy, then, is thought to be a factor associated with better social competence.

Games are also helpful in teaching social skills. Theorist Herbert Mead, in his work Mind

Self and Society (1934), recognized how play allows children to learn symbols in the socialization process. Using a games approach to skill development may be beneficial to developing a structure for learning social skills. This is the case since games facilitate learning not only about the individual's own position, but also about the behaviours (responses) associated with every position in the game and how the other players interact in socially appropriate ways. These behaviours can be internalized, and may lead to a view of behaviours from the perspective of the game as a whole which is a system of organized social interactions. Similarly, games help in the promotion of role- taking behaviours and, as a result, may help children to develop skills in interpreting their social environment (Aboulafia, 2001).

While learning to consider the perspective of others, children may try on various roles when interacting with others. The roles they take on might include that of authority, or a moderator between siblings or peers. These roles, therefore, affect their day-to-day experiences and the way in which they relate to others. Further, this form of role-taking helps children to become more aware of their position in their relationships with others.

According to Dunn and Plomin (1990), learning social cues develops in the context of children interacting with others. Relationships enrich the lives of children. Socialization facilitates a child's understanding of what upsets, pleases, or antagonizes another person and how others will react and behave. Often social skills need to be taught to those who struggle to understand how to appropriately interact. This includes populations comprised of marginalized people such as children with special needs.

Seevers and Jones-Blank (2008) suggest that modelling, role playing, positive reinforcement, practice/rehearsal, incidental teaching, prompting, and coaching help students

with learning disabilities to initiate and develop positive social relationships with others, cope effectively with the behavioural demands and expectations of specific social settings, and appropriately communicate and assert their needs, desires, and preferences. Seymour (2008) discusses the value of 'Discovery Camp' as an enjoyable vehicle for encouraging socialization amongst children with disabilities. The tools used to facilitate socialization at such camps include hands-on activities and performing arts that involve peers in group activities as well as science experiments and stories directed to teaching social skills.

Seymour (2008) addresses the benefits of integration of children with and without disabilities in a camp setting suggesting that it is within this type of environment that diversity and acceptance are understood. Fostered in this type of environment for all children may be independence, a boost in self-esteem, as well as friendships. Lord and McGee (2001) in their report to the U.S. National Research Council (Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism) stated that working on social deficits, which include a lack of interaction with peers, a lack of social initiation, and a lack of appropriate play skills, in the context of a natural environment, such as a camp that includes typically developing children as participants, is the best way to promote the development of social skills.

According to Battalio and Stephens (2005), children need to be provided with opportunities to correct or change inappropriate social behaviours over the long-term. Battalio and Stephens' approach involved teaching children to replace maladaptive behaviours with more adaptive, acceptable substitute behaviours. They suggest that when social skills are properly learned, students can apply these social skills in a variety of environments and will have more opportunities for social success.

Socialization facilitates a child's understanding of the behaviours that are deemed acceptable within the various roles in a society. The relationship between cognitive exceptionalities (including learning disabilities) and social skills explored in this chapter suggests that an identified learning disabily can hinder the development or awareness of social skills but given the appropriate environment and tools, such as inclusion camps, teaching methods, and games, children can learn how to appropriately use social skills to facilitate social interactions.

Teachers, Parents and Peers and the Roles they Play in Social Skill Development

Social skills are the tools an individual uses to engage in socialization. Maintaining a relationship requires the knowledge and use of various social skills. For children with an identified learning disability, creating environments where they can learn how to appropriately interact allows those children to socialize, engage, communicate, and behave in a way that is socially acceptable in order to develop relationships with their peers, family members, and their teachers. Each individual in children's lives plays a role in the success and development of that child's relationships.

According to Vick Whittaker, and Jones Harden (2010), teacher-child relationships are associated with the social appropriateness of children's behaviours. They argue that if teacher-child relationships are positive then children's negative behaviours may be prevented. According to Coombs Richardson, Tolson, Huang, and Lee (2009), there are strategies all teachers should use to teach social skills, or what they refer to as "character education". These skills include storytelling, bibliotherapy, relaxation, modeling, coaching, behaviour rehearsal, role playing,

verbal mediation, creative expression (art, poetry) creative visualization, co-operative learning, and transfer learning. They also argue that skill development is best learned when parents are involved.

Parents who have a child with a learning disability provide much more than general care. According to Portway and Johnson (2005), it is the parent's responsibility to structure their child's daily routines, facilitate socializing by creating opportunities and providing companionship, and furthering their child's education. Carter, Meckes, Pritchard, Swensen, Wittman, and Velde (2004) suggest it is the parents' job to listen to their child as well as encourage their child to share personal stories, feelings, frustration, and expectations. According to Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad (1998), the emotions and expressions a parent has helps their children's social development by helping children learn about their own and others' emotions. Hamre-Nietupski, Nietupski, and Strathe (1992) suggest that parents of children with an identified learning disability rated friendship building as a priority.

Friendships play a large role in the development of a child's social skills. According to Parker and Asher (1993), friendships foster positive emotional relationships. Estell, Jones, Pearl, and Van Acker (2009) suggest that friendships are highly associated with the efficacy of one's social functioning. They include the development of both social skills and social standing as an outcome of positive friendships.

For children with a disability, it is common that they become the victims of bullying. Bullying can play a role in children's development of social skills. Social and emotional problems are substantially heightened when peer victimization is coupled with the effects of an identified learning disability (Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999). According to Greenham (1999),

about 25% to 30% of students with an identified learning disability are rejected socially by their peers. Greenham also states that only 8% to 16% of students without an identified learning disability are socially rejected. Olweus (1994) found that bullying may cause a child to internalize their distress rather than problem solve and may inhibit the child 's ability to positively interact in various social situations.

Collaboration amongst school teachers, parents and friends in regards to facilitating the child's social development can help a child who struggles with socialization to become better at interacting appropriately in social settings. Careful consideration should be given toward the relationships developed between peers and children with an identified learning disability to ensure that the outcome of the relationships are positive. In this way children who are struggling to understand the social world can find the support they need from the significant individuals with whom they interact.

Media Clips as a Research Modality for Assessing Social Competencies

Media in the form of television or film often influences socialization in adolescence in North American society as well as elsewhere. According to Lichty (1989), adolescents watch on average two hours of television per day. According to Arnett (1995), television has become a part of the social environment and has created a new source of socialization. Arnett (1995) suggested that identity-related issues, occupational preparation, gender role learning, and the development of a set of values and beliefs are all shaped by visual media, and adolescents learn how to socialize in large part based on how these matters are portrayed. Brown, Childers, and Waszak (1990) maintain that adolescents learn social scripts through various forms of media.

A child with special needs often may have difficulty acquiring the appropriate behaviors for effective social interaction. For reasons such as this, Utley, Mortweet, and Greenwood (1997) advocate teaching social skills through peer modeling. The latter involves a socially competent peer being paired with a less socially skilled child to increase the opportunity for direct interaction and social learning for the child with social deficits. Another form of peer modeling that Utley et al. (1997) found successful in teaching social skills to children with learning disabilities is to have children with a social deficit watch a film in which peer models demonstrate appropriate social behaviours.

According to Bandura (1973), mass media models a symbolic field of social information. Bandura holds that audiences watch media and use the social information to make decisions about their personal lives. Further, Bandura suggests that adolescents learn much social behaviour from the media to which they are exposed.

The research literature on social competence and children with special needs suggests that learning social skills is often difficult for those with an identified learning disability. It indicates that those with an identified learning disability often struggle with learning social skills, and/or being able to execute the appropriate social skill in a particular social setting. My research uses media clips depicting complex social scenes as the modality for examining the relative ability of a sample of children identified as having learning disabilities in recognizing social cues of various degrees of explicitness compared to a group of non-special needs children viewing the same material. It is thus the use of the same media clips across both groups that allows for the comparison between the two groups in their ability to interpret the depicted social cues. Given that children in today's North American society are so heavily engaged with the media; it is

relevant to examine their ability to correctly interpret depicted social scenes. The findings may also provide some evidence regarding possible reasons underlying the lack of social competency of certain children with learning disabilities that could usefully be further investigated.

Methodology

Use of a Qualitative Approach

This study uses a phenomenographic, qualitative approach. Phenomenography aims to explore the individual's experience of a phenomenon rather than the objective reality regarding that aspect of the world. Phenomenography is driven by the search for understanding how the other comprehends and experiences (Marton, 1981). Unlike phenomenology which has philosophical roots and involves exclusively an introspective analysis of the researcher's own experience of an aspect of the world, phenomenography involves primarily the study of the other's experience of a phenomenon using an empirical strategy. This approach thus focuses on the variation in how a group of people understand the phenomenon (Trigwell, 2006). In the current study the phenomenon (aspect of the world) in question is the particular social scene depicted in a media clip.

Phenomenography as a qualitative research method is not restricted to any specific discipline because its aim is to create a deeper understanding of phenomena. Marton holds that different schools of thought still tend to have common perspectives in the way a phenomenon is viewed. Using phenomenography, I explored the differences in the responses of the participants (an identified learning disabled versus non-learning disabled group) and focused on the relationship between the individual and the phenomenon (the ability of the participants to interpret social cues in a set of standardized media clips depicting complex social scenes).

Phenomenography was the most suitable approach for this study because it addresses the experience of the participants focusing on the patterns and meanings that emerge from the participant responses to the social scenes that were presented via the media clips. This approach

focuses on revealing the voice of the participants (Trigwell, 2006). The aim of this study is to explore and compare the responses given by the participants in the identified learning disabled versus non-learning disabled group to decipher their subjective experience of the social scenes presented via the media clips. The findings are based on an analysis of the participants' discussions (guided in part by question prompts) regarding the various media clips depicting social scenes with different levels of explicitness in the social cues provided in the clips.
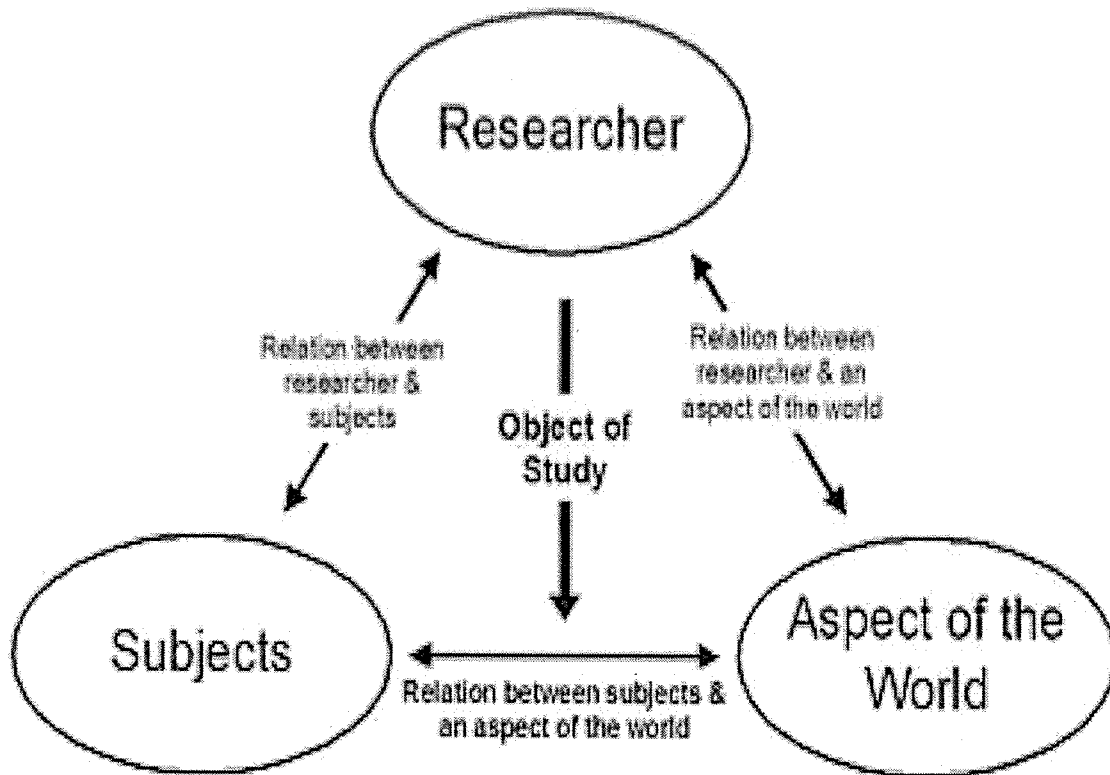
An open-ended interview technique using general questions to facilitate the discussion was used. These questions drew on the participant perceptions and opinions. According to Marton (1981), phenomenographic questions must be worded to draw on a second-order perspective. Marton's example is that a phenomenographic question would be to ask "what do people [particular groups of people] think about why some children succeed better than others in school?" rather than "why do some children succeed better than others in school?" (p. 177-178). The former question asks for the participants' personal views and experiences. Using a second-order perspective, phenomenography explored the discussion responses with the focus on the voice of the participants.

The focus of phenomenography, according to Pang, is both the perceptions of the phenomenon as experienced by the actor [study participant] and those perceptions as described by the researcher (Pang, 1999). Using the phenomenographic approach then both my experience with data collection in this study and my perceptions regarding my personal interactions with the participants during the study are included in the field notes which accompany the transcription of the children's discussion regarding the media clips. In addition, my initial impressions regarding the children's reactions to and ability to interpret the media clips have also been included in the

field notes. (Please see Appendix A)

On the following page is a visual representation of Bowden 's (2005) model of the phenomenographic research process. This figure explains that phenomenography involves the various relationships between the study participant, the phenomenon being experienced by that study participant and the researcher. Applying the Bowden (2005) model to the current study then the relationship between myself, as the researcher, and the subjects (study participants) is based on the researcher wanting to interact with the students to discover something about how they experience the social world generally as identified learning disabled (group one) versus identified typically developing students (group two). I showed media clips depicting various social scenes and then facilitated discussion at different times in two groups of middle school students about what the social scenes mean and what social cues they provide about this meaning. The figure below describes the various relationships between an aspect of the (social) world (the media clips), the researcher, and the study participants.

