An auto/biographical investigation exploring the life-stories of adults with dyslexia.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctorate of Education

2019

This thesis is dedicated to Anna and Jim.

For the nurture and the nature.

Acknowledgements

To complete this doctoral thesis has required commitment, hard work and endurance. It has also taken a lot of support and understanding from my closest family and friends.

I would like to express my gratitude to Georgia, Selena, Samuel, Amanda, Karen and Jonathan. They willingly gave me their time and stories with such generosity, and I hope they gained something positive from the experience of participation. The autobiographical element to this thesis means that my family feature in the story. Their contribution to this research has added compassion and richness. I am especially thankful to Becca and Gemma for their honest and, at times, entertaining narrative.

This work has required many corrections, suggestions for improvement and editing. For proof reading and advice, I would like to thank Katrina Atkins and Emily Pressnell. However, I must point out that all remaining errors are mine and mine alone.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding received from Marlborough House School towards this Doctorate in Education and how I was allowed complete freedom to decide on my own research.

Thank you to my supervisors Dr. Sue Soan and Dr. Alan Bainbridge who have provided me with excellent feedback, encouragement and assistance. Their professionalism, challenge and reassurance has enabled me to not only complete this thesis but also enjoy the process. I would like to acknowledge Dr Judy Durrant, my Chair, who encouraged my pursuit of auto/biographical exploration as a tutor on my Master’s degree several year’s prior to starting this Doctoral thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank Neil, my husband and Rowan, our son for their encouragement and unwavering support. Their patience and belief in me have been central to the completion of this thesis.

Notes on presentation

It is my hope that this thesis will be read, at least in part, by other people with an interest in dyslexia and who may also have this condition. I have purposefully used a sans serif font with the type justified on the left-hand side only as this is considered more comfortable to read by many people with dyslexia. Like 1 in 3 people with dyslexia, I have visual stress when reading black text on white paper. To help reduce this for me and for others, the thesis is printed on pale blue paper. For the final binding, my personal reflections are typed using a computer program called myfont.com (Appendix 1) that allowed me to upload my own handwriting which I then choose as a font style in Word. This, I feel, gives more of a personal feel to these sections.

Abstract

While there is a wealth of research about dyslexia in childhood, the life stories of adults with this condition remain largely unrecorded. It is recognised that dyslexia has a lifelong impact, and for some, this effect increases and changes over the life-course. By exploring the life-stories of adults who have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia, I seek to understand how experiences are assimilated throughout the whole of their life, including education and employment. It also provides an insight into identity, emotional well-being and behaviour.

This thesis uses auto/biographical narrative enquiry. Data, in the form of a guided conversation, was collected from six participants. This was transcribed and emerging themes were identified. As author, I am also a co-contributor to the narrative.

The study identified three significant themes:

1. Supportive others. This highlights how significant the guidance and support of family, friends and work colleagues are to the success and well-being of adults with dyslexia. It also identifies the importance of mothers as identifiers of dyslexia and supporters of their children during education and beyond.
2. Disclosure and concealment. The complex and often fraught decision to disclose or to conceal their dyslexia was identified as a critical stage in the educational lives and employment lives of the participants.
3. Identity anxiety. This theme acknowledged the discomfort adults face when openly recognising their differences and difficulties, and identifies the emotional impact dyslexia can have on an individual.

This research is significant and distinctive as it uses an auto/biographical approach with the researcher as insider and a contributor to interpreting the narratives of self and others.

I propose several future areas of research involving the families and work colleagues of adults with this condition. Findings suggest a longitudinal study following the life-course of children with dyslexia through the transitions of education and employment.

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Abbreviations

A Level	Advanced Level
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hypercativity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BAME	Black Asian Minority Ethnic
BDA	British Dyslexia Association
CIT	Critical Incident Technique
CSE	Certificate of Education
DI	Dyslexia International
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DSA	Disabled Student Allowance
DT	Design technology
GCSE	General Certificate of Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IT	Information Technology
KIAD	Kent Institute of Art and Design
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
NHS	National Health Service
O Level	Ordinary Level
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
SENDCO	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator
UK	United Kingdom
WFN	World Federation of Neurology
WHO	World Health Organisation
WRIT	Wide range intelligence test

Chapter 1 Introduction to my thesis

1.0 The context

Understandably dyslexia is often regarded as a problem limited to the time a child and young adult is in education, as it is so closely linked with the process of developing literacy skills. Prior to starting and during this research, it became apparent that there is a general understanding that children grow out of dyslexia, or the condition somehow recedes as the child matures into adulthood. This historical and embedded understanding of what is a lifelong condition is discussed at length in this thesis, with the voice of adults with dyslexia clearly arguing that, not only do we not grow out of having dyslexia, but for many, myself included, dyslexia becomes more apparent as an adult. Dyslexia is often identified by parents and teachers when a child is beginning to develop reading and writing skills (Preston, 1996; Reid, 2005). So important are these complex skills for advancement of learning, it is unsurprising that any identified or perceived deficit in learning is often highlighted by those adults closest to the child, either in a personal or professional capacity (Reid, 2016). However, due to varying and complex indications and subtleties in the way a child presents their learning, some of the identifying elements of dyslexia may be missed altogether. Additionally, some parents may feel uncomfortable expressing their concerns to professionals for fear of suggesting lack of trust in their child’s teacher (Riddick, 1996). Furthermore, due to the polygonal nature of dyslexia, it can often go undetected, or is incorrectly identified especially if there is lack of vigilance, understanding or interest at home or if the child is ‘intelligent, well behaved and helpful in class’ (Lawrence, 2009 p.21). However, despite the current focus on funding, research and discussion, dyslexia is not a condition limited to childhood, nor is it limited to difficulties with reading and spelling, as is often supposed. Dyslexia is, as Snowling (2000 xiii) claims, ‘a life-long, developmental disorder’ and not something that diminishes with age, nor can it or should it currently be cured with appropriate management or treatment. Various studies (Pavidis and Miles, 1981; Sprenger-Charolles, et al., 2011) claim that approximately 10% of the global population experience some form of specific reading difficulty as a result of neurological function. Without appropriate intervention, the results of this can impact on academic success and have long-term issues such as increased risk of depression, low self-esteem and anxiety. Furthermore, law-breaking and suicide rates are also considered significantly disproportionate amongst adults with severe dyslexia (Better training, better teaching, 2014). The prominence of focus on the child reflects the majority of the definitions of dyslexia which often omit the inclusion of adults and refer only to children. My adopted definition will be explained later in this chapter (p.12) and debated in Chapter 3.

My personal understanding of what it is like to be an adult with diagnosed dyslexia is recent. Knowing that I have a learning difference that is shared with about ten percent of the population (British Dyslexia Association, 2017) places me in an unavoidable category, and I am slowly coming to terms with it through understanding shared experiences. A critical incident, which I explain later in this chapter, caused me to reflect on my experiences, making me rethink various events throughout my life. Although this is not discussed in detail in this thesis, the dialogical position and auto/biographical methodology of that first conversation remain embedded. Indeed, just as my critical incident came to light during a conversation, so are the critical incidents unearthed by the participants and then reflected on during the conversations in this study. There was a limitation to the research in that the life-stories relied on participant memory. Furthermore, the results could have been influenced 'by the participant researcher interaction during data collection' (Graybill et al., 2017 p.536). To clarify this point, this research did not use Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to analyse the material collected during conversations, as I felt this method to be too structured and preferred a more fluid process to elicit the experiences of the participants. The core of this study was to examine the life-stories of the participants and develop rich and thick material that uses narrative methodology. This is discussed in greater depth as the thesis progresses.

Although somewhat dated, a review of literature carried out by Rothman, Damron-Rodriquez and Shenassa in 1994 exposed essentially 'no research on dyslexia in late adulthood' (Carawan, Nalavany and Jenkins 2015, p.284). However, in recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on this issue and this is exemplified by the work of Carawan et al., (2015), McNaulty (2003), Gerber, (2012). The research to date has tended to focus on isolated elements of the impact dyslexia, for example on early adulthood (Ingesson, 2007), or late adulthood (Carawan et al., 2015) and other isolated implications of dyslexia, such as self-esteem (Nalavany, 2015). Collectively these studies provide important insights into the experiences of adults with dyslexia, but do not seek to understand the collective nor the implications of living and working with dyslexia. Up until now, far too little attention has been paid to the collected incidents that impact on the life stories of adults with dyslexia.

In contrast, I seek to understand how adults assimilate their experiences throughout the whole of their life, including education and employment. Therefore, this research project aimed to explore the life-stories of adults with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia, which, depending on their responses lead to deeper investigation into how they developed coping strategies, either actively or passively. I used auto/biographical narrative research methods to understand the life-stories of five adults with dyslexia. Interwoven with their experiences is my own voice. I embraced and examined these reflections as the participants and I sought to navigate our way through the complexities of life with the added element of dyslexia.

Although my preference would be to carry out longitudinal research, such as the inspiring work carried out by Joan Freeman (2010), which spans four decades, it is beyond the scope of this thesis due to time constraints. Although this research is not conventionally longitudinal, the experiences of the participants, and my experiences are longitudinal; we have lived with dyslexia all our lives. This is my reason for using ‘life-stories’. Furthermore, although I am not participating as an interpreter in the construction of their stories, I have a role of custodian as they give me their life-stories through the snap shot of time, that is when the conversation took place.

1.1 The research title

The research title is:

> ***An auto/biographical investigation exploring the life-stories of adults with dyslexia.***

The purpose of my research was to provide an understanding of:

- How adults with dyslexia experience incidents throughout their life that may be as a result of having dyslexia
- Coping strategies they may have developed or been taught
- How they feel about their dyslexia and how it impacts on their identity
- The impact dyslexia has on emotional wellbeing and behaviour
- How and to whom they disclose their dyslexia and the impact this has had on their lives.

These key themes were informed by my own personal and professional experiences as an adult with dyslexia and also as a teacher. I have described this later in this chapter and in Chapter 3, the literature review.

1.2 My adopted definition of dyslexia

My choice of definition is not from a dyslexia support organisation nor is it from an international health or educational organisation, but from an academic expert in the field of dyslexia.

