

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

Educational Autobiography of a Student Who Struggled with Learning

My name is Mia Johnson, and for the first eight years of my education, I believed I was not smart. Not in the way that children say it carelessly — I mean I had constructed a coherent explanation for why the things that came easily to everyone around me did not come easily to me, and that explanation was that something was fundamentally wrong with my ability to learn. It took a long time to understand that the explanation was wrong. It took even longer to stop reaching for it out of habit.

I grew up in Denver, Colorado, the middle child of three. My older brother read chapter books by the time he was six. My younger sister seemed to absorb information without effort. I sat between them and worked twice as hard for half the result, which at the time I interpreted as evidence of exactly what I feared. By second grade I was being pulled out of class for reading support. By third grade I had developed a reliable system for hiding how much I was struggling — I memorised what I could, guessed strategically at what I could not, and became very good at appearing to follow along.

The hiding worked well enough that it took until sixth grade for anyone to name what was actually happening. My English teacher that year, Ms. Patricia Osei, noticed a pattern in my errors that was not random — it was consistent, which meant it was diagnostic. She referred me for an evaluation. The evaluation came back with a dyslexia diagnosis, and I remember sitting in the school counsellor's office while my mother read the report and feeling two things simultaneously: relief that there was a name for it, and anger that it had taken this long to find one.

The strategies that followed the diagnosis were not magic. They were structured, specific, and effortful — coloured overlays, audiobooks alongside print texts, extended time on assessments, a reading specialist three times a week. What changed was not that the work became easier. What changed was that I understood for the first time that the difficulty was in the method, not in me. That is a different kind of knowledge than being told you are capable. It is the knowledge that comes from watching a different approach actually work.

By the end of eighth grade my reading level had caught up to grade standard for the first time in my academic life. By tenth grade I was in honours English. By my junior year I was tutoring other students with learning differences through a peer support programme our school had started, which turned out to be the most useful thing I did in high school — not because it helped my transcript, but because explaining how I had learned to learn made me understand my own process more clearly than I ever had before.

I am now a sophomore at the University of Denver, majoring in Special Education. The path was not accidental. I know what it feels like to sit in a classroom and understand less than everyone around you appears to understand. I know what it costs, over years, to carry that quietly. I also know what it feels like when someone looks at the pattern of your errors instead of the errors themselves, and sees a learner rather than a failure. I intend to be that person for other students. I have been preparing for it longer than I realised.

