

Abstract

There is a theoretical approach that holds that teachers might view involvement in student's identity formation as a worthy and essential educational aim (Schachter & Rich, 2011). Identity education, according to this theoretical approach, is teacher's intentional activity aimed at developing processes and providing contents that shape student's self-understanding and self-determination through social and cultural interactions. Yet, there are not many empirical studies on the subject that demonstrate if this is so, and that describe how it is expressed. This study has examined the issue through a study of perspectives of teachers of students with learning disabilities, assuming that those teachers will feel the need to be involved in identity issues of their students in the context of their learning disability. In this study we defined learning disability as difficulty in acquiring learning or functional skills that are not related to low intelligence, and originated from neurological cognitive disruptions (Maor, 2003; Special Education, 2008). Although, diagnosing learning disabilities in neurological-cognitive level not limited in locating an objective facts; the diagnostic is used to tag identity in social and educational interactions. This labeling may on the one hand help some students understand themselves and learn how to operate and adjust to society and even may help parents and teachers assist those students; On the other hand it may also create social difficulties for them and their self-perception. Review of the literature on learning disabilities issues shows that self-determination, labeling and self-perception are indeed important factors that influence the educational success of students with learning disabilities; However, educational literature on teaching learning disabled children hardly focuses on identity issue, but on the pedagogical and didactic aspects.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine whether the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of teachers of students with learning disabilities might include involvement in questions of identity. Namely, whether teachers see their involvement in issues of identity as part of their role as teachers. Pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 2010) is the practical knowledge of teachers based on teaching experience, proper content and particular circumstances in certain teaching or a particular context. Based on Shulman's approach, the study examines the perspectives of teachers of students with learning disabilities regarding the goals of their teaching and way of teaching in order to learn if and how they see their role in the context of the formation of student's self-identity, in the context of self and social stigmatization as learning disabled. Thus will also contribute to the literature on identity education and to the literature on teaching learning disabilities.

Involvement of teachers in the process of internal identity of the student and how they see their role in terms of identity formation and self-perception of learning disabled students, were examined in this work in three ways: In the first arena, we examine whether and how teachers see part of their role to be involved in shaping the way the students sees themselves. This examination was based on direct attitudes of teachers to the characteristics of self-concept and identity formation of students with learning disabilities. On the second arena, we examine whether and how teachers see part of their role to become involved in structuring the relationship between teacher and student in a manner designed to produce conditions that will allow discussing the issue of identity. And on the third arena, we examine whether and how teachers see part of their role to become involved as a mediator between the student and the education system, according to the context in which teachers work, and the tension between the teacher

perspective as part of the education system and the perspective of the system regarding stigmatization and teaching learning disabled students.

The study population was sampled from teachers of special education, Mat"ia teachers, who teach as part of integration of learning disabilities student in the regular education program. Participants were 10 teachers aged 30 with at least three years teaching experience, who are working in public junior high or high school of Ministry of Education.

This study used a qualitative research method and qualitative measurement tools: interviews and observations. The interview was conducted using a method of collecting theme focused life stories (Schachter, 2004). Interviewees were asked to share their professional life story focusing on the causes of choosing teaching students with learning disabilities and their view on the role of the teacher. To half of the interviewed teachers, was also performed an observation that was used to assess how they apply their approaches and principles to classroom teaching, and also in addition an interview aimed at clarifying issues that arose in the first interview and in the observation. Sections of the interviews were analyzed based on Alexander's model of guided reading (Alexander, 1988).

The main finding of this study refers to teacher's importance of being active in identity and self-perception practice of their students. Human identity is mostly formulated due to the perception of the human environment, so the environment and the teacher have a significant impact on a student's self-construction, according to mirroring that received from the environment, and directly in context with the student's self-perception. This finding is compatible with the concept presented by Schechter and Rich (2011), according to which some teachers have role perception of the involvement in student's identity processes. The innovation of this study is that it examines the teacher position in identity formation and self-perception of

the students based on their learning disability. As stated, the literature on learning disabilities expands and deepens regarding teaching and exam-taking of learning disabled students, but rarely engages in identity formation ways of the learning disabled student based on his background and experience as a different student in the regular school system.

Also in the second arena was evidence that teachers see themselves as involved in shaping students' perspective of their identity. This finding emphasizes that teachers believe that identity is related to the way that others perceive people, so teachers of students with learning disabilities understand that they must be meaningful to their students, so that their opinion will be important to the them, and this enables them to influence and shape their identity. These findings add to the context of learning disabilities literature, which almost does not relate to the meaning of interpersonal relationships for students with learning disabilities (Svetaz, Ireland & Blum, 2000).

The third arena that was examined was teachers' perspective on their role to connect between the student and the education system. The findings indicated that teachers acts within the educational framework to which they belong, yet they are aware that the school's attitude to disabled students is mediated by their perspective on these students and their disabilities. Because of thous, on one hand teachers need to deal on a daily basis with students' stigmatization in the educational system, and on the other hand to promote to distributing educational approach and worldview for students with learning disabilities and to the impact of school's point of view on them. These findings are compatible with other studies dealing with this tension. For example, according to the approach of Vaughn, Hogan, Haager and Kouzekanani (1992) on one hand school definition of the student as learning disabled facilitates learning and enhances his own self perception as capable, while on the other hand the definition as different and as learning at different integration program labels and tags the disability at the identity (Mintz, 2010).

According to this study findings, school perspective on integrating students with learning disabilities is the one that defines this tension, so teachers feel that their job is to influence school attitude, in the way that disability of the students is not perceived to cause stigmatization, but as a factor that may even help students to integrate.

In conclusion, this study tested different direction that has not yet been studied in the literature. This study examined whether teachers of students with learning disabilities have a worldview about their role in promoting these students through practicing on their self-perception and tagging them as those with learning disabilities and found that it is so. The theoretical contribution of this study is in strengthening the approach that considers identity practice as a main part in teacher's general work. This study also contributes to expanding the study field on teaching learning disabilities beyond the pedagogical and didactic area. The discussion revealed other pedagogical implications and suggestions for further studies. It seems that it is necessary to increase the activity of the educational system in identity formatting of students with learning disabilities. Beyond that, it is worth examining the pedagogical domain of identity education in academic curriculum. The importance of this study is in the combination between teachers' perspectives about teaching and their practice on identity formation of students with learning disabilities.