Reid (2016, p.5) developed the following definition;

> *Dyslexia is a processing difference, often characterised by difficulties in literacy acquisition affecting reading, writing and spelling. It can also have an impact on cognitive process such as memory, speed of processing, time management, coordination and automaticity. There may be visual and/or phonological challenges and there are usually some discrepancies in educational performances.*

I selected this definition as it is linked to the way the participants in this research experience dyslexia; more than literacy difficulties and not limited to childhood.

However complete this definition may seem, it is a deficit definition and does not include the positive characteristics and abilities that many people with dyslexia possibly hold such as ‘focus, visual and special creativity’ (Nicholson, 2015, Slide 27) or the ability to ‘think intuitively, visually and multi-dimensionally’ (Tafti et al., 2000 p1010). Despite its common usage, dyslexia is a rather nebulous term. Ingesson (2007 p.15) concurs ‘there is no unambiguous or undisputed definition of dyslexia’. However, I debate that many of the definitions written and adopted by various organisations and research bodies are in conflict, largely in what they omit to include as opposed to what is included in their definition.

1.3 The voices in this story

As I become one of the older members of my extended family, I have several younger relatives with dyslexia, including my son, all of whom have struggled with some aspects of their education including accessing assessment and support. As a family we are aware of how the traits of dyslexia may present with younger relatives and strive to ensure they receive early intervention due to our vigilance and knowledge. However, as these children become adults their difficulties may not disappear but simply shift into other areas of their adult life.

This auto/biographical research is intended to be the voice of others, through my voice and although an interpretation of the life-stories of others, written without prejudice. Here I narrated and sought to construe the experiences of six participants and echo an understanding of their stories through experiences of my own. Choosing participants over the age of thirty enables stories of experience to be shared, revealing and establishing the narrative of adults; a group which has been less researched but still ‘of voice’ and reflection in the field of dyslexia. Although not specifically an occupational history, my participants and I are in paid employment, and much of their stories tell of their experiences in work as well as in their personal life. By considering how individuals develop an understanding of their life experiences they and I used the experiences of living to give ‘structure, coherence and meaning’ (Goodson et al., 2010 p.1) not only to ourselves but also to others in similar situations.

There are times when my voice is central in this research, as I describe how I experience dyslexia in my life. However, there are times when my voice is silent, overridden by the literature and the life-stories of others. Any work of this length and depth demands the researcher to reflect, and more so with auto/biographical work. My reflections are generally written at the end of chapters. These are highly personal and, I feel, give a very private and individual insight into my life-story. Some of these reflections are written without correction to grammar and spelling, all are written as I speak. The reason for this is twofold. I wanted my reflections to be honest and genuine, giving the reader a candid insight into my experiences in the same way the participants have opened up to me. In addition to this, I expect some readers of this thesis will have experienced dyslexia either first hand or have colleagues, relatives or friends who have dyslexia. By sharing my experiences I hope they will gain a better understanding of the benefits and difficulties of living with dyslexia.

1.4 My experience

The source of my interest in dyslexia as a research subject originates from an off-chance conversation with my niece, Becca. Our conversation lead me to recognise the behaviours that led to her diagnosis were traits that I shared. As an illustration, remembering the shapes of multisyllabic words, rather than actually reading them and our common inability to remember directions, but using the shapes of road numbers instead of written or spoken directions. Becca also worked as a mentor to trainee social workers, some of whom were also diagnosed with having dyslexia. She found that the universities offered these students excellent support such as computer hardware, scribes and proof readers, but never gave these students strategies to manage their learning and working differences when they were in employment. This echoed my experiences as a secondary school teacher working with children and young adults with dyslexia and other learning differences. Although provision was available to support these school-age children, as is similar with Becca’s university students, they were not helped with post-education strategies for dealing with their learning differences.

My personal experience

When my father died, I wanted a physical memento or keep-sake from his life. I wanted something with his handwriting on, as I considered this unique to him. However, despite my searches, I could not find anything. Since his death, thirteen years ago, I have found just three pieces of his writing; his signature on a card, brief commentary on the reverse of a World War II army photograph and a plant label with awkwardly formed capital letters spelling ‘Sweet William’ (Figure 1). Looking at the way my father has formed the letters shows that he was not a fluent writer. It appears to me that he copied the shapes of the letters, rather than understanding the shape, sound and meaning of the combined letters.

Figure. 1 Dad’s plant label

Although he was very successful, skilled and highly respected in his profession as a master plasterer, his literacy skills and had managed to arrange his life to avoid the need to write at any length. During the 1930’s when my father was at school, the understanding and support of dyslexia was very limited, and the term had only just become common place, taking over from the term ‘word-blindness’ (Hinshelwood, 1917). This is the description my Mum used to describe Dad’s literacy difficulties. Other, older members of my immediate family also struggled to make sense of language and my Mum recalls how my sister, born nearly twenty years before me, struggled at school, particularly in literacy lessons.

My experience of school

My own experiences of learning to read and write were very different from my sister. I benefitted from the influence of an adult immediate family due to the large age gap between my siblings and me. My speech and language developed well, partly I believe, due to listening and speaking with my adult family, (Sulloway, 2007) as well as exposure to my Mum's thirst for books, reading and love of libraries. Although I disliked school, I worked hard and enjoyed learning. Any traits that may now be flagged up as a possible learning difficulty would have been concealed by my compliance and high attainment.

My experience as a learner

In November 2017 I received the results of a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. However, my knowledge of dyslexia, how it presents, and understanding its hereditary nature, has led me to understand, for many years, that I have dyslexia. In addition to these observations, the results from the Canterbury Christ Church University Disability Advisor (Dyslexia and Neuro-diversity) Students Support and Guidance on-line test suggested I 'show some significant signs of dyslexia/learning difference' (Appendix 3, June 2013). This learning difference is like a spectre, invisible but present, becoming more evident when evoked or prompted out of silence. By writing this thesis I am beginning to understand how my own struggles with dyslexia have had and continue to have an impact on my personal and professional life. I did not consciously or otherwise avoid roles and tasks that may exasperate or highlight my own learning deficits at work or throughout my Master's or Doctorate studies. The most compelling evidence of this is the existence of this thesis. However, I am aware that I am 'different' from some, if not all of my student peers. Occasionally this is very apparent to me, for example in seminars, when reading, then discussing academic papers, this highlights my need to read, re-read and note take. As with many adults with dyslexia, I hide and avoid rather than explain my differences. Moreover, it is not immediately obvious, unless I disclose, that I have a learning difference. As a consequence, it is reasonable to assume I have to work longer and harder, and find alternative studying methods to achieve the same goals as other students on my course.

My experience as a teacher

Dyslexia is one of a number of hidden learning differences that is life-long. However, helping children and adults to understand their difficulties and that of others has been part of my approach to teaching. I have, for most of my career, taught in state funded schools; mainly non-selective and in one selective school, then more recently in an independent preparatory school teaching seven to thirteen year olds. The subject I teach is Design Technology (DT) which this is often thought of as a non-academic and creative subject; both descriptions I question in the broadest educational terms. However, due to the technical nature of the subject, its variety of written and practical tasks, how the written tasks are scaffolded and, until Advanced Level, the absence of long essay type activities, children with specific learning disabilities, including children with dyslexia often succeed in a way they have been unable to in other subjects. It is also interesting to note that many of my DT colleagues have some characteristics of dyslexia, such as a ‘difficulty in acquiring and processing language’ (Nalavany et al., 2013 p. 569). Others have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. I suppose that, as children, these teachers excelled in more technical and practical areas of the curriculum. Indeed, a significant number of the children and young adults with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia that I have taught, also demonstrate noteworthy strengths in technical and creative subjects.

The appropriate approach to teaching and nurturing children with dyslexia is important to their achievement and success in school and beyond. During my teaching career, I have received some excellent professional development on this matter. However, this position relies on the learner, whatever their age, having the diagnosis of dyslexia and for support to then be put into place. In order to achieve that stage and identity the learner has had to ‘wait to fail’ (Tunmer and Greany, 2010, p.231). Furthermore, various studies (Burns, Poikkeus and Mikko, 2012; Ramus, et al., 2003; Dyslexia International 2014) have shown that dyslexia varies from individual to individual, thus ‘It is virtually impossible to provide a universal profile of an adult with dyslexia’ (Tanner, 2009, p. 785).

In my opinion, a point often overlooked is helping those in compulsory education to develop their own strategies through coaching, thus to enable and empower children and adults in their learning. This could be appropriate to their particular needs and also give them an understanding of how they will need to adapt these approaches when they leave formal education and enter the world of work. Whilst some may argue that it is not the purpose of education, as Michael Gove's influence as Secretary of State for Education (2010 – 2014) still resonates, the practice of 'divorcing policy from social context' (Hart, 2012, p.10) has implications on how far education delivered in schools filters into live-long education and an ability to achieve more than examination grades. Conversely, Gove's rhetoric asserting that the English education system should be a 'cure for unemployment and welfare dependency' (Gove, 2011b) implies that education is far more than examination results.

1.5 Overview of this thesis

Chapter 1 presents an overview relating to the definition of dyslexia and how the greater part of research relates to children and young adults. I explain the research title and my reasoning behind this. I give details of the voices in this thesis and how they are presented. Further to this I share my own experiences of dyslexia in relation to personal and professional life. The structure of the thesis is explained.

Chapter 2 explores some of the key theoretical topics and concepts relating to dyslexia. The history of dyslexia is described in relation to the medical and educational discourse. Here I seek to explore and clarify the definition of dyslexia by comparing and contrasting current medical and educational definitions in relation to my own thought and experience. This discussion explores the debate surrounding the structure, social and educational implications and politics of dyslexia. I also evaluate the discourse of identity and the impact identifying as having dyslexia can have on emotional wellbeing and personal life.

Chapter 3 explains my choice of research method and the relevance of using guided conversations to collect auto/biographical narrative data. The framing and processing of the data analysis is explained. Validity and reliability of the research method are analysed and are adapted to use Creswell’s strategies (2007). Ethical considerations are explained and I debate if the recording of ‘thick descriptions’ poses any specific ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 begins with the process of analysing emerging themes is discussed questioning the balance between objectivity and subjectivity when interpreting life-stories. This is followed by an in-depth investigation of the conversations leading to an identification of shared themes.

Chapter 5 reintroduces the purpose of the research in relation to the narratives of the participants. Narrative inquiry is used to analyse the life-stories and collective themes are identified and discussed.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis in response to the research questions where I discuss the unique contribution this research has made to the field of auto/biographical research and to the understanding of dyslexia. It also contains recommendations for future research.

