

Summer I Reflection Piece – Emma Hopkins

The process of undertaking research this summer was enjoyable and educational, as well as somewhat challenging at times. This was the first time I was able to plan, conduct, and report on my own research, and it was an experience that I will remember as I continue through my educational career. It has been a gratifying experience to come up with a research proposal that I have been passionate about for so long and have the Laidlaw Scholars Program see value in the subject as well. I am so appreciative of being able to contribute my own work to the field of inclusive education.

Some aspects of the six-week research period, and the time prior, provided me with new challenges that I had to learn to overcome. One of the first issues I encountered was my lack of experience in writing and submitting Ethics protocols to be reviewed. Since I planned to interview subjects as part of my research, I had to submit a Research Ethics protocol to the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board. Before this project, I wasn't aware that such a procedure even existed, let alone how to go through it myself. However, I was determined to conduct interviews, so I had to learn about the protocol process. I used my leadership skills to investigate how to go about submitting a Research Ethics protocol. My primary advisor was unable to help with this portion of the research project, so I worked to find another advisor that would be able to recommend my research for approval, assist me with the process, and give support to the Ethics Board to green light my protocol. I spent time and effort in going through each section of the protocol and cross-comparing it to what the Ethics Board recommended, to have the best submission possible and be able to carry out my interviews. This was a long and challenging process, but I am glad that it was a step I had to take for my research. I now know how to write and submit a Research Ethics protocol if I ever need to know for the future. I can also help other students in this process, and further my leadership skills along the way.

Another barrier I encountered came during my research period. As I was trying to secure interviews, I found that it was difficult to reach educators during their summer breaks. My research period encountered a slight delay because of the Ethics protocol, so it pushed my timing into Ontario's summer holiday. I was lucky that the teachers I reached out to were kindly willing to speak to me, but I had hoped to interview Ministry of Education workers, and professors at teacher education programs. Unfortunately, these didn't work out, but it taught me how to bounce back in my research and come up with solutions. Instead of dwelling on what to do with

the new gap in my planned research, I pivoted to introduce a new perspective. Originally, I hadn't planned to study Ontario's inclusive education strategies and policies; I was solely focused on curriculum documents. Due to the fact that I wasn't able to conduct all the interviews I had hoped for, I was able to look at an entirely different section of education that I'd never considered before. I am grateful that these interviews did not work out, as I feel that including inclusive education policies broadened the scope of my research immensely. When I was first left with this space in my research period, I was concerned with how I would fill the time and continue to expand on my research in a meaningful way. In consultation with my advisor, I worked to find a solution to this problem that would benefit my research and add to my work.

Over time, I had to grow my leadership skills to complete my work and provide a paper that would contribute to my field of research. I was hesitant and nervous to reach out to teachers, Ministry workers, and professors that I had never met, but I had to overcome this concern for the sake of my paper and to provide a well-rounded account of personal experiences with the education system. In the interviews I was able to conduct, I had to learn to take control over the interview process and guide the conversation. I had only experienced interviews as the interviewee, so it was a learning curve to conduct a proper interview. I had to be the person who spoke first, asked questions, and prompted conversation. I was unfamiliar with doing this in a professional setting, but I feel now that I have the ability to speak to professionals with whom I am unfamiliar, and to lead conversations in a meaningful way. I hope to apply these new skills in my school experience to build a rapport with my professors and teaching assistants so I can further my educational and professional relationships. Though this was a new experience that began with some nerves and hesitancy on my part, I feel hopeful that I can use these newfound abilities in positive ways as I continue through my educational and working career.

I feel that throughout this summer, I have learned a great deal not only about how research is conducted, but about how to form working professional relationships. Even through the challenges I encountered, I tried to maintain a positive outlook that bettered the research experience. Before starting this project, I had only undertaken research for essays and assignments, where process would essentially be provided for me. I immensely enjoyed coming up with my own research topic and process that gave me the freedom to work at my own pace on a topic I feel so strongly about. I am excited to take part in the leadership sessions over the next year, and to put my work into action next summer.