A Model Depicting the Nature of Phenomenographic Research

(Bowden 2005)

The Researcher's Role

Creswell (2009) suggests that researchers must position themselves within the research. The researcher must acknowledge how his or her personal, cultural, or historical experience may guide the interpretation of the collected information. It is important therefore to acknowledge that I looked at the information collected with a social constructivist lens. The social

constructivist model maintains that people seek understanding of the world in which they live and that they attribute subjective meanings to their experiences of objects, and events (Creswell, 2009).

I have spent the past eight years working in various roles with children with special needs. I have learned from these children that regardless of their exceptionalities every child is different and sees the world in their own way. I have also worked as a one-on-one support for children with special needs, and have had the opportunity to meet some extremely unique individuals who changed the way I see the world. During this experience, I had days that challenged my patience, understanding, and pre-conceived views. It was within this context of interacting with children with special needs that I realized that I wanted to create a space through my research that would allow these children to voice their subjective understandings of the social world. It is hoped that this research will help to accomplish this objective.

This research, then, will contribute to the academic literature on special needs children by placing the voice of the child at the centre of the research to investigate their understanding of the social world.

<u>Child Study Participants</u>

The participants selected for this study were children between the age of 8-13 as children of this age are able to articulate their views reasonably well. There were five participants in total. Four participants were boys and one participant was a girl. Three of the boys were verbally communicative, but formally diagnosed with a learning disability. The three boys with an identified learning disability made up 'group one'. 'Group one' was the first group to respond to

the clips. The remaining two participants, one boy and one girl, were typically developing and made up 'group two'. They were the second group to respond to the media clips. The participants selected who have an identified learning disability have been formally identified by the Ontario Ministry of Education as special needs children diagnosed with an identified learning disability. Cover letters and parental consent forms were sent home with the children to recruit volunteer child participants and obtain the child and parental consents.

Procedure and Materials

A qualitative research method was employed in analyzing the data giving some insight into the social world of the study participants. Patterns were identified as they emerged from the focus group discussions regarding the children's interpretations of the social scenes depicted in the various media clips. These patterns in the group discussions of the media clips were compared across the learning disabled versus non-learning disabled identified groups. According to Cresswell (2009), it is common to think of this stage as "peeling back the layers" (p. 183). The focus group discussions and responses to the prompt questions were recorded and transcribed. Representative quotes from the transcribed discussions illustrate the different patterns of responses that emerged in the group of children with an identified learning disability versus the group of children without an identified learning disability (please see Appendix A). The children's identities are held in strict confidence and pseudonyms were used in the write-up. The name of the school is also confidential and remains unidentified in the write-up of the findings. Lastly, the findings that do not suggest social deficits in the identified learning disabled group were also included and discussed.

The study was approved by the Lakehead University, Faculty of Education thesis committee, and was approved by the Research Ethics Board (R.E.B.). This study followed all R.E.B. ethics guidelines. Written permission was also obtained from the School Board, including the principal, and classroom teacher. Cover letters were sent home with the children to recruit volunteer child participants and obtain the child and parental written consents. (Please see Appendix C for copies of the cover letters and consent forms) Participants were informed in the cover letters that they would be able to access the study results through the Faculty of Education library at Lakehead University or at the school board.

The findings of this study are based on data collected within the two focus group discussions which were facilitated by open-ended general interview questions. According to Cresswell (2009), the advantage of prompts (interview questions) is that they allow the researcher to have more control over the focus group discussion. These prompt questions also allow the researcher to acquire relevant historical information from participants and tend to result in acquiring richer data than when simply directly observing participants and listening to their completely free discussion. Cresswell (2009) also states, however, that prompt questions can have limitations because the participants' responses are shaped somewhat by the prompt questions themselves. There is also a chance that the researcher's presence may influence the responses given by the participants and not all participants will be able to appropriately articulate their opinion.

The two groups were asked to respond to six media clips depicting various social scenes with complex social interactions. Many popular shows and movies were examined before the final six clips were selected. When I watched each show I focused on finding media clips that

depicted the social skills outlined by McGinnis and Goldstein (1997). I looked for media clips that clearly depicted the social scene and its likely meaning, that had characters that were age appropriate (similar in age to the study participants), and scenes that were only a few minutes in length. The "skill streaming" list created by McGinnis and Goldstein (1997) was used to select the clips to find scenarios that address specific social skills that may be taught in a social skills lesson. The media clips required the study participants to pick up appropriate social cues regarding: a) social exclusion, b) the threat of bullying, c) facial expressions communicating different emotions, d) the comparative relevance of various social information, e) sarcasm, and f) humour and friendly banter and teasing. Each media clip selected displayed a social scene with actors of similar gender and age to the participants. Specifically, each clip addressed a specific social skill. The media clips depict basic social interactions involving middle school students that the research participants themselves are likely to encounter with their peers in various settings.

The first clip is taken from the movie *Diary of a Wimpy* Kid. This movie was popular in North America in 2010. In this scene the two young boys are trying to find a table to sit at during their lunch break. As they move from table to table, they find that there are no seats available because their peers are either saving the seats for others or simply do not want them to sit with them. The social scene thus demonstrates exclusion.

The second clip is taken from the movie *Bandslam*. Bandslam was released in 2009 in North America. It depicts a boy walking down the hall at school. He sees a group of larger boys and ducks down pretending to tie his already tied shoe. This scene demonstrates a social situation where someone is avoiding trouble. This scene also implicitly alludes to bullying and perhaps even the threat of physical bullying.

The third and fourth clips are taken from a television show titled *Freaks and Geeks*. Freaks and Geeks was a television series that was released in North America in 1999 and ended in 2000. The third clip depicts a boy about to tell his parents that his sister is planning something but she makes a face thus giving him the cue persuading him not to tell his parents what is on his mind. The audience can see the emotions change on the boy's face as he reconsiders what is the right thing to do. This scene will be used to address social interactions that involve picking up social cues via an individual's facial expression.

The fourth clip depicts a boy talking in class while the teacher asks for everyone to quiet down. After a second warning, the teacher sarcastically asks the student caught talking to teach the class. This social scene deals with being addressed in class by a teacher. It requires the study participants to reflect on appropriate social behaviors as a student in class.

The fifth and sixth clips are from the movie *High School Musical*. High School Musical was a made for television movie that was released and popular in North America in the year 2006. The girls in this scene are in math class. One girl is trying to talk to the other. The other girl who is paying attention to the lesson sees a mistake the teacher has made and she corrects the teacher. This clip deals with how to avoid distractions and unproductive social interactions and how to participate effectively in class (a social situation).

The sixth clip addresses the complexities of humour and friendly teasing in a social setting. A girl and a boy are talking about how they feel and the boy teases the girl.

After observing the media clips, the groups reflected on the clips by answering a series of questions. The guided questions for the group discussions were designed to stimulate second order perspectives (i.e. reflecting on how one experienced/interpreted the social scene depicted).

The participants took turns answering and participating in discussions as well as engaging in a general group discussion. Once each participant had an opportunity to respond and discuss the media clip, the group moved to the next clip.

The first question asked after each clip was:

What do you think is happening in this scene?

This question helped facilitate the participants breaking down and analyzing the complex social interactions they observed in the media clip. After watching the clip from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and discussing the first question, the participants were asked:

Have you ever felt excluded like the two students looking for a seat?

Have you ever excluded anyone?

What would you do if no one would let you sit with them?

Some responses encouraged unscripted prompts to facilitate a more detailed response.

After watching the next clip from the movie *Bandslam*, the participants were asked the same first question:

What do you think is happening in this scene?

Why do you think the first boy ducked out of the way?

Have you ever felt like hiding from someone?

What character is most like you? Why?

What character would you want to be friends with and why?

Again in some cases unscripted prompts were used.

The next clip from *Freaks and Geeks* addressed facial expressions, and identifying a change in emotion communicated through facial expression. The groups were asked:

What do you think is happening in this scene?

What emotion do you think the boy is feeling and why?

What can you tell from the expressions on the boy's and girl's face?

Does it seem like the boy and girl are agreeing with each other or not agreeing with each other?

Some unscripted prompts were used.

The second clip from the show *Freaks and Geeks* was watched and discussed. After debriefing what was happening in the scene, the participants were asked to interpret the boy's behaviour. The groups were asked:

What is the boy trying to communicate to the girl?

What does this make you think about the boy?

Have you ever had a similar experience?

Unscripted prompts were required.

In the subsequent clip students watched a segment from the movie *High School Musical.* The participants discussed what happened in the scene. Then they were asked:

Who do you think is behaving appropriately?

Which person is most like you? Why?

What can you tell me about the characters' facial expressions in this scene?

What do they tell you about what the person is thinking or feeling?

Some unscripted prompts facilitated discussion in both groups.

The participants viewed a final media clip dealing with sarcasm from the movie *High School Musical* and participants' reactions were sought. The participants were asked:

Do you think the boy is funny?

Do you think the girl thinks the boy is funny?

What do you think the boy meant when he said "you even look like one too"?

Some unscripted prompts were required. Each answer was recorded and transcribed.

A room at the participants' school was used for the study. The participants sat in a semi circle around a visible screen for all the participants to watch. The focus group sessions for the two groups were held separately. I briefly explained that the participants would be watching a series of clips and discussing what was happening in the clips. I then informed all the participants that their discussion would be audio recorded. I encouraged all participants to contribute to the discussion. I explained to the participants that I wanted to learn about their response/interpretation for each media clip and about their views. I explained that they would not be marked on these responses and that all responses reflecting their personal views and interpretations would be respected and appreciated. I also explained that a response such as *I do not understand* would be accepted and prompted to elicit further discussion. The participants then watched the media clips and provided their interpretations based on the social cues in the clips. After the discussion process, all the participants were thanked for participating.

Appenxid B is poster of a summary of the method and research design.

Transcription of Focus Group Discussions

The qualitative information collected from the child participants (the transcription of their discussions in response to the media clips of various social scenes) along with field notes are presented in Appendix A. The responses of the children in the two groups (children with an

identified learning disability versus children without an identified learning disability) are presented together in each section of the transcription thus allowing for a comparison of various aspects of the responses across the two groups. The group of children who do not have an identified learning disability act as a marker of what social skills are normally developed in their cohort which allow the children without exceptionalities (special needs) to generally interpret social cues accurately.

Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the specific nature of the social skill deficits that may be experienced by a sample of children between the ages of 8-13 years who have been formally identified as having a specific learning disability. More specifically, the objective was to investigate whether children with an identified learning disability interpret social scenes differently than do typically developing peers and whether they do so in a way that reflects certain deficits in picking up and correctly interpreting social cues. The method employed compared the responses of children from two groups to a standard set of media clips depicting complex social scenes: a) a group formally identified as having a learning disability versus b) a group of typically developing children not identified as having a learning disability or other special education needs characteristic. The main finding of this study is that there were distinct differences in responses and interpretations given to describe a series of media clips depicting complex social scenes by the group of children identified with a specific learning disability compared to the group of children not identified as having a learning disability. The differences between the groups emerged as the level of understanding was revealed in the participants' responses, as well as the depth and length of the responses given. For example, both groups where asked to explain what they saw happening in the second media clip. Two participants in the group of participants with an identified learning disability responded rapidly with one word answers, saying " Bullying". A participant in the group of typically developing participants, Jess, answered the same question with a detailed response saying:

In this scene, um I've done that before, just to pause and see what was going on.. but in this

I actually think that he was actually watching someone for a reason cuz they did a close up

on these two specific characters out of everybody in the hallway and I think he was watching them do something, I haven't seen that movie but I think that he may either be friends with that guy or he might have problems with him or something or that girl or something.. because when that girl walked up to him and said you've been tying that shoe for a while he said you can never be too careful I think he was like kinda lying because he just wanted to really keep an eye out for them.

Children identified as having a learning disability likely understand less about their social surroundings than their typically developing peers do if their responses/ interpretations of the media clips are taken to be reflective of their understanding of the real life social situations depicted. For example, when the participants were asked to explain what emotion the boy was feeling and why in the third media clip, the participants in the group of participants with an identified learning disability identified basic emotions saying the character looked happy or sad. The participants in the group of typically developing participants were able to show their understanding more comprehensively by unpacking the scene. For example Jess responds to the question saying:

Um I think he felt a little like "oh no they are gonna find out that I'm doing something that I'm not supposed to do" just from his reactions, he was hesitant and he wouldn't really come open to what he was doing but after they said "aww ok well don't do anything to the house and all that" he kinda seemed relieved and like (sigh) I'm ok, I'm in a free zone, and they are leaving and..

Although the media clips merely depict social situations and the children are not experiencing the social situation directly, the study nevertheless reveals the challenges children with an

identified learning disability can experience in perceiving relevant social cues and interpreting them accurately.

Media Clip One: Exclusion as Bullying

Although it was clear in the responses given that all of the participants understood that the first clip was about bullying, the children with an identified learning disability showed a lower level of understanding of social skills required for dealing appropriately with being victimized by bullying expressed as exclusion. That is, the children with an identified learning disability had more difficulty generating ideas regarding pro-social adaptive coping mechanisms for dealing with exclusion and bullying compared to children identified as typically developing. This is evidenced by the fact that in response to the question of how they would react to being excluded, as were certain children depicted in media clip one, two of the members of the identified learning disabled group responded that they would react with aggression. For instance, Alex stated: " I'd be mad, I'd punch them in the face." In contrast, both students in the group identified as typically developing opted for a non-confrontational approach. For instance, Jess stated: " I would probably find..I would probably like realize that these aren't the kinda people I would want to sit with anyway..so I'd probably, if there wasn't any open seats, I would probably find somewhere else to sit like a classroom or something, and ask someone if there's any other places to sit, or I'd sit at a table where other people had some open seats."