1.6 Summary and concluding thoughts

The formal reading, exploration and research of this thesis has taken three years. However, for my participants and for myself the data or material has taken a lifetime to gather. Although part of this chapter details my experiences of dyslexia and the experiences of some of my immediate family, this thesis is to include the stories of six more people. This thesis has two themes; the narrative auto/biographical element and that of the research into dyslexia. Although I could have carried out narrative research with the focus on many aspects of education, interweaving my story with the stories of others makes this thesis more engaging and genuine, placing the emphasis of interest on the person as opposed to the ‘problem’.

1.7 Reflection Conversation with Becca

This is the section where I write about dyslexis. It is written how I type, without any corrections oradjustkemnts to how I hit the keys. I want to do this to show what it’s like to type and be dyslexic. As I type I have to concentrate on the shapes of the lettsrs on the keyboard, make sure my findgers go in the righte places and in the write order. If I look up I know I will see lots of red squggles underlining my works, telling me Ive got the spelling wrong. Im resisting changing these as I want to demonstrate what it’s like, what dyslexica is like. If I was to write this section by hand tere would not be so many errors because typing is lower than writing, I can see the words and the shapes, im in charge of the squiggles that my hand makes on the page, but when I type its more uncontrollable. My findgers don’t always go where they should go. My brain insyt in line with the shapes on the keyboard and my fingers overtake themselves, hence tarbnsposed letters. Numbers are wors. In my head I have to converst each sound into a shape, if Im reading outloud, that shape has to be conversted from ‘isght’ into a sound and then I have to make the sound with my mouth. If I have words with many sylabuls, its harder, the sounds don’t dome out right or they get mixed up and in the wrong order. In school, reading a register with unfamiliar names is a struggle, I cant hear the words, so they come out wrong. Long numbers are also hard to say. Each number, for example 203377, is just six shapes, but its six full words that had to be visually read, ‘translated’ into a sound them I have to say then sound in the right order. Its almost like an internal stutter.

Without doubt dyslexia has effected many of my family. For part of my Master’s degree I identified relatives that have been either diagnosed officially with ‘dyslexic tendencies’ or I would consider to be dyslexic knowing how they read, write and their general behaviour. It’s rife. My realisation that I might be different and I might be the same was during a converstation with my niece, Becca, whio is fifteen youears younger than we. Sha e had ahd a formal diagnosis for some time, and we were discussing how we read, memorise thisngs see thinsgs and hear words. It wasn’t until this time that I understaood how

I do these things is not ‘norma’l and that at the same time there are lots of other people who do thinsgs the same as me. Sadly for those in my family over my age (50) , much of their formal education was difificult and theyw ere often misunderstood. In particular my sister, Janet who Mum described as “very, very backward at school, she couldn’t get her words right. Do they call it dyslexic or something?” Mum recalls how came home one day from school crying beacsue they had taken her out of the class and put here in “with the babies”.

Although I write about having dysklecxis a freely =here, I stoill struggle with sharing it with people at work and in particular tghose in senior positions. I don’t use it as an excuse, and don’t ever expect my students to do the same, but it is a reason. Av reason why I cant ‘see’ words sometimes, or get them completely wrong, or can see tanles. When I am tired or stressed my speech slows down, and I really struggle to find the right workds. Verbaly, sometimes I get ‘toingue tied’ and just feel like an idiot. In my head I know the word, but I cant verabalise it, so I have to go through the alphabet, (hoping it’s a word that sharts with a letter at the start of the alphabet) in my mind and visyuual;ise theh letter.

Mucxh of the time, its (the dysslecxia) is ‘just there’, hovering aourn waiyting to piunce. Other times it overtakes and seems to have its own momentum. Maybe it has stopped me from doing thsings. I have given up applying for deputy headship posts as I just cant do the written tasks in interviews well enough. I watch the other candidates fill in pages of paper and im struggling with the forst few sentances. I don’t bother ‘admitting’ to dyslexica an the application form. Wjhjo w3ants to appoint a ‘slow’ deputy head’?

Get on with it. It is what it is.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This literature review presents the concept of dyslexia by using its historical origins as a way of understanding how it is socially constructed and how society, the medical profession and educators view dyslexia. That is to say, the concept of dyslexia within the wider social and cultural structures and how it has been formed and established. However, I also questioned the pre-existence of dyslexia. How it has evolved and become part of our genetic make-up and how dyslexia exists outside of a literate society.

The mechanics of the literature research should also be understood. Prior to writing this thesis, I had already identified a number of relevant peer reviewed articles, including McNaulty (2003). However, as my literature review progressed it became evident that I needed to broaden my reading and then narrow my focus on areas pertinent to the research questions. That is not to say that there were several occasions that I became engrossed in literature giving me a wide-ranging and esoteric understanding of the subject and hooked my fascination for diverse and often curious literature. Enlightening as this was, I had to rein myself in and focus on reading articles that were both useful and relevant. My literature search was done with dyslexia specific focus (see Appendix 2), using only the terms 'dyslexia', 'dyslexia adults', 'dyslexia disclosure', 'dyslexia anxiety', etc. I did not use the term 'learning difficulty' as this is too heterogeneous. Typing the word 'dyslexia' into the university library search engine brings up well over 41 000 results. This is comprised of 37 000 academic articles, almost 2 000 reports, some 1 600 magazines and 32 books. Of course, it is not feasible to read such a number of articles, nor would it have been worthwhile. I progressed to search with key words relating to my research questions, the results of which can be seen in Appendix 2. Again, this was narrowed down using the original search terms, through scanning titles, abstracts and conclusions for relevance and credibility. I hand-searched books and journals and also explored websites pertaining to this topic. Numerous articles, web sites, books, etc. that have influenced my work, and this resulted in reading 400 texts with 350 publications listed in the bibliography.

Although my method of research is qualitative, much of the key literature identified realting to the subject of dyslexia was quantitative, or a combination of open questionnaire, focused discussion and numerical data, highlighting a paucity of work in the field of research targeting lifelong experiences of adults with dyslexia..

Being guided by and citing an article does not imply I agreed with the work. Indeed a number of articles, such as McNaulty's 'Dyslexia and the Life Course' (2003) and 'Adult dyslexia and the 'conundrum failure'' by Kathleen Tanner (2009) influenced me because they encouraged me to exercise critical opinions. These articles and other writing seminal to my work are critiqued throughout this chapter.

Before carrying out the research for this thesis, it was important for me to explore and understand the chronological relationship between medical and educational theorists and practitioners, and how this progressed to the establishment of a better understanding of dyslexia as an accepted neurological difference. Understanding the connection and disjuncture resulting from the chronology of dyslexia as what is commonly considered and 'frequently presented as an educational construct' (Carawan et al., 2015, p. 284) supported my own positioning as both researcher and participant in this thesis. Indeed, there were times in the historical understanding of dyslexia, that it was considered a medical condition. Then at other times, limited to the domain of education. In my opinion, dyslexia is a medical condition, resulting from genetic variations, and should be understood by educationalists and medics. Both professions are now beginning to work in collaboration to adapt and improve our understanding of this condition. By exploring the understanding of dyslexia and how it is perceived by professionals in education through their knowledge of current medical research and how this formulates collective attitudes to and by people with dyslexia. Key to this research was understanding how dyslexia was defined, as this leads to identification or otherwise of people presenting difficulties with literacy. Furthermore, due to the 'multifaceted' (Lawrence, 2009, p.21) nature of dyslexia and also the 'confusion and uncertainty of what dyslexia might be' (Kerr, 2001, p.82), I debated the need for a definition and if it is necessary or indeed helpful to people with dyslexia, their supporters and educationalists. I feel that an inclusive and balanced definition gives security and acts as a starting point or hook to greater discussion and is therefore beneficial. I attempted to disentangle societal and organisational attitudes to dyslexia and how this linked to the understanding of hidden differences, especially with adults. Following this, I studied the literature surrounding the personal experiences of people with dyslexia, including educational and work experiences. I explored the literature supporting practical and emotional experiences relating to disclosure and concealment and how this can impact on the identity of individuals with dyslexia and strategies that they employ to cope with their situation. My exploration is documented in this chapter. To conclude this chapter I have analysed key texts that support my literature review and guide my research questions. Although these articles were particularly influential during the nascent stages of this research, as my knowledge and critical thinking progressed, I became more confident to wisely question the methods employed and the research findings.

2.1 Historical perspective

Prior to 1877 and, as the history and recognition of dyslexia has developed, so has the diagnosis and definition. This section will attempt to detail the timeline of the recognition and research of dyslexia through to current day understanding and to provide historical perspective in order to position the impact of new findings in this area of the debate about the construct of dyslexia. Although ‘word blindness’ was first described by physician, John Schmidt in 1676, (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014) it is not until the ability to read became important to progressing in school and life that more documentations of this learning difference were recorded. This may have an historical link to the invention of the steam printing press in England during the Industrial Revolution, making access to the written word both significant and available. In 1872 the English neurologist, Sir William Broadbent described how a man had ‘specific aphasic loss’ (Pumfrey and Reason 1991, p.9) of ability to read following a head injury. In the evolutionary understanding of dyslexia it appears that there is no differentiation between causal and acquired dyslexia. Moreover, those investigating ‘word blindness’ and reading difficulties were not researching what we now understand as dyslexia, but in fact physically aquired reading difficulties.

From a medical perspective of acquired dyslexia

Broadbent's record of acquired dyslexia was followed in 1877 by the German physician, Adolph Kussmaul, who described a number of patients who were unable to read properly, transposing words as they read out loud. Despite exhibiting no other disabilities other than having 'word blindness', Kussmaul proposed this was a special type of speech difficulty or aphasia triggered by an injury to the brain. He had a special interest in 'adults with reading difficulties who also had neurological impairment' (Lawrence 2009, p. 11). However, Kussmaul's interpretation of dyslexia is very different from current knowledge. Without the benefit of genetic mapping and neurological charting, Kaussmaul's patents had 'lost the ability to read and used words in the wrong order' (Compston 2016, p.2804) as opposed to those who had a congenital or developed learning difference.