All of the participants showed their understanding through their responses that the social cues in this clip were based on social hierarchy, and bullying through exclusion. Thus, the children with an identified learning disability interpreted the fact that particular children were

being excluded to mean that those children were "unpopular" or "nerds in the school" that "no one wants to sit with." The latter responses were given respectively by Troy, Alex and Luke; all members of the group with identified learning disabilities. Similarly, the children in the typically developing group agreed that bullying was occurring. For instance, Jess states that "no one is allowing Greg (one of the main characters in the clip) to sit and eat his lunch." However, just as important was the comparison of the participant cohorts (children with an identified learning disability versus children without an identified learning disability) regarding ability to cope and relate to the social situations that were presented.

The findings are contrary to those reported by Nijmeijer, Minderaa, Buitelaar, Hartman, and Hokestra (2008) regarding social skill deficits of children identified with attentional difficulties and impulsivity which suggest that social competence deficits are a result of poor execution of social skills rather than a lack of knowledge or understanding of social interaction. In this current thesis research, the participants with an identified learning disability initially were less engaged with the task than the comparison group and their responses were sometimes oppositional. The responses given by the participants with an identified learning disability suggested that these children could not generate a socially appropriate strategy to handle bullying involving exclusion. The participants with an identified learning disability suggested they would react to a similar actual social situation confrontationally and impulsively. For instance, Luke stated he would respond to being excluded as follows: "I wouldn't use violence, huh, I'd just get em by getting them a weggie, old school, the old school way." Thus, Luke did not understand that the latter behaviour is also a form of violence and bullying. The problem seemed as much about knowledge of as execution of appropriate social strategies.

The participants with an identified learning disability at times struggled somewhat with identifying or at least reporting on situations in their own life in which they have been excluded. That is, they had difficulty identifying with the type of bullying depicted in the first media clip (i.e. Troy stated the media clip didn't make him think of anything in his own life). Nevertheless, the participants with an identified learning disability were able to recognize the behaviour of the individuals in the first media clip (the attempt to exclude peers) as bullying. For instance, Troy, like the others in the identified learning disabled group, stated he had bullied through exclusion frequently and indicated that exclusion was a form of bullying. Troy linked his own exclusion strategies to him being a bully and went so far as self-attributing negative personality traits based on his bullying saying he engages in the behaviour "cuz I'm just a mean kid." According to Crick, Werner, Casas, O'Brien, Nelson, Grotpeter, and Markon (1999), exclusion is used as retaliation against others. This is consistent with the perception of participants with an identified learning disability of exclusion as bullying.

When discussing bullying through exclusion, the participants with an identified learning disability were able to comprehend the scenario and relate to the bullying behaviour of the main character in the scenario. For example, when asked if they had ever bullied through exclusion, all of the children in the learning disabled identified group answered in the affirmative. In contrast, both students in the typically developing group stated that they did *not* exclude people from their games. Jess, a typically developing student, commented in regards to bullying through exclusion:

> I don't think its very fair, its a game..there's.. it's.. it's a kid, they just wanna try and have
>
> fun like you, but it's not like you're any special- anymore special than they are so..

This finding is consistent with the findings suggested by Olweus (as cited in Jered B. Kolbert & Laura M. Crothers 2003) who noted that often bullies tend to be rated high in popularity by their peers. That is, it is likely the children identified as having a learning disability perceived the bully as more popular and therefore wished they could be that character in actual social situations.

The children without an identified learning disability understood the clip in detail and expressed their understanding with thorough responses that showed they could relate to the behaviour of the characters depicted in the clip. For example when asked *"Have you ever felt excluded like the two students looking for a seat?"*, the participants without an identified learning disability were able to draw on personal experiences that showed that they could understand the social scene depicted and relate to the characters. Jake said "yea, I've been excluded when they were playing tag, umm like I was asking a whole bunch of times like really nicely if I could get in, and they were just like no, no" and Jess responded by saying "It hasn't happened to me but I've seen it a lot of times happening like just with- I think this one time I remember it was with a fort and snow, like a snow fort and all the kids- this one girl wanted to come and this other girl she wasn't being very nice and she wouldn't let her in and I went over there and I said why can't she go in because it's a fort of snow it's probably going to melt tomorrow. So just let her go in."

These participants saw exclusion as a negative social behaviour and did **not** wish to identify with the bully character in the clip. According to Winter (1972), pro-social children have less of a need to acquire emotional contentment from impacting others. The responses given by the children without an identified learning disability in this study support Winter's assertion. The

responses given by the children without an identified learning disability also indicated a higher level of social understanding (i.e. understanding that persons who exclude others as a form of bullying are not persons one should want to associate with) beyond the understanding demonstrated by the children with an identified learning disability.

Media Clip Two: Bullying Involving an Implied Physical Threat

The second media clip addressed more direct bullying, specifically a situation with the possibility for physical bullying. The children with an identified learning disability gave responses rapidly often without much critical thought about what they were reporting giving one word answers frequently like yes or no with little explanation to follow. For example, when asked *"Have you ever felt like hiding from someone?"*; the first responses from all the participants in the group with an identified learning disability were all one word answers. Troy responded "No", Alex said "Ya" and Luke said "No". The discussion about bullying appeared to stimulate bullying in the learning disabled identified group as each child tried to intimidate the other. The younger child threatened to punch an older group member in the face and he responded that the younger child was "annoying" and he would therefore punch the younger one in the face. According to Kolbert and Cruthers (2003), bullies often hold beliefs that motivate bullying behaviour. The responses from the participants with an identified learning disability supported this theory in that they viewed the bully as being in an enviable social position. More specifically, the responses that supported Kolbert and Cruther' view occurred when the children in the group of participants with an identified learning disability were asked which character in the clip they would most like to be. All the participants in the group of participants with an identified learning disability said they would most like to be the bully since according to Troy

"he's got more power" and Alex said he has "more protection." As previously discussed, it is also the children in this learning disabled identified group who expressed that they would often react to social situations with their own bullying. For example, Alex said to Luke "I'll punch you in the face; you're annoying" after responding to the question "*Have you ever felt like hiding from someone?*" Luke responded to Alex saying "You're annoying too, you're a little kid." The children in the typically developing group said they would opt for a pro-social approach avoiding confrontation. For example, when asked "*What would you do if you saw someone duck out of the way from you?*" Jake said "Um I would say I'm sorry, and I would be like um is there anything I can do cuz I'm really sorry" and Jess said "I would ask if I did anything wrong to make them hide from me, and I would just see what did I do wrong and see if I could make peace with them."

Often the children with an identified learning disability personally identified with the characters in this clip. Their responses demonstrated a sense of heightened vulnerability and the wish to be in the position of power so as not to be victimized by bullies (i.e. thus the belief that being a bully would make school life easier and more satisfying). A good example of revealing the desire to be in a position of power as a bully occurred when Troy, a member of the learning disabled identified group, stated in response to being asked: "*What would you do if you saw someone duck out of the way from you?*" that he would do "nothing" but that having someone duck out of the way from him "just makes [him] feel better." Presumably Troy would feel better since he would perceive himself to be less vulnerable if other students were intimidated by him and ducked out of the way when he was near.

These findings also support the work of Kolbert and Cruthers (2003) which indicate that the

act of bullying can contribute to establishing a dominance hierarchy. In the present study, the concept of dominance hierarchy was supported by the responses of the children with an identified learning disability. The latter group members commented on the social power that results from involvement in a behaviour like bullying. This sense of desiring the power associated with bullying is, however, associated with a sense of implicit continual insecurity (i.e. the threat of being the victim of bullying) for the group of children with an identified learning disability.

The participants without an identified learning disability could relate their own social behaviour to the less impulsive behaviour exhibited by certain characters in the social situation depicted in this media clip. For instance, Jess, a participant in the group of typically developing children, stated "Um I've done that before, just to pause and see what was going on..." This group's responses showed a critical thought process in their interpretation of the scene. That is, they speculated about the characters' mental states and motivations for acting as they did and gave their rationales for these speculations. Such thoughtful responses were not given by the children with an identified learning disability. The participants without an identified learning disability logically explained their understanding of the entire situation and reflected on the dialogue in the clip. The children without an identified learning disability also readily recognized and commented on social cues in the social scene depicted. These cues were derived from the characters' body language. This consideration of the whole scene and attention to body language is reflected in the following comments made by Jake, a participant in the group of typically developing children, in response to the question: "*Why do you think the first boy ducked out of the way?*": "Uum I think he was a little like um scared cuz how he was standing there with his

head down and crouched down like that like in the corner."

Further the participants without an identified learning disability stated that they would rather self identify with the positive socially appropriate character than with the bully. In the second media clip viewed by the participants there is a character who displays socially appropriate behaviour. The participants were asked: *"Which character is most like you, and why?"* Jess, a participant from the group without an identified learning disability identified with the character behaving appropriately in the second media clip. She said "I think I would have been the girl that would have walked up and said oh, well.. kinda like try and find out.. why, that they were in a busy hall way just sitting there tying their shoe.." The participants without an identified learning disability gave responses to the guided questions that displayed an internal locus of control (recognizing that how they reacted depended on how they wished to perceive the situation and how they chose to cope).

Media Clip Three: Interpreting Non-Verbal Social Cues

Responses from the participants with an identified learning disability in the current study supported the conclusions of Sermund-Clikemean, Walkowik, Wilkinson, and Portman Minne (2010) describing children with special needs as individuals who commonly struggle to accurately understand cues regarding the emotions of the other and non-verbal cues. The third clip focused on facial expression and non-verbal communication. The participants with an identified learning disability showed a limited understanding of the social scene depicted and gave no details in their responses about non-verbal social cues. For example, when the participants were asked: *"Does it seem like the boy and girl are agreeing with each other or not agreeing with each other ?" ;* Luke and Alex, two participants in the group of participants with

an identified learning disability, gave one word opposing responses. Luke said "disagreeing" and Alex said "agreeing", and neither child volunteered any further information to support their interpretation. As in the interpretation of the events in clip one, the participants with an identified learning disability gave less in-depth thoughtful responses about the third media clip than did the comparison group. These findings also are inconsistent with the conclusions of Nijmeijer, Minderaa, Buitelaar, Hartman, and Hokestra (2008) that children with special needs adequately understand social cues but simply have difficulty implementing social strategies.

The group of children without an identified learning disability gave an elaborate explanation of the scene and in doing so considered and integrated in their interpretation many aspects of the scene. The participants interpreted, analysed, evaluated, and created a story out of the short clip viewed. Their responses showed the participants' ability to understand the non-verbal social cues, body language, and facial expressions. For instance, Jess, a participant in the group of typically developing children, stated the following:

> Well just from the way he was wide eyed and kinda hesitating and his breath was shaky,
>
> um I think that he made a plan or something that his parents wouldn't really approve of like
>
> a party or something, and then.. and they were like what's wrong like they realized
>
> something and then he all of a sudden said have a good trip or something and they left and
>
> he kinda seemed relieved and he was like (sigh) ok closing the door.

Jake, a participant in the group of typically developing children, was able to recognize the emotions in play in the third media clip. He said "He's a little nervous, she was a little hesitant" when asked: "*What can you tell from the expression on the boy's face and girl's face ?*"

Compared to the focus group of participants with an identified learning disability, the group of participants without an identified learning disability again showed much more depth of understanding of the media clip in their explanations of the non-verbal social communication in the social scene depicted. The difficulty for the participants with an identified learning disability in the current study in recognizing physical cues such as facial expressions and body language supports previous research by Bloom and Heath (2009). These researchers found that children with an identified learning disability were less accurate at recognizing and understanding facial expressions.

Media Clip Four: Responding to Being Reprimanded in Front of Peers

In the fourth clip, a teacher addressed a student in front of his peers and implied that the student was entirely responsible for disrupting the class. The participants with an identified learning disability showed signs of losing interest in this media clip and displayed off task behaviour. For example, Troy responded to the first question after viewing the clip by saying "Yea.. I wasn't really watching the video.." Luke and Alex were also losing focus during this clip and were recorded arguing in hushed murmurs between their responses. This inattentive behaviour may be one factor related to this group's poor processing of social cues. The relationship between attention and the ability to process social scenes has been commented on by several researchers. Barkley (2005) stated that inability to focus may cause a child to have difficulty in processing social cues. Sermud-Clikeman, Walkowiak, Wilkinson, Portman Minne's (2010) findings also agree with the current study's finding in that they suggested that attention, or lack thereof, is related to adequacy of social perception. Fine, Sermud-Clikeman, Butcher, and Walkowiak (2008) found inattentive behaviour to be a crucial contributing factor to poor social

awareness.

The participants with an identified learning disability in the current study at times were defensive in their responses. For example, when asked in regards to the fourth media clip: *"What does it make you think about the boy when the teacher addresses him?"*; Troy's response was "Teacher doesn't like him.." and Alex agreed saying "Just hates him." The participants with an identified learning disability were also confrontational and showed limited understanding of how to exhibit appropriate social coping behaviours. For instance, in the scene depicted in the fourth media clip a student is addressed by the teacher who implies that the student is not paying attention when in fact this was not the case. Troy, a member of the identified learning disabled group, reacted to this media clip by saying he would:" Tell the teacher to get back to work" if he were the student who found himself in such a social situation.