A further ten years passed before the German ophthalmologist Rudolph Berlin determined that severe lesions to the adult brain caused 'lexia', which included the total failure to read. Berlin also coined the term 'dyslexia' to describe partial inability to read leading to difficulty de-coding written symbols. Berlin thus distinguished between the total inability to read and the inability to de-code (Thomson 1990, p. 4). However, the focus was still to be on acquired adult dyslexia as opposed to developmental dyslexia which is the focus of most literature and this research.

Post mortem examinations of patients whom Dr Joseph Jules Dejerine determined had dyslexia due to their reading and writing difficulties, found there was always a lesion in the back of the posterior temporal region (Dejerine 1871). In 1891 the same neurologist published an article in the medical journal, The Lancet, reporting about a man who suffered a head injury caused by a crow bar and lost ability to read. This compounded the view that 'wordblindness', as it was still known, was acquired and moreover, caused by injury. Following Dejerne's report other publications established the connection leading to a major development in the understanding of dyslexia where the theories of a connection between reading difficulties and neurological dysfunctionality were established. However, it should be understood that this was not based on any valid research of the time and merely a hypothesis. Additionally, the theory that these learning difficulties were caused by trauma left their diagnoses and treatment in the domain of the medical profession.

Amongst the articles and research carried out investigating this condition by the medical profession came a breakthrough, when, in 1896, Sir Francis Galton became the first educationalist to explore individual learning differences and academic abilities in children (Lawrence 2009, p.10). Encouraged by the work of his cousin, Charles Darwin, Galton was inspired by the theory that intelligence is hereditary. Galton's 'true passion was studying the variations in human ability' (Human Intelligence, 2016) and although he became eminent in this field, he did not use it to pursue the link between dyslexia and genetics. This was to lie dormant for many decades.

In May 1900, the Glaswegian ophthalmologist, Jonathan Hinshelwood published a paper in The Lancet titled 'Congenital Word Blindness'. This well respected paper described a number of his observations made of intelligent and orally competent boys, with sound eye sight, who had difficulty learning to read. He also observed, as did Dejerine a century before, that there were lesions to be seen in the angular gyrus part of the brain thus making the connection between word blindness and brain structure. Hinshelwood seemed to be pioneering to suggest that this primary disability was a weak visual memory of words and letters and that these individuals should be given specialised and intensive training to increase their visual memory. Furthermore, Hinshelwood suggested the importance of identifying then supporting those with 'word blindness' at a very early age. He acknowledged that the 'embarrassment and ridicule' these children faced in the classroom, could be avoided when the correct intervention was given, as their defective visual memory could be remedied with 'persevering and persistent training' (Elliot and Grigorenko 2001, p. 2). This was echoed in Hinselwood's paper 'Congenital Word Blindness, with Reports of Two Cases' published in 1902 stating that 'no sooner the true nature of the defect is realised, the better are the chances of the child's improvement'.

At the other end of the country and in the same year, Pringle-Morgan, a British physician published an article in the British Medical Journal describing the reading difficulties of an otherwise highly competent 14 year old boy, Percy F. (Snowling 2000, p.14). Percy was described by his School Master as ‘the smartest lad in the school life if the instruction were entirely oral’. Morgan also described Percy’s familial cases and concluded this word blindness was hereditary and congenital as opposed to acquired.

The shift from medical to educational perspectives

During the 1920’s ground breaking research moved from Europe to the United States. Samuel Orton was one such innovative American physician who identified how a ‘high proportion of children with ‘a specific reading disability’ had pronounced reversal and orientation difficulties in reading and writing’ (Pumfrey and Reason 1991, p. 10). Orton’s methods developed from ‘the assumption that ‘dyslexia’ was a problem of linguistic development (ibid, p.10) and he observed problems with b/d, p/q, no/on, saw/was, etc. Orton also proposed that the term ‘word blindness’ be replaced by ‘strephosymbolia’ which in Greek means ‘twisted’. Like Hinshelwood, Orton looked into the physiology of the brain to identify the derivation of the problem. However, he thought it might be related to another region of the brain rather than the angular gyrus. Orton’s work was, at the time, highly influential and even now very relevant. The Orton-Gillingham method of learning to read is ‘a multisensory approach, involving visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/tactile learning pathways’ (Taylor 2019, p.8) and is still widely used in specialist dyslexia support. Indeed, the teaching of phonics and blending sequences which is currently seen as best practice in English schools was also pioneered by Orton.

Although unable to scan the brains of his patients, Orton observed similar symptoms in adults with brain damage to the left hemisphere and their responses to literacy were similar to those of children with dyslexia. It is now understood that the left part of the brain is responsible for, amongst other things, language. Realising specialist teaching was important to these children to learn to read and write, Orton developed a multi-sensory approach seeking to understand the connections and functions of the right and left parts of the brain. In addition to this, Orton was influenced by the work of educational psychologist Grace Fernald who had developed a tactile learning approach which involved writing in the air and tracing letters while saying the sounds or words. This multimodal method of learning, popularised by Howard Gardner in the 1980's is still in use today. Considering Orton's work was carried out almost 100 years ago, it is pertinent that recent studies by Valachos, Andreou and Delliou (2013, p.1538) provide evidence that preference testing 'revealed that significantly more dyslexic pupils displayed a preference for a right hemisphere thinking style'. Similarly, the speculation that an imbalance of the activity in the two hemispheres of the brain might be the cause of dyslexia is also supported by functional neuroimaging (Illingworth and Bishop, 2009; Shaywitz et al., 1998).

Political intervention and influence

It is important to realise that as well as a developing understanding of learning difficulties among educational and medical professionals, education along with special educational needs, became under greater control of the government. The 1970's and 1980's saw a quagmire surrounding the recognition of the term and acknowledgement of dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty category.

In 1970, the Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act, gave parliamentary recognition to the term 'dyslexia'. Equally important was the fact that this Act stated that support should be provided, when possible, to children with severe dyslexia, likewise the Secretary of State should be provided with information about Local Education Authority (LEA) provision for these children. This was quashed by the Education Act of 1976. During the four years between these acts, three further reports were written, which continued to muddy the waters. Concluding that the word 'dyslexia' did not serve any useful purpose, the Tizard Report (1972) presented the idea that children with dyslexia were 'simply at the lower end of the continuum of those with severe learning difficulties' (Tizard, 1972). Specifically, the report encouraged the use of the term 'specific reading difficulty' (Thomson 1990, p.41). As a consequence of this, children with dyslexia failed to receive specialised learning programmes. Instead they had extra reading and spelling sessions, which, in my opinion may have compounded their difficulties and made their learning problems more obvious and frequent. Rather than focusing on strategies to lessen difficulties, children would be repeating their failures. Thereafter in 1994, the Rehabilitation Report on People with Dyslexia, acknowledged concern that the 'provision for the identification of dyslexic children is, at present, greatly inadequate'. Although the Warnock Report (1978) clearly preferred the description 'specific learning difficulties in reading, writing and spelling' (Young and Tyre, 1983) as opposed to the term dyslexia, the report recognised that early intervention and identification was critical, stating that 'If adequate arrangements are not made for these children when they are young, more severe difficulties in learning, motivation and behaviour may arise as the result of their failure and frustration' (Warnock 1978, p. 219). Mary Warnock's report continued to have a lasting influence and prompted the writing of the 1981 Education Act which saw the abolition of all categories of handicap instead adopting the term 'special educational needs'.

From Schmidt's initial notion of what we now understand to be a 'neurologically based, developmental reading disorder' (McNaulty 2003 p. 363) the dyslexia debate now transcends three centuries. As research, in particular neurological charting and DNA mapping continues, the complexities and understanding of dyslexia deepen. From early medical research in the 1800's to the move to the field of educationalists and psychologists in the mid-1900's, the work to unravel the neuropsychological and scientific construct of developmental dyslexia is now guided by medics and educationalists working together. In my opinion, combining knowledge from these two spheres brings a greater ability to understand and therefore address the issues related to dyslexia.

2.2 Struggling to define

A significant and positive shift from the description of dyslexia in the Bullock Report (1975) as 'specific reading retardation' to a learning difficulty has been a critical part of the dyslexia narrative over the past forty years. This meaning simplifies the condition to a single problem; that of reading, furthermore, the term retarded, although stemming from the Latin verb *retardare* meaning obstruct or make slow, has developed negative and derogatory meanings.

Dyslexia is not a straightforward condition. Whilst effecting the 'individual's ability to process the written words' (Tanner 2008, p.785) it is broader in that the ability to decipher text ‘reading retardation is merely one of its manifestations’ (Ramus et al., 2003, p.2). Dyslexia involves many variables that contribute in different extents in each individual, making the presentations and experiences of dyslexia very specific to each person.

These inconstant aspects of dyslexia; neurological, experiential, psychological, social and educational are ‘interlocking and mutually supportive’ (Pavlidis and Miles, 1981). As the narrative and recognition has developed, so have the diagnoses methods, treatments and definitions. However, with its more mainstream understanding and acceptance, come, at times, a social misuse and confusion. The proleptic discourse of dyslexia endangers a clarity of definition, therefore this research has to go beyond existing understanding within the current framework and perspective to include perceptions, paradigms and tradition. When dyslexia ceased to be the preserve of the medical specialists in the 1960’s, it became important to differentiate ‘between ‘dyslexic’ and normal readers’ (Snowling 2001, p.14).

As dyslexia support bodies increase and international health and education organisations discuss and debate dyslexia, all devise their own description of dyslexia to add to the definition soup. Some of these definitions overlap in view, others focus solely on development of reading and spelling. Few mention the impact dyslexia has on work and adults. As with Pollak (2005) I will only explore the experiences of adults who have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. Although this is necessary for this research, I am aware that people with rich and diverse life stories will be excluded. Nonetheless, having the formal diagnosis of dyslexia, as a child or adult, and the impact of such recognition, is an important aspect of this research.

The World Federation of Neurology (WFN) defines dyslexia as,

> *‘A disorder in children, who despite conventional classroom experience, fail to attain the language skills of reading, writing and spelling, commensurate with their intellectual abilities.’ (2018)*

This educational definition contains terms limited to reading and associated skills. Furthermore, it limits dyslexia to children, by implication giving the impression that dyslexia is not experienced by adults. This definition is exclusive in nature and do not give any measures for positive inclusion of indications. Both Rutter (1978) and Snowling (2000) are highly critical of the WFN definition. Rutter (ibid., p.12) states ‘as a piece of logic this definition is a non-starter’ arguing, along with Snowling, that the term ‘conventional instruction’ is meaningless. Certainly, what was conventional instruction a decade ago may not be now, and this may well vary between different educational systems, and indeed, schools and classrooms. There is also debate over the definition of ‘adequate intelligence’ surmising that this may exclude people with low cognitive ability from diagnosis. There is also an inference in the definition that children from low socio-economic backgrounds would be excluded. Both authors argue that the definition is irredeemable due to its exclusive nature.