The responses of the participants with an identified learning disability confirmed the research hypotheses suggested by Walker and Nabuzoka (2007) that children with an identified learning disability often lack adequate social competence. The evidence is found in the solutions the participants provide as to how they would respond in a similar scenario. For instance, the students in the non-learning disabled group stated they would self-advocate if wrongly accused by a teacher. For instance, Jess stated:

> Uh yea I'd probably like sometimes I would keep it to myself but at moments- if it was something severe like I was talking during a test or something I'd probably go and say, that wasn't me and I realize that it was your..like it.. you made a mistake and it- I'm not blaming you that like you were addressing me but I'm just saying that..- It wasn't me talking, and it wasn't my fault..it was.. I didn't name the people but I would say that it was people around

me that were talking.

The students in the learning disabled identified group, however, did not speak in very diplomatic terms unlike the students in the non-learning disabled group. For instance, Alex stated he would respond to the teacher as follows: "Umm …I'm sorry I'm trying to tell these guys back here to shut up" while, as mentioned, Troy stated he would tell the teacher to get back to work.

The participants with an identified learning disability in this study also gave responses that most often suggested they reacted impulsively with anger to certain provocative external social cues (such as when being accused by a teacher of disrupting the class when in fact one's intent was to listen and quiet others who were talking). For instance, when asked if they had ever been wrongly accused by a teacher. Troy, a member of the identified learning disabled group, stated: "Teacher calling you out in front of the class? Yea! Yesterday- I got mad." However, one of the children with an identified learning disability did respond that he would explain to the teacher that he was trying to do the work and to quiet those students talking during the teacher's lesson.

The group of participants without an identified learning disability, unlike the students in the identified learning disabled group, responded to the fourth media with signs of empathy for the frustration of the teacher. For example, Jake, a member of the typically developing group, stated: "Um the teacher is getting frustrated because of everyone else is talking and the other kid is telling the other people to stop so he could listen and then he's getting in trouble…" They easily unpacked the social scenario seeing the issue addressed in the social scene depicted as something that usually does not affect them. It seems that they are usually not in trouble with teachers so their responses drew on more socially appropriate methods for dealing with the situation. For example Jess said:

I don't really get in trouble a lot but one time, I think-I don't remember what class it was in but I was trying to explain something and then the teacher was just like everybody be quiet and then sometimes they address you but you're just in that position when you're either trying to shush them or explain what you're doing to them, its one of those positions when your not actually doing something wrong but the teacher may think you are.- I kinda felt like embarrassed, cuz I don't get in trouble a lot, but like you know in like in your head that you were not doing anything wrong you were just trying to explain something you may have been talking but you were either trying to um shush them so you could listen or others around you could listen or you were trying to explain something to them cuz they didn't get it.

The children without an identified learning disability were explicit in their intention to not be associated with being reprimanded by an authority figure in front of their peers. For example when asked: *"What would you do if that was you getting in trouble ?"* Jake, a member of the typically developing group, said "Yea, I would tell the teacher 'May I talk to you at recess' or something like that like because um it wasn't me talking or something like that."

Media Clip Five: Self-Assertion (Correcting a Teacher's Mistake)

The fifth clip the children observed in this study focused on avoiding distraction and addressing an authority figure. The students in the group with an identified learning disability were easily distracted and off task with respect to their reactions to the fifth media clip. When asked: *"Which person is most like you, and why?"*; Alex started to play with a hackie sack. This off task behaviour disturbed Luke. Alex then answered the question by saying " Um I'm the

table", to which Luke responded to saying "Yea you are you don't have a brain". It seemed as if they were either bored with the overall activity or no longer felt comfortable with the process. The inattentive behaviours demonstrated by students in the identified learning disabled group while responding to the fourth and fifth media clips and the types of limited interpretations they offered as previously discussed are consistent with the view of Barkley (2005), Sermud-Clikeman, Walkowiak, Wilkinson, Portman Minne's (2010), and Sermud-Clikeman, Butcher, and Walkowiak (2008) regarding inattention and poor processing of social cues. These researchers suggested that social awareness and the ability to execute social skills adequately is impacted by one's attention and level of focus regarding social cues which is consistent with the findings in this study.

The children without an identified learning disability responded confidently to the fifth media clip. They gave elaborate interpretations of the clip and considered how the various characters might be feeling and what motivated them. This deeper understanding of the social scene depicted in media clip five is reflected in the following response from Jess:

...Sharpay (the blonde) um was talking to Gabrielle (the brunette) and Gabrielle was trying to focus kinda cuz from that movie she's new and she's just trying to get the hang of things and um Taylor (dark haired girl) behind them she was like realizing oh she's pretty smart and then Sharpay was very annoyed because one she got it right and got the glory of the teacher and she wasn't paying attention to her and she wasn't really in the spotlight in that moment, so I think she was kinda embarrassed but uh she.. um that Gabriella got the answer and corrected the teachers work and that she didn't and she wasn't really in the spotlight.

The attention to body language is evident in the following response also from Jess, a member of the typically developing group:

> Well in the end Sharpay was- had that look of oh my goodness I can't believe she did that look on her face and she's like tapping her nails like she was frustrated but- and also when Gabriella corrected the teacher she was happy cuz she was able to show the teacher she was smart and figured out the answer- at first [the teacher's] likes like huh!? like I'm sorry that's not right, and then she checked and said I stand corrected and I think she was kinda impressed and she was like welcome aboard and she was very pleased with the new student.

The thorough and detailed responses of the children in the typically developing group demonstrated that they fully understood the situation portrayed in the fifth media clip.

Media Clip Six: Interpreting a Complex Social Scene Involving Humour and Sarcasm

The sixth and final clip was selected because it portrayed a combination of sarcasm, humour, friendly banter, and teasing. The participants with an identified learning disability did not find humour in the situation and their responses suggested that they did not think the situation was meant to be funny. When asked: *"Do you think the boy is funny?"*; all three participants in the identified learning disabled group said "no". The characters in the clip were of the opposite gender and the participants with an identified learning disability automatically attributed the characters' behaviours as resulting from a romantic interest and focused on that. For example, Luke, a member of the identified learning disabled group stated: "Umm they are talking about boy friend girl friend stuff."

The responses of the participants with an identified learning disability to the sixth clip are consistent with the findings of Ozonoff, Rogers, and Hendren (2003) which suggest that children with learning disabilities often struggle to understand the meaning of social interactions and respond inappropriately to certain social cues. For instance, when the participants in the typically developing group were asked *"Do you think the girl thinks the boy is funny?"* Jake was able to correctly pick up on relevant social cues. He said "Yea cuz she kinda gave a little giggle". The group of participants in the identified learning disabled group, in contrast, did not answer the question with reference to social cues but only based on an *assumption* about a romantic interest between the characters. Troy thus responded to the same question by saying: "The girl thinks he's funny cuz she thinks he's cute that's the only reason."

Brown, Childers, and Waszak (1990) suggested that social skills are learned in part through various forms of media. The participants without an identified learning disability understood the sixth media clip scenario as involving innocent teasing and joking between a boy and girl. They found humour in the characters' interactions. For instance, Jess, a participant in the group of typically developing children, stated the following: "Well in that moment he kinda had a witty remark he was.. cuz she said "I'm a girl" and he said "Oh you look like one too" it was kinda like a sarcastic little joke thing, it was kinda funny." The responses of the children without an identified learning disability demonstrated independent critical thought and were less influenced by other members of their peer group. Overall, the children identified as typically developing were better able to attend to and correctly interpret the verbal and non-verbal social cues in the complex social scenes depicted in the various media clips.

This study used an innovative empirical strategy to investigate the inner social perceptual

world of a sample of children aged 8-13; some belonging to a typically developing group; the other to a group formally identified as having a learning disability. The findings reveal some of the differences in interpretations of the social scenes depicted in media clips across the two groups providing suggestive evidence that the two groups of study participants experienced the social scenarios depicted quite differently. In the next section certain possible limitations of the study are considered while possible directions for further research in this area are discussed in the concluding comments.

Limitations of the study

Use of Media Clips

Use of media clips depicting complex social scenes was both a strength and limitation of this study. It was a strength in that it allowed for comparing similarities and differences in content and quality of responses of a group of children 8-13 identified with an identified learning disability versus typically developing children to the same controlled standard set of complex social stimuli. It was a limitation as these are media clips depicting social scenes not actual social scenes in which the children were participating. Hence there may be some limitation in fully understanding how the children would interpret the 'real thing'. In fact, children with an identified learning disability may have had even more difficulty interpreting the real social scene where they would not be part of a group (here the focus group) and would have less time to reflect on what was happening in the particular social setting than was the case in the study (i.e. where the researcher was asking the children to reflect and interpret the social scenes depicted and giving the children enough time to respond).

Response Bias

There did not seem to be a response bias operative in the group of children with an identified learning disability where children seek the approval of the researcher (i.e. they responded to one media clip that they would like to be the bully rather than the victim). There may, however, have been some response bias in the typically developing group where the opposite occurred. For instance, Jake, a member of the typically developing group, said that instead of being a bully he would want to comfort a bullied victim and be the person who "tried

to find out what was wrong " since "that's what I usually do with people." Jess, another member

of the typically developing group, also said that she identified with "those people that are caring

and wanted to make sure he [the victim of bullying] was OK and his feelings weren't hurt." Most

likely, however, these typically developing children were simply expressing their ability for

better social coping in difficult social situations which is well-documented in the research

literature rather than reporting to the researcher what they thought would be the most socially

acceptable response. Further, the prompt interview questions may have influenced the responses

somewhat but appeared to be necessary to stimulate the conversation. The child participants in

both groups appeared eager to share their own thoughts suggesting that the guided questions

generally were effective.

Sample

One major difficulty in conducting this study was in obtaining a cohort of child

participants, one group of participants with an identified learning disability versus another group

of children identified as typically developing. This greatly limited the sample size.

The process of ethics review for a study with this type of research design is formidable

and requires successfully achieving milestones such as acceptance of the study by the school

boards, acceptance by the primary school principal, acceptance by the independent classroom

teacher, acceptance by the parents, and finally (yet most importantly) acceptance by the child

participants. Finding a school from which I was able to select participants was one of the greatest

challenges. In the end, I was able to obtain a sample of three boys with an identified learning

disability who made up the first focus group, and one girl and one boy without an identified

learning disability who made up the second focus group. Another limitation was that there were no girls in the focus group of participants with an identified learning disability. It was not possible therefore to look for any gender differences in the pattern of responses for the particular children in this sample that comprised each comparison group. The small number of total participants certainly limits the generalizability of this research. However, the rich detail provided by students without an identified learning disability and uniqueness of the responses by members of both child participant groups made the experience valuable for the children and the researcher and provided several insights to support the notion that individuals with an identified learning disability are more likely to lag in social skills due to difficulty attending to and interpreting social cues and complex social scenes. It is possible that the higher verbal skills of the participants without an identified learning disability made it easier for participants in that group to express their interpretation of social cues. The participants with an identified learning disability may have understood more of the social scenarios than what they could verbally express. This may have impacted the evaluation of skill level of the participants with an identified learning disability. Nevertheless, the participants with an identified learning disability seemed to misinterpret social scenes (such as regarding any interaction between boys and girls as necessarily romantic) and their impulsive and aggressive responses to social situations suggests that there are social competency difficulties in interpretation and response. The group dynamics in both focus groups could have also impacted the participants' responses and could potentially weigh as a factor in underestimating or overestimating skill level for the participants. A participant may have responded in a way that agreed or disagreed with the responses of others in the group rather than that participant's response reflecting primarily their own thoughts and

interpretation of the scenario. Studies using both the guided group discussion and individual interviews are necessary to explore this further.

The time line and waiting time between board approval and locating participants that were willing to be involved in the study created another obstacle. This greatly restricted the time available to recruit participants before the end of the children's school year. The delay was such that multiple time extensions were necessary from the university for completion of this thesis. However, I was, in the end, fortunate to have a school principal, teacher, parents, and children willing to contribute to this study that is intended to provide further insight into areas in which children with identified learning disabilities can be better supported.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study indicated limitations for children with identified learning disabilities in terms of their understanding of social skills and social situations in comparison to children of the same age who did not have an identified learning disability. Kolbert and Crothers (2003) found children who behave anti-socially and/or aggressively are often rejected by their peers. The findings in this study support Kolbert and Crothers (2003). The students with an identified learning disability more often verbalized aggressive responses as opposed to their non learning disabled peers. Further the children with an identified learning disability reacted to the clips with an attitude that suggested they were not always accepted by their peers.

This study was a first step in comparing differences in perception of social scenarios between children with an identified exceptionality (here an identified learning disability) and those of the same age who are typically developing. The study highlights how persons with an identified learning disability may perceive the social behaviours of others differently than do persons without an identified learning disability. The findings reported here show a distinct difference in perceptions and interpretations by members of the two different participant cohorts. Therefore, more research is required using larger, more diverse cohorts to understand more clearly the specific influences of an identified learning disability and other special needs characteristics on one's ability to attend to and process social cues and develop, and demonstrate acceptable social skills and competence. The findings support the need for children with identified learning disabilities to have greater opportunities for interaction with typically developing peers as well as for direct teaching of social skills such as the reading of social cues. With the help of positive teacher-child relationships, parent involvement, and positive emotional

friendships, along with an environment to facilitate socialization; children with an identified

learning disability can better learn how to pick up and interpret social cues, and appropriately use

social skills in interacting with others.

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Appendix A:
Focus Group Discussions Transcribed and Researcher's Field Notes

Focus Group Discussions Transcribed and Researcher's Field Notes

Here follows the transcript of responses given by child study participants identified with

learning disabilities versus the child study participants not identified with a learning disability

interpreting the sample media clips from selected popular children's television programs and

media depicting complex social scenes. Also included are researcher field notes about the

children's responses. The child participants are identified with pseudonyms.

1. Clip One Depicting Exclusion (Clip from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*)

1.1 (a) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- They're unpopular

Luke-Nobody wants to sit with them

Alex-They're like the nerds in the school

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The Participants recognize social hierarchy, and understand the situation. There is an over all
lack of engagement and resistance to participate amongst members of the group of children
with an identified learning disability

1.1 (b) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- well in that scene umm I think his name is Greg, he is looking for a place to sit cuz he has
his lunch with his friend but nobody is really allowing him to sit with them so he's in a position
where he doesn't know where to sit, he doesn't know where to go but, he just wants to eat his
lunch like everybody else.

Jake- I think the same

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
First participant to respond was eager to participate and showed she understood the situation in detail. Second participant seemed shy and gave a reserved response.

1.2 (a) Question: *Have you ever felt excluded like the two students looking for a seat?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- No

Alex- Yes

Luke- No

Troy- Nope

Alex-I never got to play football with my friends

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants did not recognize when they have been excluded. Only one student in the group of children with an identified learning disability could identify with the depicted exclusion situation on a personal level.

1.2 (b) Question: *Have you ever felt excluded like the two students looking for a seat?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- maybe once or twice

Jess- I actually don't think that's happened to me, just in general. I've always just sat with my friends and here we sit at our desks for lunch so I've always had a seat, but in Hyde Park we went to a water park and we had tables and I just always sat with my friends at the table.

Jake- yea, I've been excluded when they were playing tag, umm like I was asking a whole bunch of times like really nicely if I could get in, and they were just like no, no

Jess- It hasn't happened to me but I've seen it a lot of times happening like just with- I think this one time I remember it was with a fort and snow, like a snow fort and all the kids- this one girl wanted to come and this other girl she wasn't being very nice and she wouldn't let her in and I went over there and I said why can't she go in because it's a fort of snow it's probably going to melt tomorrow.
So just let her go in.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability could relate to characters and the situation. They showed they understood the concept by their willingness to talk about it.

1.3 (a) Question: *Have you ever excluded anyone?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- Yes

Luke-Yes

Alex-No, except for you (turning to Luke)

Troy- umm everyday

Luke-every month

Troy- cuz I'm just a mean kid

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability would rather self identify as a bully than as the victim of bullying.

1.3 (b) Question: *Have you ever excluded anyone?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- no! I've always let someone in the game

Jess- I think I have too. like I don't think its very fair, its a game..there's.. it's..

Jake- it doesn't matter

Jess-yea exactly, it's a kid, they just wanna try and have fun like you, but its not like you're any special- anymore special then they are so..

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability see exclusion as a negative social behaviour and do not wish to be seen as participating in such behaviour. Also the participants were able to pick up on each other's ideas and finish each others sentences.

1.4 (a) Question: *What would you do if no one would let you sit with them?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- It would suck

Alex- I'd be mad, Id punch them in the face

Luke- I wouldn't use violence, huh, Id just get em by getting them a weggie, old school, the old school way

Troy- It wouldn't matter to me cause I'd still have my friends

---

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
Responses given by participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability were confrontational and reactive. The participants expressed views endorsing a brute force response that seemed to be a reflexive impulsive response to bullying (exclusion). It seemed that the group of children with an identified learning disability had not fully processed the bullying environment depicted which would have enabled them to come up with a socially appropriate strategy.

1.4 (b) Question: *What would you do if no one would let you sit with them?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- umm I would just go sit somewhere else where no one else would be sitting, and sit there and eat.

Jess- I would probably find..I would probably like realize that these aren't the kinda people I would want to sit with anyway..so I'd probably, if there wasn't any open seats, I would probably find somewhere else to sit like a classroom or something, and ask someone if there's any other places to sit, or I'd sit at a table where other people had some open seats.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability have the tools to evaluate the situation and come up with a socially appropriate alternative response. They give an articulate and critically thoughtful answer. They have interpreted this scene using higher order cognitive skills such as reflection and strategizing.

Field notes

Researcher's comments:
          My perception of the participant responses to this clip was that the participants without an identified learning disability seemed to take in the entire scene, while the children with an identified learning disability only seemed to scratch the surface of the social setting. The children without an identified learning disability were extremely articulate and confident. The two participants worked together encouraging each other and giving elaborate responses. Neither groups seemed to be bothered by the recording devices, and were seemingly not threatened by my presence. I had expected to get responses about cliques and how to problem solve. The group without an identified learning disability seemed to understand how to appropriately problem solve for this situation while the group of children with an identified learning disability did not come up with effective problem solving suggestions. Of course it is unclear whether the children not identified with a learning disability would actually implement the strategies they mention but they were aware of adaptive strategies for handling exclusion.

2. Clip Two Depicting An Attempt to Avoid Confrontation With Bullies (Clip from *Bandslam*)

2.1 (a) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- Bullying

Alex-Bullying

Troy- No no

Luke-cuz he's scared

Alex- he wants to get out of the way of the bullies

Luke-bully

Troy- He likes the girl who was with the guy

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
Responses given by the participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability were quick unthinking responses sounding rehearsed, like they had experienced this type of scene previously. The participants provided rapid responses accurately and with familiarity. There was also an attempt to relate to the emotions of the characters in the clip.

2.1 (b) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- In this scene, um I've done that before, just to pause and see what was going on.. but in this I actually think that he was actually watching someone for a reason cuz they did a close up on these two specific characters out of everybody in the hallway and I think he was watching them do something, I haven't seen that movie but I think that he may either be friends with that guy or he might have problems with him or something or that girl or something.. because when that girl walked up to him and said you've been tying that shoe for a while he said you can never be too careful I think he was like kinda lying because he just wanted to really keep an eye out for them.

Jake- same, umm not a very good like relationship or anything cuz he just sat there like looking and the other guys just walked past and didn't even notice him

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the in the group of children without an identified learning disability connect with the situation, speculate about the characters and the situation, and logically explain in detail their understanding by breaking down the reasons for their speculations. They reflect on dialogue in the media clip to try and understand the situation.

2.2 (a) Question: *Why do you think the first boy ducked out of the way?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex-umm if he was in the way he might have got trampled by them or something

Luke-could have got weggied

Alex- ya haha or..

Troy-He was scared of the guys she was hanging out with

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The group of children with an identified learning disability members were able to come up with possible explanations for the main character's avoidance behavior

2.2 (b) Question: *Why do you think the first boy ducked out of the way?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- um I think he was a little like um scared cuz how he was standing there with his head down and crouched down like that like in the corner

Jess- he was kinda like in the shadows by the lockers kinda keeping out of the way of everybody else and he like he ..like T said he was in a hunched over position he was kinda to himself and just out of the eye of everybody else.

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability were able to take note of the main character's body language and interpret its possible meaning.

2.3 (a) Question: *Have you ever felt like hiding from someone?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- No

Alex- Ya

Luke- No

Alex-cuz I got into a fight, it was a 3 on 2, me and my friend Dominique, I.. well this guy was coming up to punch me.. so I like hid and this guy was like 13 and I was like 10 so my friend Dominique punched him right in the face.

Luke-I'm 13

Alex- Ill punch you in the face; you're annoying

Luke- your annoying too, you're a little kid

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability could relate to being bullied. In discussing this media clip as a group, their responses were confrontational and oppositional toward the other group participants. These participants became easily distracted from the focus group task.

2.3 (b) Question: *Have you ever felt like hiding from someone?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- yes I have done that

Jess- not with like a real problem just from my brother, just in..

Jake- yea same

Jess- yea just cuz I don't want to talk to him or something like that

---

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:

> The group of children without an identified learning disability participants do not identify with the character who was depicted as bullied in the media clip. These participants stated that they avoided bullies not because they were themselves victims; but rather simply due to their personal preference not to interact with bullies.

2.4 (a) Question: *Which character is most like you? Why?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- He must have bullies, ya. When I was in grade 5 that happened to me, I used to stay out of the way of these kids

Alex- ya same.

Troy- The bully walking down the hall and everybody'd move. - still is today

Alex- yea don't nobody want to get in your way

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The responses given after watching this clip suggest the group of children with an identified learning disability participants can relate to being bullied and personally relate to the scene. They are also at times self- identifying as a bully however.

2.4 (b) Question: *Which character is most like you? Why?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- the guy sitting in the corner

Jess- I think I would have been the girl that would have walked up and said oh, well.. kinda like try and find out.. why, that they were in a busy hall way just sitting there tying their shoe..

Jess-like I.. like people tie their shoes, but they usual don't hide from people when they tie their shoes

---

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The group of children without an identified learning disability participants made pro-social comments and identify with the more positive character in the media clip but not the victim of the bullying.

2.5 (a) Question: *What character would you want to be friends with and why?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- The guy walking down the hall

Alex-ya!

Troy-exactly

Troy- he's got more power

Alex- more power, more protection

Luke- or you could just, if you have an older bother you could get him

---

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants demonstrate vulnerability in their responses. They express a 'short end of the stick' attitude. The responses reveal implicit insecurity. The participants are defensive, looking for power. It is as if they have a chip on their shoulder and they want to identify with the bully because they obviously often feel a lack of control in social situations and they see a character in control depicted in the media clip and they want that power also. They express that they would choose to be friends with the bully as he has the power.

2.5 (b) Question: *What character would you want to be friends with and why?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- that girl. She tried to find out what was wrong, and that's what I usually do with people, I see what was wrong.. and yea.

Jess- probably the girl that approached the guy that was tying his shoe

Jess- just cuz she seemed like one of those people that are caring and wanted to make sure that he was ok and his feelings weren't hurt.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The group of children without an identified learning disability participants chose the most socially appropriate and positive character in the clip to identify with and as a potential friend.

2.6 (a) Question: *If you felt like the boy who ducked out of the way of the bully what would you do after?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- nothing

Alex-I would have went up to him

Troy-you don't start stuff

Alex- I wouldda been like NO I aint afraid of you anymore

Luke-nothing

Alex- yup, if it was him (pointing to Troy) NO!

Luke- you don't go against a grade 8.. like you're like um grade 6?

Alex- 6 ya

Field notes
Key points observed by researcher: In the group of children with an identified learning disability the participants were disagreed as to how to handle a bully with some suggesting confrontation as long as the parties were matched in age

2.6 (b) Question: *If you felt like the boy who ducked out of the way of the bully what would you do after?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- I would, I would try to run away so then they wont get a sight of you and where you're going

Jess- I've never been in that predicament but probably if I was, I .. if they were really bugging me I probably wait till they passed and just go on with what I was doing

Field notes
Key points observed by researcher: The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability responded

that they would not engage with a bully.

2.7 (a) Question: *What would you do if you saw someone duck out of the way from you?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy-Nothing, just makes me feel better

Alex- it would make me feel a lot better

Luke- that's kinda weird for him.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability again make a positive association with being a bully.

2.7 (b) Question: *What would you do if you saw someone duck out of the way from you?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- um I would say I'm sorry, and I would be like um is there anything I can do cuz I'm really sorry

Jess- I would ask if I did anything wrong to make them hide from me, and I would just see what did I do wrong and see if I could make peace with them.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability approach the situation with independence, they are self assured and self confident. They reject the role of being a bully

Field notes

Researcher's comments:
        The responses to this clip given by the group of students not identified as having a learning disability used a higher order of thinking (i.e. realizing that they would have to ask why the other person ducked as they could make a wrong inference about that.) They seemed to have more personal confidence judging from their responses than the group of students

identified as having a learning disability. It was surprising to hear the students identified as having a learning disability make positive associations with the bully character. All the participants understood the situation was about bullying. Some of the students not identified with a learning disability also seemed to be very sensitive to media techniques that reveal what is important such as a 'close-up' while the comparison group members (students identified with a learning disability) were not attuned to such cues.

Clip Three Depicting Understanding Various Facial Expressions that Communicate Different Emotions (Clip from _Freaks and Geeks_)

3.1 (a) Question: _What do you think is happening in this scene?_

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex-The parents are going on a trip and the kids are going to have a party

Luke- Like I am going to have a party this weekend.. they will become like me having a party on the weekend when my parents are gone

Alex- my mom doesn't care

Troy- Dads mad about something

Luke- Ya! so he ditches the kids

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability understood the social situation generally but made no note of cues regarding body language, or facial expression.

3.1 (b) Question: _What do you think is happening in this scene?_

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- um their parents are going away and they are saying like don't do anything like bad to the house or anything like that

Jess- well just from the way he was wide eyed and kinda hesitating and his breath was shaky, um I think that he made a plan or something that his parents wouldn't really approve of like a party or something, and then.. and they were like what's wrong like they realized something and then he all of a sudden said have a good trip or something and they left and he kinda seemed relieved and he was like (sigh) ok closing the door.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability interpret, analyse, and evaluate the scene synthesizing a story, and creating a story out of the scene. They also took note of social cues related to voice and body language.

3.2 (a) Question: *What emotion do you think the boy is feeling and why?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- umm kinda Sad

Alex- Happy, happy

Luke- kinda looking at his face, and he looked like he was sad

Troy- Sad until his parents walked out the door

Luke-Happy

Troy- then he got happy

Alex- happy

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participant's responses were uni-dimensional and had no depth.

3.2 (b) Question: *What emotion do you think the boy is feeling and why?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- little scared..umm..umm..I cant remember what the emotion is called but.. umm?- umm I'll say it when I remember it

Jess- um I think he felt a little like "oh no they are gonna find out that I'm doing something that I'm not supposed to do" just from his reactions, he was hesitant and he wouldn't really come open to what he was doing but after they said "aww ok well don't do anything to the house and all that" he kinda seemed relieved and like (sigh) I'm ok, I'm in a free zone, and they are leaving and ..