Although there are an abundance of definitions of dyslexia, none are, in my opinion, complete or comprehensive, possibly as suggested by Lawrence (2009) due to a number of explanations including the complex nature of dyslexia and how it also has indicators that overlap with other specific learning difficulties such as dyscalculia and dyspraxia. Additionally, the multitude of research perspectives taken in regard to the causes of dyslexia also make a succinct definition problematic. As this research focuses on the experiences of adults, the search for an inclusive definition has significance. Lawrence (ibid) concludes that ‘attempts to formulate a definition that would apply equally to adults and to children has proved to be an almost impossible task’.

I turn to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for a credible and progressive definition. This is adopted by and impacts on British government policy and also European Union agenda (Snowling, 2000) but provides a limited definition. WHO state that dyslexia is a ‘Specific reading disorder’, (ICD – F81.0 2007) however fail to include the multitude of other indicators that are recognised by other organisations.

I feel that to have a diagnosis of dyslexia allows people to categorise and identify themselves as ‘different’ from others. Although this can be contentious, it can, for many children and adults, give a sense of relief and even belonging. In particular, dyslexia is a hidden disability or difficulty that does not give a clue or identification to the cultural or individual understanding of self. On a personal level the adult with dyslexia may have a dichotomy between their personal and public persona in relation to their ‘dyslexic label’. To categorise can involve stigma, however, in order for the adult to be defined and diagnosed, there must be a story of consent. For adults diagnosed when they were children, however, in contrast the experience may well be very different and possibly more complex, as consent to test, diagnose and disclose would have been with a parent or carer.

The lack of a cohesive and comprehensive definition of dyslexia could have impacted on research (Reid-Lyon, 1995) and resulted in the reliance of exclusory criteria. Be that as it may, Rose (2009) argues that despite the various definitions, experts agree that the key feature of dyslexia is a developmental language and cognition difficulty. In October 2010, the British Dyslexia Association Management Board approved the following, more inclusive definition:

> *Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities.*
>
> *It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effect can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling.*

Whilst this descriptive definition recognises strengths as well as deficits, it is broad in its terminology and could easily relate to people with general learning difficulties as ‘it is not clear that this definition refers to a specific learning difficulty’ (Lawrence, 2002). It should be noted that definitions vary according to the stance of the organisation. Although I am critical of the WFN definition, it is of its time and devised for a different purpose. Support organisations such as the BDA and Dyslexia International (DI) are charities lobbying to support and foster change for children and adults with dyslexia. For this reason these definitions appeal to those who they are aimed at supporting. The approach of the BDA supports a wider dyslexia profile, one which I adhere to, as it includes the explanation that dyslexia is a constant state, not a condition that a child grows out of or that can be ‘cured’. Additionally, their definition extends to differences with processing and memory.

Dyslexia International define dyslexia in the following terms, written to be specifically accessible:

> *Dyslexia is a neurologically-based condition, which is often hereditary. It results in problems with:*
>
> - *reading*
> - *writing*
> - *spelling*
>
> *and is usually associated with difficulties in:*
>
> - *concentration*
> - *short term memory*
> - *organization.*
>
> *Dyslexia is not the result of stupidity.*
>
> *It is not caused by:*
>
> - *poor schooling*
> - *poor home background*
> - *poor motivation for learning*
> - *clinically manifest poor sight, hearing or muscle control - although it may occur with these conditions.*

Here, the organisation appears determined to explain exactly what dyslexia is and what it is not, possibly as a result of continuous misinterpretation of the condition. Indeed, these descriptive definitions are concerned with ‘the manifestations of dyslexia’ (Lawrence, 2009) and may include the characteristics of dyslexia as part of the definition.

Conversely, definitions in academic articles that focus on the scientific, biological and neurological as opposed to a more sociological viewpoint, relate to their purpose and are often causal as opposed to descriptive. For example, Grigorenko (2001, p.94) defines dyslexia as:

> *a complex biologically-rooted behavioural condition resulting from impairment of reading-related processes (phonological skills, automised lexical retrieval and verbal short-term memory, in any combination) and manifested in difficulties related to the mastery of reading up to the level of population norms under the condition of adequate education and a normal developmental environment.*

Parallel to the WFN definition, this too, has its place in defining a complex condition. More recently Elliot and Grigorenko (2014) argue that many of the dyslexia definitions or labels are problematic because they are unscientific, suggesting the 'label' or diagnosis held by many, challenging because it causes confusion. They also suggest that children with speech and language difficulties can be misdiagnosed as having dyslexia. Inappropriately the desire to 'define then, the indefinable' (Critchley and Critchley, 1978) continues to cause pressures across educational disciplines.

As a statement of exact meaning, a definition by its nature, will need to be relatively short and concise and therefore, to clarify or explain such a complex human condition such as dyslexia that ranges in severity (Singleton, 2002) will, inevitably lead to some shortcomings. However, many of these definitions clearly exclude adult dyslexia, making no reference to the more challenging problems faced after childhood. Some also focus on the area of literacy, some completely avoid mentioning organisational skills or memory span (Malatesha and Aaron, 1982). Furthermore, few consider the emotional challenges a person with dyslexia can face (Gerber, 2012). Whilst the definition depends on the standpoint of the writer, and of course, the audience, many reflect broad conceptual frameworks, which may be a reason why, paradoxically, the term dyslexia is sometimes avoided in education.

2.3 What is dyslexia?

In this section I seek to determine the key descriptors of dyslexia and how these factors are understood. Previously published studies in this area have suggested there are 'two subtypes of dyslexia' (Tamboer, et al., p.466 2016); phonological and visual. One possible implication of this theory is that dyslexia is one disorder, with one cause, giving multiple outcomes. Conversely, it is also argued that dyslexia is the result of different disorders giving similar outcomes (Tønnessen, 1997). However, Castles and Coltheart (1993, p.177) challenge this by suggesting research should 'focus away from deliberations about the existence or otherwise of various types of developmental dyslexia and towards the important task of investigating the possible causes of these disorders'. This stance is the focus of this section.

Despite the differing opinions of researchers, experts in this field tend to agree that dyslexia commonly presents as difficulties related to language, 'especially reading and spelling' (Tamboer, et al., 2016, p.467). However, in my experience as a person with dyslexia, a teacher and as a researcher, dyslexia is much more complex in the way it presents. When scrutinising literature, McNaulty (2009), Tamboer (2016), and Goldberg (2003) differ significantly from my opinion in that reading and writing are not always the main indicators or symptoms of dyslexia. Conversely, Tanner (2009, p.18) challenges some of McNaulty's conclusions, arguing that 'It is virtually impossible to provide a universal profile of an adult with dyslexia. This emphasis on linguistics is reflected in the wording of the various definitions written about in the previous section. Generally these definitions exclude the causes of dyslexia, focusing on the symptoms rather than its origins. Comprehensive studies of recent literature suggest that dyslexia is best thought of as a continuum, which has a range of indicators with co-occurring difficulties (Rose, 2009) thus giving rise to the awareness that dyslexia is a multiple cognitive deficit model.

Neuro-analysis of the brain

Analysing the structure of the brain is not new to research into dyslexia, as in the early part of the 20th century Hinshelwood (1900) identified lesions to the angular gyrus and a century before Dejerune noted abnormalities to the posterior tempural region during post mortem examinations. However, these structural differences may have been due to acquired changes due to injury as opposed to development changes.

As magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) developed in the 1990's, the more common practice of live-person brain analysis grew, using techniques such as diffusion, spectroscopy and T1 (Ramus et al., 2017). Data from this study must be interpreted with some caution because of its small scale. Furthermore, findings remain inconclusive when comparing anatomical differences between dyslexic and non-dyslexic individuals (ibid).

In English speaking countries, such as the United States, Ireland and Australia, the incidence of diagnosed dyslexia is in the region of 10% of the population. However, this varies in different countries (Goswami, et al, 2010). These differences in recorded incidence could be due to the English language being ‘one of the most difficult in terms of the complexity of the links between phonemes and graphemes’ (Fawcett, 2016, p.9). As Hoeft, McCardle and Pugh (2015, p.4) suggest ‘writing systems vary extensively not only in their visual appearance but also in many other factors such as orthographic depth and morphological complexity’. However, there are also other suggestions to the variable occurrences such as the norms in diagnostic testing and agreement of definitions and also the possible impact of multilingualism on language development (Cappa and Giulivi, 2014, p.5).

Genetic association and dyslexia

Turning now to the contribution of genetics in the understanding of dyslexia; just as the structural mapping of the brain has developed in recent years, so has the process to identify a genetic element that could be responsible for dyslexia. In 1983 the first correlation between the genetic markers on chromosome 15 and specific learning difficulties was identified (Smith, et al. 1983). More recent advances in molecular technology have helped researchers initiate genetic risk factors and neurodevelopmental differences such as dyslexia (Graham and Fisher, 2013). It is interesting to note by stating that dyslexia has a genetic basis Jimènez-Bravo, Marrero, Benítez-Burraco (2017) also highlight that the cause and subsequent development of dyslexia needs to be better understood if a way to improve reading abilities of affected people is to be developed.

It seems that in order to further our understanding of dyslexia there needs to be more research to combine the understanding of ‘the effects of dyslexic candidate genes on structures and functions of key neural circuits’ (Carrion-Castillo, et al, 2013, p231). This means the neuroscientists will need to work closely with geneticists to determine the cause the isolated genes have on the behavioural qualities of the dyslexic brain: neuroimaging and genetic mapping building the bridge between two complex and contemporary understanding of dyslexia.

I need to take a step into the brain and also into our DNA in order to unlock the conundrum of dyslexia. I welcome the controversial work of Elliott and Gibbs (2008) questioning the existence and social construct of dyslexia describing dyslexia ‘as an arbitrary and largely socially defined construct’ (ibid., p.488). It may be that as medical science progresses and provable patterns of brain behaviour and genetic mapping collide to support the theory of dyslexia, a more concrete understanding and acceptance that it is more than a social construct will emerge.

To explain the heritable nature of developmental dyslexia Carrion-Castillo, Franke and Fisher (2013) describe that there is a relationship between genetic information and reading skills is not straightforward, as genetic bases for this are known to be highly complex and relating to different versions of the same gene.

Carrion-Castillo, Franke and Fisher (2013, p.231) contested that ‘the dyslexic category is specific to literature culture and that most of the affected people would not have the disability if they were not required to read’. However, since the symptoms of dyslexia are much more complex than those limited to reading and spelling, I would argue that in non-literate societies and eras, the possessors of these genes would still struggle with many features of dyslexia, for example poor organisational skills and sequencing difficulties.

As in the history of dyslexia, educationalists turn to the positivist medical sciences to prove what has been seen by some as a questionable social construct. As the armamentarium available to the neurologists and geneticists increases, maybe our knowledge of the complexities of dyslexia as a physical certainty will become substantiated. As Tamboer, Vorst and de Jong (2016) suggest, as our understanding of dyslexia deepens we begin to realise it is far more complex that first thought.

2.4 Dyslexia and education

Poole (2003) claimed that for a child to be identified as having dyslexia, first they must fail. To identify dyslexia early in childhood may mean that there will be less opportunity for the negative and lasting impact failure can have on a person. Multiple studies of families (Pennington, et al, 1990; Hagtvet, B. 2003; Elbro, et al, 1998, Lyytinen et al., 2004; Snowling, et al., 2003) have shown that the roots of dyslexia are moderately to highly heritable. Therefore, knowing that dyslexia is genetic and understanding how the symptoms of dyslexia can present in pre-linguistic children, it could be argued that those caring for and educating young children should at least be aware of the possibilities that dyslexia may develop. Reid (2003) claims that there are times when a parent is more informed about their child's educational needs than the child's teachers. This is reiterated by Riddick (2010) suggesting that a child with dyslexia is sometimes identified by parents who have the ability, resources and interest to carry out their own research. It may also be because the parent feels their child may have heritable dyslexia (Elbro, et al, 1998).

The diagnosis or identification of dyslexia requires sensitive management. Kerr (2001) suggests that the behaviour of the teacher will change when the child gains a diagnosis of dyslexia. This should be the case, the teacher could make adaptations to the way they teach and may change their expectations of the child. However, Kerr's argument is that the teacher reduces their expectations of the child, encouraging learned helplessness. Understanding and accommodating a child's learning difficulty or difference is positive, yet, to lower expectations is precarious and would not be beneficial to the learner. It is also assuming a child with dyslexia cannot be highly intelligent.

When a child is withdrawn from lessons, given different work and has additional support within the classroom their peers may understand that a child has a learning difficulty or learning difference. While the presence of teaching assistants is accepted as the norm in primary school classrooms and children of all abilities take part in various focus groups, it can still lead a child to believe themselves to be different and inferior to their peers. Children with dyslexia do not want to be different (Reid, 2016). In a report by Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars (2016) conclude that children who had prolonged periods in different classes became adults who appeared more reliant on family and colleagues for security and approval.

Experiences in education vary considerable from primary to secondary schools and on into non-compulsory education. In primary education the children are more known to the teacher, compared to secondary school where they are taught by many more teachers. From my own teaching experience and research in state secondary schools, children in their first year (Year 7) can be taught by as many as 27 different teachers in one academic year and this increases if the child has additional educational needs. To support my view, Hales (2001) suggests the transition from primary to secondary school highlights children's vulnerability and needs careful consideration. I would go further than this and suggest that any time a child or young adult faces change in their educational environment could be when anxiety increases and confidence falls. Indeed, Reid (2016) supports better collaboration between pre-school, primary and secondary schools and colleges to allow for a smoother transition in learning.

Initial and ongoing teacher training also needs to be considered. Although it is understood that dyslexia has many more symptoms than those just relating to reading and spelling (Nicholson, et al. 2014; Reid, 2014) teachers, particularly those in secondary school fail to realise dyslexia can impact on many more aspects of learning than literacy alone. Like Reid (2007 a) I understand through experience that secondary education should focus on the pedagogy of education, rather than be subject content driven if children with learning differences are to access the full curriculum and flourish as joyful learners.

In UK universities the prevalence of students holding a formal diagnosis of dyslexia is on the increase (HESA Free online DATA table, 2018). This could be for several reasons; I will outline two here. Access to diagnosis is more widely available, however, until attending university it is likely that funding a diagnostic test would be the responsibility of the family. Once in higher education, the test can be largely funded by the university, presenting an incentive to the student to gain a diagnosis. Another reason for the rise of students with dyslexia could be as a result of improved support and teaching for children and young people with learning differences, resulting in gaining higher academic awards such as A Levels and aspiring to a university education.

Once at university, Richardson and Wydell (2003) claimed that students with dyslexia were likely to encounter problems studying and were more likely to leave their course within the first year. The same study states that those students with dyslexia who complete their Batchelor's degree are more likely to get a lower second class or third class degree than students without dyslexia. Writing in The Guardian (2018) Christopher Byrne, a lecturer at Leeds Beckett University, states that 'most universities do little else than allow dyslexic students extra time to complete assessment'. Byrne also states that an obsolete attitude towards dyslexia prevails amongst academic staff. On balance, research provided by Ryder and Norwich (2018) found that the lecturers taking part in their research held a positive view of dyslexia and of the legislation requiring them to make reasonable adjustments to support inclusive pedagogy. However, the study did identify that most of the lecturers associated dyslexia with poor literacy skills. If lecturers have an incomplete or incorrect understanding of dyslexia then their approach to teaching students with dyslexia may not be appropriate. Compounding this is the aspect of disclosure. While colleges and universities should actively encourage students to disclose any learning difference or difficulty they have, in practice the students have the right to conceal (Cary, 2012). It is pertinent to ask why students choose to do this. Mortimore and Crozier (2006) advocate that there is a recurrent stigma connected to the identity of disability, while Prevett, Bell & Ralph (2013) suggest that university lecturers need to reconsider the approach to teaching students with dyslexia with the focus on identity. It is a student's prerogative to withhold their diagnosis of dyslexia, however, a well-informed and observant lecturer may identify this in their student and offer provision without the need for formalities.

It has not been possible to include a comprehensive and detailed literature review of approaches and understanding of dyslexia in the UK education system in this thesis. While I conclude that there is a broad understanding of dyslexia, and what this means for the learner, it appears that this understanding is somewhat outdated and still limited to viewing dyslexia as primarily limited to literacy difficulties.

2.5 Into employment

Although there is an increased appreciation that dyslexia and co-occurring traits can have a lifelong impact of an individual, ‘there remains little research into the benefits of employment, the challenges of gaining employment and considering the support that may be required for some’ (Kirby and Gibbon, 2018, p.27). Current employment figures in the UK suggest that there could be in the region of 300,000 adult workers with dyslexia. Knowing how this impacts on the workplace is challenging (Bartlett and Moody, 2000). Furthermore, to understand these challenges is central to the achievement of the individuals in the organisation, how they are understood, encouraged to flourish and valued as colleagues.

Tamboer, et al., (2016) suggest that as a child with dyslexia ages, they compensate for their dyslexia-related weaknesses or differences. However, my opinion differs. Although some ‘students who are smart and well educated can therefore be expected to develop advanced coping strategies’ (ibid) those same students, when in employment and as adults, may encounter complexities and variations during their career that highlight their difficulties. So, as they mature, weaknesses remain weak while strengths become stronger. Gerber (2002) and West (2010) frame this as utilising strengths and avoiding weaknesses. This evolution does not happen quickly, and for some the metacognition of self-knowledge and reflection (Witte et al., 1998) may develop over a lifetime. Further to this Skinner and MacGill (2015) state that individuals can become more aware of their strengths and weakness as they deal with impairments, thus learning from failure. I would suggest that finding a niche in employment, or as Gerber (2002) describes ‘goodness of fit’ may take a person with dyslexia more time than a person who does not have dyslexia.

Although less space in this literature review is given to the strengths associated with having dyslexia, it is not an area to be overlooked. Various studies (Leather, et al, 2011; Logan, 2009; West, 2010) state that adults with dyslexia can be highly effective. Fink (2007) proposes that it is possible for an adult with dyslexia to be successful in a wide range of professions including medicine, law, academia, acting, art and business. Certainly, by capitalising on strengths, creative contributions can be made (Morgan and Klein, 2003). In recent years there have been a number of highly successful and well-known people such as entrepreneur, Richard Branson and actor, Kiera Knightley, who explain in very positive terms how having dyslexia helped their careers (madebydyslexia.org). However, this affirmative experience is not global, as lower pay, poor promotion opportunities and the feeling of lack of achievement compared to non-dyslexic co-workers is also experienced (Witte, Philips, et al., 1998; Leather, et al., 2011). This leads me to question the meaning of success. Career success should be recognised as more than income or status. Heslin (2005) describes salary, salary growth and promotions as societal success and subjective career success deriving from job satisfaction. In their article 'Job satisfaction of college graduates with learning difficulties' Witte, Philips and Kakela (1998) state that the greatest job satisfaction was gained by individuals who have a vocation as opposed to individuals who are career, status and financially driven.

While it is commonly understood in educational environments that elements of executive function such as working memory and non-verbal ability are frequently affected by dyslexia, in a working environment the broader impacts of dyslexia are often misunderstood. Less discussed is the associated impact dyslexia has on social, emotional, occupational and economic fields (Livingston, Siegel and Ribary, 2018). Additionally, anxiety and depression can have a detrimental bearing on executive functions (Snyder, 2013). While these negative emotions may be because of living with a working and learning difference that is misunderstood and stereotyped as negative, it could be that a person with dyslexia is also genetically predisposed to feelings of sadness and worry. The first study to demonstrate a significant relationship between internalised emotional problems and dyslexia was by Willcutt and Pennngton (2000b). Although this is supported by a number of studies (Dahle et al., 2011; Knivsberg and Andreassen, 2008; Carroll et al., 2005) the genetic link remains nebulous. These co-occurring emotions could further a circle of negativity and lack of self-esteem. Intertwined with the emotional experiences related to dyslexia is the individual's feeling of self-efficacy and its links to job satisfaction (Bandura, 1997). In 'Dyslexia in the Workplace' (2000) Bartlett and Moody devote a chapter to exploring the emotional reactions people with dyslexic experience regarding their difficulties in the workplace. While these emotional responses are largely negative, once difficulties are recognised and understood, positive experiences can follow with disclosure leading to a feeling of personal strength (Lyons, et al., 2017). Having a colleague who also has dyslexia can provide an understanding and a feeling of validation (Dale and Taylor, 2001). Further to this, in their biographical study of working mothers who have dyslexia, Skinner and MacGill (2015, p.425) explain that for most of their participants 'having other people who are dyslexic in their organization was thought to help in terms of identifying what their own difficulties were'.