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability identify the deeper meaning of the social situation based on various complex social cues (the character being hesitant/ sighing etc).

3.3 (a) Question: *What can you tell from the expressions on the boy's face and girl's face?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- like something happened

Troy-mixed emotions

Luke- like something happened and then he was gonna tell his dad but he didn't want to tell because his sister gave him that look, there was a look in there, you saw it? she gave him that look

Troy- maybe she's pregnant

Luke- yea like a look like if you tell I might..

Troy- the older bully look

Luke-Yea

Troy-keep your mouth shut

Troy- don't be a squeal

Alex-ya

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability interpreted the sister's facial expression only in terms of bullying but did not relate the facial expression to the specifics of the situation portrayed (i.e. the fact that the sister may be planning to have a party while the parents were away).

3.3 (b) Question: *What can you tell from the expressions on the boy's face and girl's face?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- he's a little nervous, she was a little hesitant, like umm the boy..

Jess- well at first I kinda thought that she was going on the trip (mumbles)..for some reason then I realized- At first I thought she was like going on the trip with them cuz she didn't really look hesitant at first but then when he kinda said oh have a good trip I realized she kinda totally too must have felt- she must be-not going with them and staying and then she closed the door and

she kinda looked at her brother like (sigh) oh we're good! -he was like really really shaky and wide eyed and from his face you could see that, oh my gosh I'm gonna get in trouble, like he was very anxious and scared that like every kid is scared when they, when they have that feeling that their gonna get in trouble or punishment

---

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability were able to analyse social cues, and body language. This led the participants in this group to a better understanding of and identification of various facial expressions displayed by characters in the media clip and more complex interpretations of various emotions the characters were likely experiencing.

3.4 (a) Question: *Does it seem like the boy and girl are agreeing with each other or not agreeing with each other?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke-disagreeing

Luke- ya

Alex-agreeing

Troy-disagreeing because he wants to tell, she doesn't

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability appear to lack the ability to elaborate or perhaps even pick up on the detail/specifics of the social situation depicted in the media clip they are interpreting.

3.4 (b) Question: *Does it seem like the boy and girl are agreeing with each other or not agreeing with each other?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- yes, I think that they were both hiding something big

Jess- I think either one or both of them was planning to do something that their parents wouldn't approve of and something sneaky like having a party or going out late or something, or going out with friends, like something that they didn't want their parents to find out about so they were

gonna- hiding it so they didn't- they didn't want their parents to find out, and they didn't want to get in trouble- I think that they were like in that moment together when they were (sigh) oh were good so I think they were agreeing like we're fine we're not gonna get in trouble in that moment a relief they were together on that side.

Jake- yea

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability evaluated the social situation and identified a reason as to why the characters are displaying the specific behaviours/facial expressions depicted (i.e. the sister is planning something the parents would disapprove of)

Field notes

Researcher's comments:
  The group of participants without an identified learning disability showed in their responses that they are critical thinkers. They were both very cognizant of social cues and were able to break down what was being expressed on the characters' faces. According to Bloom and Heath (2009) in their study comparing children with an identified learning disability and children without a disability the group of children with an identified learning disability "was significantly less accurate at recognizing and understanding facial expressions compared with the non- learning disabled group." (p.181)(please see reference details below). In this series of questions the group with an identified learning disability seemed to understand the emotions portrayed in the clip, but the group's responses were very simplistic. They did not break down the scene and analyse the characters the way the group of children without an identified learning disability did. It gave the impression that the children with an identified learning disability did not have the tools to fully understand the social scene depicted. I also got the impression that the children with an identified learning disability associate tension between characters as being a power struggle and they automatically suggest bullying. I am not sure if this is because bullying is a regurgitated response they go to when being asked about social scenarios, or if bullying is something they can relate to, or if it is just them scratching the surface of the emotional setting.
  (Bloom E. and Heath N., (2009) Nonverbal and General Learning Disabilities Recognition, Expression, and Understanding Facial Expressions of Emotion in Adolescents With Nonverbal and General Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 43(2) 180 –192).

Clip Four Depecting Interacting With Authority Figures (Clip from Freaks and Geeks)

4.1 (a) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke-umm they are having health

Alex- yea and the boy in the front is trying to learn and the guys in the back are talking and annoying him..

Luke- and the teacher thinks that the boy is saying shut up to him

Troy - yea.. I wasn't really watching the video..

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability are losing focus.

4.1 (b) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- um the teacher is getting frustrated because of everyone else is talking and the other kid is telling the other people to stop so he could listen and then he's getting in trouble, the teacher is getting mad at him and telling him to do work.

Jess- well Id say they are learning about something that is kinda out of their knowing and ah, he- I think he felt a little awkward in that situation and then his friends started talking so he was kinda like be quiet and all that then the teacher was getting um frustrated and annoyed with the boy cuz they- he was trying to quiet his friends and the people in the back and he was- you know I think he was in that awkward position cuz one he was learning about like something very awkward and..

Jake- how babies get made

Jess- yea in a stage where he didn't want to go up there and try to teach the class like he was very nervous and sorry and then he was apologizing

---

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participant responses from members of the group of children without an identified learning

disability were empathetic. They were able to unpack the meanings of the complex social scene depicted in the media clip.

4.2 (a) Question:W*hat does it make you think about the boy when the teacher addresses him?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex- kinda sad cuz he has to teach the class

Troy- the boy is stuck with the nerds

Luke- yea. what he said

Luke- [It makes me think] uh oh detention! he's going to get a very big detention

Alex- low mark- yea kinda stuff ....

Troy- teacher doesn't like him..

Alex-just hates him

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability have limited understanding of the scene and difficulty interpreting basic emotions expressed by the characters depicted. They are giving answers that reflect a lack of understanding of the teacher's likely view of the situation (i.e. they suggest the teacher 'hates' the boy perceived as causing a classroom disturbance) .

4.2 (b) Question:W*hat does it make you think about the boy when the teacher addresses him?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- um I think it makes him feel really- I think it makes him feel more um emotionally frustrated then the teacher cuz he's trying to learn about the subject and other people are all talking in the background, its all noisy.

Jess- like maybe in that position in the class the teacher may continuously think that its him talking but it could be those two boys in the back that which- that were chatting with each other so he could get in trouble for something they were doing.

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability understand the main character's emotions in this scenario.

4.3 (a) Question: *Do you think his friends are trying to get him into trouble? Do you think they are his friends?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex- yes

Luke- Yes

Troy- I don't assume they are his friends

Luke- no i think they are trying to get him into trouble

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability assume the boy spoken to by the teacher is the target. Their answers are another example of their expecting someone to be a target of unfair treatment. .

4.3 (b) Question: *Do you think his friends are trying to get him into trouble? Do you think they are his friends?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- I don't know really, uh he was like- cuz in those times like I know I've shhed like shushed people and that but, he- I don't know they could have been his friends and they couldn't have been his friends like they could have been anybody really-I don't think they were [trying to get him in trouble], they were just talking to themselves, and well he was asking them to be quiet and they weren't but still they were just talking..

Jake- yea I actually do think that they were really trying to get him into trouble- cuz they were continuously talking

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability tried to relate to the social situation depicted. They analyzed objectively whether or not the others in the scene were trying to get the main character in trouble with the teacher

4.4 (a) Question: *Have you ever had a similar experience?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- teacher calling you out in front of the class? yea! Yesterday- I got mad

Alex- no.. -I've never got caught talking

Luke-just once, I was like common what did I do, and he was like come out here and ill tell you.. ok..

(Luke and Alex murmurs, arguing/ losing focus)

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability could relate to the scenario. They were also starting to lose focus again on the task of interpreting the scenes depicted in the media clip.

4.4 (b) Question: *Have you ever had a similar experience?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- I don't really get in trouble a lot but one time, I think-I don't remember what class it was in but I was trying to explain something and then the teacher was just like everybody be quiet and then sometimes they address you but you're just in that position when you're either trying to shush them or explain what you're doing to them, its one of those positions when your not actually doing something wrong but the teacher may think you are.- I kinda felt like embarrassed, cuz I don't get in trouble a lot, but like you know in like in your head that you were not doing anything wrong you were just trying to explain something you may have been talking but you were either trying to um shush them so you could listen or others around you could listen or you were trying to explain something to them cuz they didn't get it.

Jake- same[this happens to me] lots!-cuz I have a lot of talkers behind me and I go shhh this is a really cool subject [it makes me feel] really really frustrated

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability don't see the situation as something common or relatable. They understand what is happening but see it as something external to them. Their responses can be interpreted as - "I don't get in trouble" --"that's not my world"

4.5 (a) Question: *What would you do if that was you getting in trouble?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- I'd tell the teacher to get back to work.

(Luke and Alex murmurs, arguing/ losing focus)

Alex- me and him have problems so. yea. his problems with my cousin..
(Luke and Alex murmurs)

Alex- umm I would like be quiet then like say get to work I'm sorry I'm trying to tell these guys back here to shut up.

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability members were confrontational. The participants were also often off topic.

4.5 (b) Question: *What would you do if that was you getting in trouble?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- yea I would tell the teacher "may I talk to you at recess" or something like that like because um it wasn't me talking or something like that.

Jess-uh yea Id probably like sometimes I would keep it to myself but at moments- if it was something severe like I was talking during a test or something I'd probably go and say, that wasn't me and I realize that it was your..like it.. you made a mistake and it- I'm not blaming you that like you were addressing me but I'm just saying that..- It wasn't me talking, and it wasn't my fault..it was.. I didn't name the people but I would say that it was people around me that were talking

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants see the teacher attention as negative and expressed that they wouldn't want to be associated with this type of negative attention. They would want to clear their name.

Field notes

Researcher's comments:
   The responses given by the children identified as having a learning disability in this section gave the impression that they get into trouble with teachers often .Also at this point in the focus group the attention from all the participants in the group of children identified with a learning disability was lacking and off topic conversations were emerging. Perhaps this occurred as the media clip depicted uncomfortable situations with a teacher that are very familiar to these students The children identified with a learning disability were varied in their response to how to cope with being falsely accused by a teacher of misbehaving with, for example, one child stating he would tell *the teacher* to get back to work and one saying he would apologize for talking in class during a lesson but then explain the reason. The children without an identified learning disability saw the scenario as a negative scene, and did not want to identify with the characters i.e. denied they get into trouble often with teachers . Instead, for the group of students not identified as having a learning disability when asked to put themselves into that role their responses focused consistently on finding a solution to absolve them from the wrong doing.

Clip Five Depicting Avoiding Distraction/ Self-Advocating (Clip from Highschool Musical)

5.1 (a) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex-umm Bullying

Luke- umm being a geek

Troy-popular girl's picking on the new girl

Alex- I think I know what that clip is from

Troy- High school musical

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the L.D. identified group give what they perceive as the "expected response".

5.1 (b) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- the girl in the pink is trying to get that other girl to not be in what ever they were doing, so then she would like.. she could make fun of the other girl cuz she wasn't in it.

Jess- uh just cuz I've seen that movie so many times I'm just going to use the names:
Sharpay (the blonde) um was talking to Gabrielle (the brunette) and Gabrielle was trying to focus kinda cuz from that movie she's new and she's just trying to get the hang of things and um Taylor (dark haired girl) behind them she was like realizing oh she's pretty smart and then Sharpay was very annoyed because one she got it right and got the glory of the teacher and she wasn't paying attention to her and she wasn't really in the spotlight in that moment, so I think she was kinda embarrassed but uh she.. um that Gabriella got the answer and corrected the teachers work and that she didn't and she wasn't really in the spotlight

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Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participant responses from in the group of children without an identified learning disability are extremely confident in interpreting this scenario. The participants gave complex interpretations of the thinking and motivation of the various characters in the scene depicted.

5.6 (a) Question: *Who do you think is behaving appropriately?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- umm

Alex- Sharpay, the blonde

Troy- its always the blonde..

Luke- its always the blonde

Alex- dumb blonde

Luke- no

Troy-no, the brunette

Luke- the brunette yea.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participant responses in the group of children with an identified learning disability reveal a low tolerance for students making mistakes in class in their learning.

5.2 (b) Question: *Who do you think is behaving appropriately?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- I think that it was the girl sitting behind Gabriella cuz she was paying attention to the um conversation that those two were having but she was also doing her work and wasn't talking to anybody, and Gabriella was kinda talking but she was also paying attention cuz she corrected the teacher showing that she was paying attention- um well yea [its ok to correct a teacher], like you don't want to embarrass them but you just want to say I think this is right if its wrong you can show me how to get that answer but just state your opinion

Jake- yea

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability see the whole

---

picture not just the main characters, They demonstrated that they were continuously thinking in interpreting the complex scenario depicted in the media clip. The responses to this clip also revealed the participants' consideration for others.

5.3 (a) Question: *Which person is most like you? Why?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

(sound of tossing hackie sack)

Troy-the blonde

Luke- can you take that away from him

Alex- um I'm the table

Luke- yea you are you don't have a brain

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability are off task and losing focus.

5.3 (b) Question: *Which person is most like you? Why?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- um the girl in the pink talking

Jess- I think I'd either be the girl, Taylor, the girl sitting behind Gabriella, [or the girl Gabriella] who corrected the teacher. One of those two cuz I usually like to just pay attention

Jake- cuz I usually try to um talk, but not always when its like a really cool subject, just when I get bored I turn around and..

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
Both participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability can relate to one or both of the characters depicted in the media clip

5.4 (a) Question: *What can you tell me about the characters' facial expressions in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy- she's disgusted- cuz the new girls taking over her place

Alex- yep

Luke- her smart place

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability understand and are aware of the meaning of the social situation depicted but do not have a complex analysis of what the characters depicted are likely feeling..

5.4 (b) Question: *What can you tell me about the characters' facial expressions in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- well in the end Sharpay was- had that look of oh my goodness I can't believe she did that look on her face and she's like tapping her nails like she was frustrated but- and also when Gabriella corrected the teacher she was happy cuz she as able to show the teacher she was smart and figured out the answer- at first [the teacher's] likes like huh!? like I'm sorry that's not right, and then she checked and said I stand corrected and I think she was kinda impressed and she was like welcome aboard and she was very pleased with the new student. [the girl sitting behind her] was kinda realizing cuz uh, from the movie, I know that she holds like a.. I forget what its called but its like this like where people are very smart, its like a decathlon or something like that and she was like.. she realized ooh she's pretty smart and she was just kinda paying attention keeping a close eye on her work.

Jake- same

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability showed that they understood all the emotions expressed through facial expressions. The responses suggested the non-L.D. identified students were assessing the emotions of all the characters depicted in the scenario.

5.5 (a) Question:*What do the facial expressions tell you about what the person is thinking or feeling?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- umm the blonde is thinking..

Alex- the dumb blonde

Luke- yea the dumb blonde is thinking "hey she's stealing my place" and the brunette one was saying "I'm pretty good at this class"

Alex- yea

Troy- yep.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The responses of the group of children with an identified learning disability members reveal a limited understanding of the social scene depicted and that the participants are only scratching the surface of what meaning the scenario might be conveying.

5.5 (b) Question:*What do the facial expressions tell you about what the person is thinking or feeling?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- the girl in the pink was..was like.. was saying..with her face.. what she was saying was I don't want you in this, and the girl behind- err-.. in front of her was like I'm going to be in this and you cant stop me, and then the one beside her..I didn't really see her face much in the video, but um the face was like um well I wonder if she'll get this question right or something like that and then the teacher had a little face like wahh?? and um then once that girl answered the question she was like she had a little bit of a frown and she said sorry that would be highly impossible and then a big smile cuz she forgot that it can go either way.

Jess- I think they were feeling.. uh Sharpay was um annoyed because one Gabby was like yea and then she realized that the teacher made a wrong mistake and she wasn't really paying attention to Sharpay and then just the teacher was impressed and pleased with the work that Gabriella did and Gabby was.. uh I think she was proud of her self for correcting a teacher that has been through schools and has her degree and she was able to correct the mistake that an adult made.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability were able to acknowledge the roles of all of the characters in the scene and were able to make assumptions as to what each character may be thinking or feeling based on their facial expression.

Field notes

Researcher's comments:
It was clear in this section that the responses given by the students without an identified learning disability were very confident. These students did not feel intimidated by the questions and were very comfortable with giving a response. The group of children without an identified learning disability members in contrast displayed a lack of focus, and gave rapid fire responses they assumed were what was expected.

Clip Six Depecting Iterpreting Sarcasm, Humour, Friendly Banter and Teasing.(Clip from Highschool Musical)

6.1 (a) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Luke- umm they are talking about boy friend girl friend stuff

Alex- yea

Luke- he probably knows (points to Z)

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability automatically interpret boy/girl interactions as a necessarily a romantic encounter.

6.1 (b) Question: *What do you think is happening in this scene?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jess- I think she said "I'm a girl" and he said "you look like one too" so I think just from they were sitting-she was sitting and he was talking and he went over and approached her and they were getting along he was complementing her kindalike a silly complement "you look like a girl too" cuz she is one and they looked like they were having a lot of fun!

Jake- same

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability interpreted the scenario as two characters (a boy and a girl) simply having fun without inferring any romantic connection between the two.

6.2 (a) Question: *Do you think the boy is funny?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Troy/Luke/Alex- no/ nope

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the L.D. identified group did not find the humour in the situation and did not think the situation was meant to be funny.

6.2 (b) Question: *Do you think the boy is funny?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- not really no

Jess- well in that moment he kinda had a witty remark he was.. cuz she said "I'm a girl" and he said " oh you look like one too" it was kinda like a sarcastic little joke thing, it was kinda funny

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability understand the social interaction depicted to be harmless and innocent and appreciate the witty comments of the characters in the scene .

6.3 (a) Question: *Do you think the girl thinks the boy is funny?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex- umm yes

Troy- the girl thinks he's funny cuz she thinks he's cute that's the only reason

> **Field notes**
>
> Key points observed by researcher:
> The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability are attributing the interaction to a romantic interest between the characters .

6.3 (b) Question: *Do you think the girl thinks the boy is funny*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- Yes!

Jess- yea he kinda looks like he's kinda trying to impress the girl with his humour

Jake-yea cuz she kinda gave a little giggle

Jess- yea she kinda chuckled at the joke so I think that she kinda likes him

---
Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants understand the characters and the scenario and its humourous aspects .

6.4 (a) Question: *What do you think the boy meant when he said "you even look like one too"*?

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex- umm

Troy- He's just trying to get on her

Luke- yea

Alex-mmhmm

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability members are
short and shallow. They assume the male character has an agenda.

6.4 (b) Question: *What do you think the boy meant when he said "you even look like one too"*?

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- he meant that she was a girl

Jess- I think that he was kinda trying to be funny, cuz she is a girl its pretty clear that she's a girl,
and she said hey I'm and he's like you look like one too, so he was just kinda stating that she was
but putting humour into it so..

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability interpret the
key comment by the male character as a harmless joke.

6.5 (a) Question: *What can you tell about this boy's personality?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex- he's being stupid

Luke-no when your in love you wanna get.. get with the girl..

Alex- yea

Luke- yea

Alex- like with the girl.. like trying to get a date with her.

Luke- date with her?..

Troy- that he's stupid and he doesn't know what he's doing.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children with an identified learning disability can only assume the scene is based on a romantic interest and don't see any other explanation. They do not struggle to dig deeper to understand the characters or the scenario.

6.5 (b) Question: *What can you tell about this boy's personality?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- I think that he- I think that the boy's personality is that he's more of a funny guy then more of like a guy that's more into sports and stuff

Jess- I kinda disagree with that because I know that he's very athletic, but just from the clip he seems like one of those uh sarcastic kinda funny guys that's like joking around all the time.

Field notes

Key points observed by researcher:
The participants in the group of children without an identified learning disability interpret joking to be part of the male character's personality thus demonstrating an appreciation for differences in personality and temperament.

6.6 (a) Question: H*ave you ever said something as a joke that could have been taken seriously?*

Responses from the group of children with an identified learning disability:

Alex- uh yea..

Luke- yea

Troy- everyday

Alex- yea

Luke- yea

Field notes
Key points observed by researcher: The participants in the L.D. identified group have used sarcasm, but struggled to relate when they observed it depicted in the media clip scenario.

6.6 (b) Question: H*ave you ever said something as a joke that could have been taken seriously?*

Responses from the group of children without an identified learning disability:

Jake- yup

Jess- yup probably

Field notes
Key points observed by researcher: The participants in the non-L.D. identified group have used sarcasm and understood when the boy in the scenario was using it.

Field notes
Researcher's comments: For the children without an identified learning disability the interaction between the boy and girl was nothing out of the ordinary. They saw it as harmless joking. The children with an identified learning disability interpreted the interaction as a romantic situation where the boy was trying to impress the girl. They did not find humour in the clip and were less attuned to picking up on the sarcasm/humour. The students in the group of children with an identified learning disability automatically assumed that because the interaction was between a boy and

girl it must be for romantic purposes. They never suggested that it could just be two friends interacting, or being funny.

Children with a Learning Disability, and their Understanding of the Social World

Erin Marie Montelpare, M.Ed, 2nd Year

Background and Purpose

The intent of this study is to provide some insight into the specific nature of the social skills deficits that may be experienced by a sample of children between the ages of 8-12 who have been formally identified as having a learning disability.

Social skills are learned behaviours. Individuals with learning disabilities frequently have difficulty demonstrating, acquiring, and understanding the importance of behaviours that are deemed social skills and in abiding by social scripts and norms. The development of social skills evolves through interaction with others. Children who do not have a learning disability pick up on social cues through interactions. These children quickly become aware of what is socially acceptable and what is not socially acceptable by understanding the context and social reaction to what is going on in the world around them. A child with a learning disability, however, commonly struggles to understand the cues communicated by others as to the other's emotional state and the nuances in their social environment.

According to Rose- Krasnor (2006) social competence is the capacity to interact effectively with others because of the development of the social-cognitive skills, knowledge, and emotional control in specific contexts. The ability to demonstrate competence in the social environment is a skill that children with a learning disability may be unable to manifest (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2009).

The current study analyses how children who have been formally diagnosed with a learning disability compare to their non-learning disabled peers in terms of level of social competence in interpreting diverse social scenes displayed in film which depict social cues with varying levels of explicitness. The study thus puts the notion of the social incompetence of learning disabled children to the test to gather more specific detailed information about the nature of these difficulties in interpreting social data.

Research Design and Methodology

Using phenomenography, this study explores the differences in the responses of the participants (a learning disabled versus non-learning disabled group) and focuses on the relationship between the individual and the phenomenon (their ability to interpret social cues in a set of standardized film clips depicting complex social scenes).

An open- ended interview technique using general questions to facilitate the discussion will be used. These questions will draw on the participant perceptions and opinions.

The participants selected for this study will be children between the age of 8-12. There will be eight participants in total. Four participants will be girls and four will be boys. The participants selected who have a learning disability will have been formally identified by the Ontario Ministry of Education as special needs children diagnosed with a learning disability.

The two groups will be asked to respond to six movie clips depicting various social scenes with complex social interactions. Each movie clip selected will display a social scene with actors of similar gender and age to the participants. Specifically, each clip will address a specific social skill.

Benefits:

Social competency allows access to community environments and it may ultimately lead to better personal adjustment by increasing independence and reducing passivity and isolation (Baumgart &Anderson, 1987). Once we identify social deficits common among children with a learning disability then we can adapt teaching strategies to better educate and socialize all individuals.

Summary of clips

The first clip is taken from the movie Diary of a Wimpy Kid. In this scene the two young boys are trying to find a table to sit at during their lunch break. As they move from table to table they find that there are no seats available because their peers are either saving the seats for others or simply do not want these particular boys to sit with them. The social scene thus demonstrates exclusion.

The second clip is taken from the movie Bandslam. It depicts a boy walking down the hall at school. He sees a group of larger boys and ducks down pretending to tie his already tied shoe. This scene demonstrates a social situation where someone is avoiding trouble. This scene also implicitly alludes to bullying.

The third and fourth clips are taken from a television show titled Freaks and Geeks. The third clip depicts a boy about to tell on his sister something important but she makes a face inadvertently thus persuading him not to tell his parents what is on his mind. The audience can see the emotions change on the boy's face as he reconsiders what is the right thing to do. This scene will be used to address social interactions that involve picking up social cues via an individual's facial expression.

The fourth clip depicts a main character talking in class while the teacher asks for everyone to quiet down. After a second warning, the teacher sarcastically asks the student caught talking to teach the class. This social scene deals with interpreting sarcasm.

The fifth and sixth clips are from the movie High School Musical. The fifth clip deals with how to avoid distractions and unproductive social interactions and how to participate effectively in class (a social situation). The girls in this scene are in math class. One girl is trying to talk to the other. The other girl who is paying attention to the lesson sees a mistake the teacher has made and raises her hand and corrects the teacher.

The sixth clip addresses the complexities of humour and friendly teasing in a social setting. A girl and a boy are talking about how they feel and the boy teases the girl.

References:

Rose-Krasnor, L. (2006)The Nature of Social Competence: A Theoretical Review Social Development, vol. 6 issue 1 Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Solish, A., Perry, A., & Minnes, P. (2009). Participation of children with and without disabilities in social, recreational, and leisure activities. Journal of Applied Research in Disabilities.

Baumgart, D. & Anderson, O. J. (1987). Assessing and teaching job-related social skills: A curriculum manual for students with handicaps. Moscow: Secondary Transition and Employment Project, University of Idaho.

For additional information, please contact:
emontelp@lakeheadu.ca

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Principal Cover Letter

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

Dear Principal,

My name is Erin Montelpare and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study that will compare responses from a group of students with an identified learning disability to a group of students without an identified learning disability or other special educational need using various film clips of social situations to investigate social reasoning To collect this information, I am hoping to work with 8 students, 4 with an identified learning disability, and 4 without an identified learning disability or any special educational need. These students will participate in focus group discussions concerning the social scenes depicted in the film and television clips presented. There will be two separate groups. Written consents will be obtained from the principal, teacher, children and their guardians.

All participants, school and school board identities will be protected at all stages of the study and in the dissemination of the findings. **Hence, fictitious names will be attached to all responses.** The data collected from this study will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis. I may also report the results of this study in professional journals or at professional conferences.

The research will investigate the relative understanding of a sample of children identified as having a learning disability and a small slice of the social world compared to a group without special educational needs or any identified learning difficulty. This will be accomplished by analyzing their discussions of media clips depicting social scenes compared to the discussions regarding the same clips by children not identified as having special educational needs (or an identified learning disability in particular). The study thus compares what a child with an identified learning disability might understand about social cues in the *same* social situations with the *same* available social cues in contrast to their peers who have not been identified as having a learning disability or any special education need.
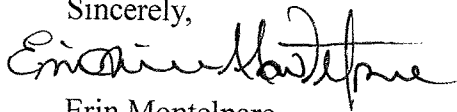
Please note that the Lakehead University Ethics Board has approved this study as has the Lakehead Public School Board Research Office (please see approval letters attached). The school board and the school will not be identified in any of the write-up and pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants. There are no known risks associated with this research. Student participation is entirely voluntary and students will be able to withdraw from the study at any point or decline to participate in any aspect without adverse consequence and will be so informed. The raw data (transcripts of the audio recordings, field notes, audiotapes) will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

A summary of the findings and a copy of the thesis will be available through Lakehead University libraries but I would be happy to provide the school board with a copy.