We may be adults for 70 or more years; 'the longest stage of human development' (Gerber, 2012, p. 31). Employment can span the majority of those years, rendering happiness and self-fulfilment during this time all the more important. For many adults with dyslexia their self-esteem improves as they age (Ingesson, 2007). However, many of our childhood experiences remain with us as we mature. Public failure can have a life-long impact that should not always be seen in a negative way, and, depending on an individual's personality, can have a positive impact on resilience and drive (Tanner, 2009).

2.6 Disclosure; a positive or negative experience

The dilemma to disclose or conceal should not go unrecognised. In childhood the power to disclose is often withdrawn from the child or young person, especially in the educational setting. I have worked with parents who, on receiving a positive diagnosis of dyslexia for their child, have preferred to keep this knowledge to themselves, not sharing it with their child. However, as the young person matures and becomes more independent, they become the custodian of their dyslexic identity and label, and with it, often their choice to disclose or conceal. My experience of children taking ownership of their dyslexic identity varies. Some of the children and young adults I have taught are happy to share their diagnosis with their peers, often using it as a way of explanation or demonstrating that it is a positive aspect of their identity, indeed a badge of honour. For others, there is a preference for concealing their learning difference as they perceive it as

embarrassing or part of their identity they wish to hide. The workplace has many facets and ‘adults with dyslexia often face complex decisions regarding disclosure’ (Nalavany, et al., 2015 p.568). Coupled with this is the fact that disclosing dyslexia can be the cause of anxiety as much as concealing it (Blankfield, 2001). There seems to be no positivity in the situation. However, to disclose can be a constructive experience as it should result in support and understanding.
Here, I explore the link between disclosure and self-perception in employment. Many people with dyslexia do not consider themselves to be disabled (Alexander-Passe, 2015), however, job application forms qualify dyslexia to be a disability. Furthermore, to gain additional support or reasonable adjustments in the workplace, an individual will have needed to disclose their dyslexia within six weeks of employment. Although to discriminate against a person with dyslexia is illegal, stigma and discrimination is commonly perceived as a cost of disclosing (Yeowell, et al., 2015).

In recent years there has been a debate exploring issues raised in training adults with dyslexia to be teachers. It is unsurprising that with such a focus on improving the standards of literacy in our schools, having teachers with their own literacy challenges is questionable. However, Morgan and Burn (2010) argue that adults with dyslexia bring a new and creative approach to teaching because of their dyslexic not in spite of it. During the interview for my current school I hesitantly disclosed that I have dyslexia. The reply was positive, stating that I would be able to teach better due to my own awareness of children’s learning difficulties. This theory is supported by Jordan (1989) and Morgan and Burn (2000) suggesting that teachers with dyslexia are in a key position to help support and educate children with dyslexia. There are parallels here with trainee nurses, engineers and other professions that require work placements as part of the training. These students must decide whether to let their tutors know, and also their supervisors and colleagues when on work experience (Morgan and Burn, 2000). In his paper ‘Disclosing a dyslexic identity’ (2015), Edwards discusses the implications of non-disclosure of student nurses. If students do not disclose their working and learning differences they will not receive the appropriate support needed when training, further to this they may not meet the required standards to succeed in their chosen career. More serious is that there may be increased risk of injury to patients caused by an error in calculation, misreading or misspelling of a drug or procedure.

There are various types and strategies for disclosure. Lyons, et al., (2017) strategy suggests downplaying the working difference and placing emphasis on particular assets or highlighting dyslexia as a personal strength. Tanner (2010) cites three types of disclosure: non-disclosure, partial disclosure and open disclosure, explaining that these types are fluid depending on the work or social situation. There is also the question about disclosure within social networks. Dale (2004) suggests openness and positivity. She also expands on the idea that disclosing is part of an ambassadorial role and is helping to educate the public about dyslexia. I hesitate to agree with this stance, as it needs to be done with sensitivity and wisdom on the part of the person disclosing. People with dyslexia tend to be very conscious of their differences (Alexander-Passe, 2015), and, as a coping strategy some choose to cover-up their difficulties. However, when this approach fails it can cause humiliation and expose vulnerabilities (McNaulty, 2003 and Scott, 2004). Disclosure is closely related to identity (Nalavany, et al., 2015). If colleagues, friends and family are unaware of an individual's dyslexia then, to them, that person is not dyslexic. Furthermore, if an individual does not fit into the dyslexic stereotype, concealment may be easier but disclosure more difficult. In this study I use the term 'concealment' which has active inferences, however, other studies in this field use terms such as 'identity denial' (Ragins, 2008), 'preoccupation' (Pachankis, 2007) and 'fear of disclosure' (Chaudoir and Quinn, 2010) to describe the effort of keeping hidden a characteristic that may be perceived as negative.

In any environment, whether it is work, personal or social, disclosure requires an approachable setting where diversity is encompassed in a positive way and disability is not seen as a reason to exclude. Although I believe that people with dyslexia should be positive about their dyslexic identity and understand what strengths it brings to them and to their work place, they also need to be accepting of any difficulties having dyslexia brings to their working life and be open to support and self-reflection. However, from personal experience, which I have explained earlier in this thesis (1.4 and 1.7) I understand this is not always an easy action to take.

2.7 Identity and impact on personal life

In 2003 McNaulty stated that the first generation of formally diagnosed children with dyslexia were then reaching adulthood. In his study McNaulty (2003) sought to understand the emotional impact dyslexia has on children and adults. In some respects our research is similar, however, McNaulty's participants were all diagnosed before the age of 14, whereas my participants received their diagnosis as young as 6 and as late as their mid-50's. Fifteen years after McNaulty's focused work on emotions, I seek to broaden the exploration investigating how and indeed if, the symptoms or indicators of dyslexia influence children and adults lives. Like Tønnessen (1997, p.80) I use the term 'symptom' here in its broadest sense, referring to 'observable and/or measurable signs'. Some of these symptoms may be negative, for example, poor working memory, while others are positive and beneficial indicators, such as visual acuity (Schneps, Brockmole, et al., 2011).

The changing demands faced by young adults entering adulthood are compounded by dealing with the effects of dyslexia (Carawan, Nalavany and Jenkins, 2016). It must be understood that dyslexia whilst diagnosed in the early school years continues into adulthood (Bruck, 1985, 1990; Elbro et al., 1994). In various studies researchers argue that having dyslexia often has a lasting impact on confidence with some adults carrying the negative emotions they had in childhood through to adulthood (Burden, 2008; Riddick, Sterling, Farmer and Morgan, 1999). Further to this, as the challenges faced by adults with dyslexia continue into later life (McNulty, 2003) the feelings of failure, disappointment and inferiority remain (Navavany, Carawan and Rennick, 2011b). As a result, dyslexia could be a risk factor to having a well-lived life (Carawan, Nalavany and Jenkins, 2016) and the impact it can have on social and emotional experiences throughout a lifetime should not be underestimated. Throughout the life course a combination of insecurity, depression, anxiety and stress (Nalavany, Carawan and Rennick, 2011) can impact on an individual's psychological well-being.

There is a growing understanding that dyslexia impacts across the life-span and the symptoms can be evident before children try (and fail) to learn to read (Fawcett, 2016). However, it could be argued that to receive a diagnosis of dyslexia, a child or adult will have a history of educational failure (Tanner, 2009; Dale and Taylor, 2001), possibly over several years, or even decades, as in my case. However, on an anecdotal level, I know of adults who received a diagnosis of dyslexia in their 40's and 50's and were able to construct their life to avoid any failure in education and employment. It was only when elements of employment changed, for example the need to use computers, that having dyslexia came to light and confirmed through diagnostic testing. Furthermore, due to the complex nature of dyslexia, failure in many aspects of learning and shortcomings in behaviour may have been experienced over a significant length of time and in a variety of situations. Kerr (2001) states that having a diagnosis of dyslexia is a negative diagnosis of an innate disability. Contrary to this, Macdonald (2009) rejects the idea that stigma is related to having a diagnosis of dyslexia, stating that the shame relates more to specific or discrete manifestations of dyslexia. However, failure should not solely be linked with negative experiences as it can have a positive impact on resilience and motivation (Tanner 2009). To focus on the positivity of a dyslexic identity I agree with the suggestion of Tamboer, et al., (2016) and rather than understanding dyslexia to be disorder, we should consider it to be a different way of processing information that has evolved for thousands of years without detection.

I have previously suggested the link between the historical prevalence of dyslexic awareness and the development of literacy earlier in this chapter (p.22). Gwernan-Jones (2008) cites how the western education system disables people with dyslexia. In The Political Economy of Dyslexia, Strauss (2014) rages about the links between capitalism, empire and literacy. He criticises those who medicalise and label children because they are unable to read in a specific way required merely for employment purposes. Strauss's point is valid and demands consideration, as does Gwernan-Jones's emancipatory proposal that there should be 'shift away from the medical model, which places the problem of disability within the person, to the social model, which places the problem of disability within society' (2008, p.9).

However, the onus is not on society to cope with this ‘disability’, but on the individual to develop their own strategies or approaches.

2.8 Coping strategies

First, I will investigate coping strategies that apply to education and learning. Several studies (Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2002; Burden, 2005; Sousa, 2005) show that people with dyslexia learn in different ways to those without dyslexia. It could be assumed, therefore, that to learn as effectively as people without dyslexia, we would either need to be taught differently, develop strategies for learning that deal with the teaching deficit, or put more effort into learning than learners without dyslexia. Most likely it will be a combination of all three. Intelligent, well-educated students with dyslexia are expected to have well-developed coping strategies (Tamber, et al., 2016). Suggesting a variety of strategies that a bright child with dyslexia may use to approach learning, Montgomery (2003), describes how they can employ compensatory learning activities such as visual and oral communication methods. Expanding on this idea, Logan (2009) states that entrepreneurs with dyslexia have enhanced oral communication skills. Everatt, et al., (1999) concluded that people with dyslexia perceive that they have better communication skills than people who do not have dyslexia. An interesting finding in the study by Gilger and Olulade (2013) suggests that there is an etiological link between the co-occurrence of dyslexia and higher nonverbal skills. An alternative interpretation can be found in Montgomery (2003) who reasons that highly able children with dyslexia are able to mask their difficulty in developing literacy skills because they have good visual memories, learning the sound of the shapes words make as opposed to de-coding the words using phonics.