You may contact Dr. Sonja Grover or myself (please see contact information below) regarding any additional questions pertaining to the study details or contact the Lakehead University Office of Research (807-343-8934) if you have any further questions or concerns.

If you agree to allow the study to take place in the school of which you are principal please sign the attached consent form. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Erin Montelpare

Erin Montelpare
MEd Student

Thunder Bay, ON

E-mail:emontelp@lakeheadu.ca

Dr. Sonja Grover
Supervisor
Faculty of Education

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955 Oliver Rd
Thunder Bay, ON
P7B 5E1

Phone: (807) 343-8714
E-mail: sgrover@lakeheadu.ca
***It is best to contact Dr. Grover via email for a prompt response

Office of Research

Lakehead University
955 Oliver Rd
Thunder Bay, ON
P7B 5E1

Phone: 807-343-8934

Principal Consent Form

Children with a learning disability and their understand of the social world

I, _____ have read the cover information letter and understand that:

The child participants, school and school board identities will be protected.

All data collected is confidential.

The focus group discussions will be audiotaped only with written permission of the participants (children and the children's legal guardian).

All data collected will be presented with the use of pseudonyms.

Participants may choose not to answer any question as part of the research without adverse consequence.

The participants may withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequence.

The child or parent may request redaction of any of their responses without adverse consequence and will be given an opportunity to do so.

Should a participant choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.

There are no known or anticipated risks to the participants but any unforeseen concerns will be referred to the teacher for follow-up.

Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by discussing their understanding of social situations addressed in the various clips; voicing their opinions, interacting with peers and having a chance to contribute to social science research. The study it is hoped will provide some preliminary insights into the nature of the social reasoning deficits, if any, of children identified as having a learning disability; a first step in considering appropriate intervention regarding social skills training

The participant's parent(s)/ guardian(s) and students and classroom teachers may receive a summary of the study upon request.

All raw data from the study (audio tapes, written notes and transcriptions) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

The data collected will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences with all participant identities concealed.

_____

Name of Principal

_____

Signature of Principal

_____

Date

Teacher Cover Letter

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

Dear Teacher,

My name is Erin Montelpare and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study that will compare responses from a group of students identified as having a learning disability to a group of students not identified as having a learning disability using various film clips of social situations to investigate social reasoning To collect this information, I am hoping to work with 8 students, 4 with an identified learning disability, and 4 without an identified learning disability or any special education need. These students will participate in focus group discussions concerning the social scenes depicted in the film and television clips presented. There will be two separate groups. Written consents will be obtained from the principal, teacher, children and their guardians.

All participants, school and school board identities will be protected at all stages of the study and in the dissemination of the findings. **Hence, fictitious names will be attached to all responses.** The data collected from this study will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis. I may also report the results of this study in professional journals or at professional conferences.

The research will investigate the relative understanding by a sample of children identified as having a learning disability of a small slice of the social world compared to a group without any identified learning disability or special education need. This will be accomplished by analyzing the discussions of media clips depicting social scenes by a group of children identified as having a learning disability compared to the discussions regarding the same clips by children not identified as having special education needs (or a learning disability in particular). The study thus compares what a child with an identified learning disability might understand about social cues in the *same* social situations with the *same* available social cues in contrast to their peers who have not been identified as having a learning disability or special education need.

Please note that the Lakehead University Ethics Board has approved this study as has the Lakehead Public School Board Research Office (please see approval letters attached). The school board and the school will not be identified in any of the write-up and pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants. There are no known risks associated with this research. Student participation is entirely voluntary and students will be able to withdraw from the study at any point or decline to participate in any aspect without adverse consequence and will be so informed. The raw data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

A summary of the findings and a copy of the thesis will be available through Lakehead University libraries but I would be happy to provide the school board with a copy.

You may contact Dr. Sonja Grover or myself (please see contact information below) regarding any additional question pertaining to the study details or contact the Lakehead University Office

of Research (807-343-8934) if you have any further questions or concerns.

Please sign and complete the attached form if you agree to allow the study to be conducted in your classroom. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Erin Montelpare

Erin Montelpare

Erin Montelpare	Dr. Sonja Grover	Office of Research
MEd Student	Supervisor	
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	E-mail: sgrover@lakeheadu.ca	
	***It is best to contact Dr. Grover via email for a prompt response	

Teacher Consent Form

Children with a learning disability and their understand of the social world

I, _____ have read the cover information letter and understand that:

The child participants, school and school board identities will be protected.

All data collected is confidential.

The focus group will be audiotaped only with written permission of the participants (children and the children's legal guardians).

All data collected will be presented with the use of pseudonyms.

Participants may choose not to answer any question as part of the research without adverse consequence.

The participants may withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequence.

The child or parent may request redaction of any of their responses without adverse consequence and will be given an opportunity to do so.

Should a participant choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.

There are no known or anticipated risks to the participants but any unforeseen concerns will be referred to the teacher for follow-up.

Child participants are expected to benefit from participation in the study by discussing their understanding of social situations addressed in the various clips; voicing their opinions, interacting with peers and having a chance to contribute to social science research. The study it is hoped will provide some preliminary insights into social reasoning deficits, if any, of children identified as having a learning disability; a first step in considering appropriate intervention regarding social skills training

The participant's parent(s)/ guardian(s) and students and classroom teachers may receive a summary of the study upon request.

All raw data from the study (audio tapes, written notes and transcriptions) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.

The data collected will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences with the name of the school, school board kept confidential all participant identities also concealed.

_____

Name of Teacher

_____

Signature of Teacher

_____.

Date

Parent/Guardian Cover Letter/ Introductory Information

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a qualitative research study, *Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world.* Due to Ontario privacy legislation, I have not been informed as to who in the class has been formally identified as having a learning disability. Thus, if your child has been formally identified as having a learning disability and you decide to allow your child to participate in the study can you please indicate on the consent form that you give permission to the teacher to inform me that your child has been identified as having a learning disability

The research will investigate how children *with and without* an identified learning difficulty interpret their social world. Students who agree to participate in the study will be part of a discussion group that will watch and discuss film and television clips of social situations. The students will be asked to give their interpretation of the media clips which are taken from popular children's television programs and films. The children's responses will be recorded on an audiotape and transcribed but the children's names will be kept confidential in any transcription. Discussion group participants will be asked to keep discussions confidential, but this cannot be guaranteed. Students will not be informed of who does or does not have an identified learning disability. It is only with written consent from both the parent/guardian and the child that the child will be permitted to participate in the study. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. It is hoped that the research will provide some insight into how children identified with a learning disability interpret social scenes compared to typically developing children. Such information will hopefully ultimately lead to better strategies for assisting students who have been identified as having a learning disability and correlated social difficulties.

My name is Erin Montelpare and I am a second year Masters of Education student at Lakehead University and will be conducting the study. Dr. Sonja Grover, a professor at the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University, will be supervising the research. Both parent/ guardian and potential participant (your child) must agree to participate in the study. Should you choose to give written consent for your child to participate in the study, and your child also provides written consent your child's participation would be entirely voluntary. Your child may refuse to answer any question asked as part of the research or to withdraw at any time without any negative academic or other consequences. You may refuse to allow your child to participate in any part of the study and can withdraw your child from the study at any time without penalty or your child suffering any negative consequences.

At the end of the study, you and your child will be given the opportunity to remove any of the child's group discussion responses from the data set if you wish without any negative consequence. The information from this study will be used for a Masters of Education thesis. I may also use the information to report findings from the study in professional academic journals or at professional conferences, where your child's identity, school and school board information

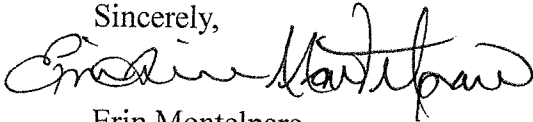will be kept strictly confidential.

The findings and analysis of this project will be made available to you at your request upon the completion of the study. All information that your child provides will remain confidential and securely stored at Lakehead University for five years. After the 5-year period, all multimedia data (electronic, notes, or tape) will be destroyed.

This research has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or swright@lakeheadu.ca

Please sign and complete the attached parent/guardian form and have your child read the child friendly version of the cover letter (providing any help the child may need in understanding the latter) and have the child sign a) the child consent form if he or she voluntarily wishes to participate and b) the discussion group consent form. If you have any questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to contact, myself or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover. Thank you for considering your child's participation in this study.

Permission given to teacher to inform the researcher Erin Montelpare as to whether or not my child has been formally identified as having a learning disability Yes_____ NO_____

Sincerely,

Erin Montelpare

Erin Montelpare	Dr. Sonja Grover	Office of Research
MEd Student	Supervisor	
	Faculty of Education	
		Lakehead University
Thunder Bay, ON	Lakehead University	955 Oliver Rd
	955 Oliver Rd	Thunder Bay, ON
	Thunder Bay, ON	P7B 5E1
	P7B 5E1	
E-mail:emontelp@lakeheadu.ca	Phone: (807) 343-8714	Phone: 807-343-8934
	E-mail: sgrover@lakeheadu.ca	
	***It is best to contact Dr. Grover via email for a prompt response	

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

My signature on this sheet indicates that I agree to participate in a study by Erin Montelpare, MEd student of Lakehead University entitled ***Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world*** and that I have read and understand the following:

I have read and understood the information letter for the study.

I voluntarily agree to have my child participate.

There are no known or anticipated potential risks of the study and any unforeseen concerns that may arise will be referred to the teacher for follow-up

I understand that my child is expected to benefit from participation in the study by having a chance to voice his or her opinion, interact with other students in a discussion group and contribute to social science research on children's understanding of the social world

I can withdraw my child from the study at any time without any adverse academic or other consequence to my child or me.

My child can decline to answer any interview question or decline to participate in the focus group discussion at any time without any adverse academic or other consequence.

The raw data my child provides in any form will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed.

I can withdraw any of my child's discussion responses from the data set without negative consequence to me or my child.

I understand I can request a copy of the research findings from Erin Montelpare at emontelp@lakeheadu.ca at the conclusion of the study when findings have been analyzed and written-up.

My child and I will remain anonymous in any publication or public presentation for research findings.

All comments are confidential and will only be presented in aggregate or anonymous form.

For participating parents:

My child has been formally identified as having a learning disability Yes_____ NO____

_____   _____   _____
Name of Legal Guardian   Signature   Date

If you would like the results of this study please provide your e-mail or mailing address below:

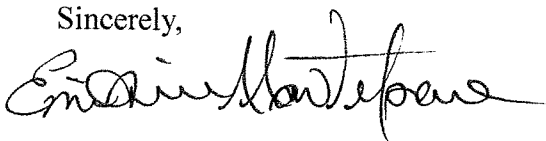*Thank you for your participation in this study.*

Participant Cover Letter

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

Dear Student Potential Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study. The study is about how children understand things in their world when they are dealing with other people. Some people have problems socially and others do not and the researcher wants to know why. You will be part of a group of other children who are asked to watch parts of popular children' movies and television programs that are about people dealing with each other. You will be asked to give your opinion about what is happening in the film or television program you see. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers and everyone's else's will be recorded on a tape recorder but the researcher will give you a fake name when she writes everything down from the audio tape so no one will know it was you making the statements. You do not have to participate in the study if you do not want to and you can pull out at any time even if you start and then change your mind. It won't affect your grades or anything else. It is hoped that the study may give us some Information about how to understand and help any student who might be having social and learning problems.

If you agree to participate please sign the form labelled consent form

Sincerely,

Erin Montelpare

Participant Consent Form

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

My signature on this sheet indicates that I agree to participate in the research study about how children understand social relationships:

1. I have read (or had my parent read the information letter to me) and I understand the information letter for the study.
2. I want to participate and noone is making me do it.
3. I understand that this is expected to be a safe study
4. This is a way for me to let adults know what some children think about different social situations so that they can understand children a little bit better
5.. I can stop participating in the study anytime I want to even before the study is finished and it will not affect my grades or anything else in any way if I do.
6. I do not have to answer any questions I do not want to and everything will still be fine for me.
7. What I say will be tape recorded but when the researcher tells about what she found my name won't be used and noone will know I was in the study
7. The researcher will keep all my information for five years and then destroy it.
8. I can ask the researcher to remove what I said from any report when she asks after the study if I would like to do that
9. I can ask my parents to get a copy of the final report about what the researcher found out
10. The researcher won't mention my name or anything that will let people know I was in the study when she talks or writes about the results.
11. If I make any statements In addition to answering questions no one will know who made the statements

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Name of Child Participant   Signature   Date

If you would like the results of this study please provide your e-mail or mailing address below:

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Student Focus Group Consent Form

Children with a learning disability and their understanding of the social world

I _____ (participant name) understand that the information discussed in this discussion group is confidential. By signing below, I agree that I will not share what was discussed with other people and will not tell others who participated in the discussions

I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions asked during the group discussion and this will not negatively affect me in any way. In signing below, I also agree to give my permission for the discussion to be audio taped. Furthermore, I understand that anything I say during the discussion that is used in a write up or presentation will not use my real name. I am aware that the audiotapes and any writings about what I said are confidential and will be locked in storage for five years and then destroyed.

Please circle YES or NO to the following questions:

Do you agree to continue to participate in this study? YES   NO

Do you agree to have this discussion audio taped? YES   NO

_____   _____   _____

Name of Potential Child Participant   Signature   Date