Studying certain subjects in school and excluding others can also be a method of coping. Research (Williams et al., 2009) demonstrated that students with dyslexia avoided subjects that required a high demand of literacy. While avoidance may be the option for some students, for others, such as trainee teachers, elements of their role cannot be avoided but still need to be conquered. Morgan and Rooney (1997), in their study questioning if dyslexic students can be trained to be teachers, found that particular strategies were employed to overcome a lack of confidence or ability. While spelling ‘on demand’ (ibid. p. 29) could be difficult, trainee teachers identified key words they could record or practise in advance. Preparation was crucial to the confident delivery of a lesson, and this often resulted in over-planning. This could mean that a trainee or qualified teacher with dyslexia spends more time finalising or perfecting their lesson plans. This could take the form of making sure there is a PowerPoint or similar pre-made presentation for each lesson, thus reducing the need to recall the sequence of the lesson. When discussing our experiences as teachers of design technology with dyslexia, Samuel stated that detailed PowerPoint presentations reduced his anxiety when teaching less sympathetic students in a selective school. Even as an experienced and confident teacher I become anxious when writing on the board as I fear spelling a word incorrectly. However, the children I teach know that I have dyslexia and I choose to share the positive and negative aspects of this condition.

The ability to use and control emotions can also be a way of coping with the challenges faced by people with dyslexia. In two separate studies (Prevett et al., 2013; Kinder and Elander, 2012) focusing on the experiences of trainee teachers, there was found to be a link between the development of self-esteem and resilience when dealing with obstacles. An understanding of self and knowledge of dyslexia was also shown to aid success in Goldberg et al’s., (2003) longitudinal study. Furthermore, the ability to compartmentalise dyslexia, thus not defining self by learning differences was also found to help and support adult learners.

While adults with dyslexia who own businesses or have suitable financial resources could delegate or employ staff to carry out activities they found difficult such as report writing (Logan, 2009: Everatt, et al., 1999), other strategies for employment included becoming self-employed. The primary reason given for this was to move away from negative attitudes experienced due to characteristics of dyslexia and allowed for self-control of their working environment (Tanner, 2009). Contrary to this are other examples where adults with dyslexia enjoy the support and recognition of colleagues.

2.9 Summary and concluding thoughts

In this chapter I have explored literature surrounding the social history, education and medicalisation of dyslexia. I have also extracted and concluded my stance on its meaning. As genetics and neuroimaging continue to play their role in defining our understanding of this complex condition, the move away from the idea of dyslexia as a social construct to a scientifically understood medical term will, I feel, define the way people with dyslexia are viewed, supported and understood. Furthermore, with the clarity in understanding that it can be diagnosed from in vitro, babies and children can be part of longitudinal studies helping society, medicine and education have a much greater appreciation of the positive aspects of this complex condition as well as the challenges it brings.

Analysis of key texts

Many of the central texts referred to in this work (see Appendix 2), including Tanner (2009), Tamboer, et al. (2016) and McNaulty (2003), articulate in their research purpose the negativity related to living with dyslexia. In fact in Tanner's study volunteer participants felt their dyslexia had a sufficient negative impact on their learning to enrol on a course specifically designed for adults with this learning difference. To me, this is undesirable, and could be viewed as denigrating as there are positive aspects of the dyslexic condition, some of which I experience myself, such as divergent thinking when solving problems and thinking in three dimensions. I did not want my participants to rule out any of their positive experiences. Indeed, much of the literature focuses on certain aspects of dyslexia, such as its negative impact on learning and emotional influence and does not allow the participant freedom to direct the themes and outcomes. By using pre-constructed online questionnaires (Carawan, Nalavany and Jenkins, 2014/15 and Nalavany, Carawan and Sauber, 2015) the freedom of the participant to diversify and have influence over questions and therefore answers, was restricted.

None of the texts identified the researcher(s) as having dyslexia and were therefore 'outsider' researchers. Although I am not a critic of this; undeniably it can be beneficial, but as a participant researcher in this work, I feel I have added richness and authenticity to the narrative. This may be the reason why I did not want the focus to be negative. Here I am the sole researcher and I consider this to be advantageous when analysing the data as it gives a consistent interpretation of the material, unlike Goldberg, et al. (2003), Nalavany, et.al (2015) and Carawan, et al. (2014/2015) where several researchers interpreted the transcripts and data.

In the next chapter I will explain my choice of research method and discuss its relevance in relation to the use of guided conversations to collect auto/biographical life stories. I will explain how the data was collected, analysed and framed. Also discussed are the validity reliability and ethical considerations of this research method, specifically in relation to the collection of personal ‘thick descriptions’ of life stories.

2.10 Reflection - My Personal Identity

It's ok. I'm a lot of things and one of them is dyslexic. I see it as like being a pie chart and a few degrees of my pie chart is dyslexia. But some days it is a bigger proportion of me than on other days. By doing this research and by making it auto/biographical, it's become more of my identity. And I have to disclose more. I don't want to be seen as the 'dyslexic' one. Or the dyslexic specialist. It's just part of my identity. I don't even know if that's ok.

My Experiences of Disclosure and Concealment

I think because I'm doing this qualification and I've got papers that verify I'm bright, or at least good at learning, it's easier to disclose. But it hasn't always been the case. You would think in education we would be more open to it, but I'm not sure that is the case. Teachers I work with still say to me 'they will grow out of it' or 'it won't matter when they leave school'. That is wrong, I've grown into it and it matters more now that I am an adult than it did when I was at school. It's easier, for me at least, to disclose, if I am feeling confident and secure. But that hasn't always been the case. People still don't understand what it means. It's difficult. Uncomfortable.

I presented my research at work as part of a CPD session. I handed out a sheet that I had written without correcting it. It explained some of my experiences. (See Appendix 4). The room was completely silent while about 20 of my colleagues read it. They know more about me now that I know about them. I don't like that. I feel very vulnerable. One of them said I was brave. Another one cried. She said it was like her daughter. Sasha laughed. She said it was her. Sasha has dyslexia too. I did this session two weeks ago. I'm really not sure I feel comfortable.

Chapter 3 Research approach

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides context for my research by defining and discussing theory, methodology and the links to my research method. I discuss the reason for choosing an auto/biographical approach to explore and give meaning to the personal experiences of adults with dyslexia and to highlight the impact this can have on them and the impact it has had on me. I question the purpose of my research by interrogating my research questions and how they gave me the opportunity to explore the meaning and impact of dyslexia through the stories of six individuals.

In the second part of this chapter I debate my reason for using qualitative research methods and how this partly stems from my own experiences of using quantitative data in the past. Drawing on narrative inquiry, I continue to determine how auto/biographical research gives voice to others and to myself through the means of conversation analysis and interpretation. I also outline the dilemma of exposing my own 'voice' in the research and finding the confidence to write about my research in the first person. For the participants taking part in this research there is a prerequisite diagnosis of dyslexia and 'The Experiences of Diagnoses' (p.7) reveals the impact this can have on individuals. This will be discussed comprehensively in Chapters 5 and 6.

I continue to explain the specific methods used to gather data and step away from the central topic of dyslexia to focus on the research construction and implementation. It is here that I develop an interpretive framework for the data analysis. I consider the contested views of validity and reliability within qualitative research and explore Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) terms: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity as my guiding principles. The final part of this chapter reflects on ethical issues relating to the use of conversations. As well as observing British Ethical Research Association (BERA) guidelines, my approach to ethical considerations and procedures is explained with reference to the approach of Merrill and West (2009) and Creswell's framework (2014).

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the guiding incentive for my research was personal. It gave voice to individuals with stories which I felt needed to be heard and understood (Speers 2019, p.5), and in addition to this, explored how their stories can be used to benefit others. This qualitative research has an emphasis on the immersion and comprehension on human meaning (Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk, 2007) and explores the life experiences, coping strategies and impact on identity and careers of adults with dyslexia. My theoretical position was postmodern ethnography with influence from the oral history of the late modern and post-modern culture (Merrill and West, 2009). I use the narratives provided by the participants and also my own narrative with a 'desire to recover neglected stories from marginalised groups' (Merrill and West, 2009, p.179) and to capture first hand human stories of experience and understanding' (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Therefore, the stories told here were 'narrated but also located' (Goodson, 1992, p.25) in the time when they were experienced and made intelligible when they were narrated (Erben, 2000). Whilst extracting critical events in the narrative, I used biographical interpretive methods as the framework for narrative analysis and inquiry.

Collective story

There is an understanding that narrative inquiry stems from people making sense by giving structure to stories that would otherwise be random experiences (Duff and Bell, 2002). Further to this, in auto/biographical research the researcher is making sense of two stories simultaneously; their own and that of the participant.

My research explored whether dyslexia impacts on the experiences and identity of adults, with the narratives articulated by the participants used to capture how identity is created. By analysing and interpreting the life-story of this small group of individuals, I provided an extensive auto/biographical narrative (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This view is supported by Pavlenko (2007) who writes that one of the main advantages of personal narratives is that they give access into people's private worlds and provide rich data. In addition to this, throughout the process of writing and researching, I have had to reflect increasingly on my own position as an individual with dyslexia and what this means to me as a learner, a teacher and as a researcher. Consequently, I have included my own experiences in the writing (Tedlock, 2005) while endeavouring to avoid the confusion of ‘emotional involvement and objective attachment’ (ibid., p.180) that can arise from being an observing and participating ‘self’. Similarly, Burr (2003) states that reality is constructed by humans, and the reality cannot be studied objectively. So the context of the narratives and the co-location of my stories with the stories of the participants defines the theory and methodology of this work. A broader perspective of this is suggested by Bornat (2018), proposing that further layers of complexity are created by the personal and individual nature of biographical material.

The participants involved in the research were more than casually chosen ‘voices’ and givers of themes (Ndlouv, 2012; Riessman, 2008). What started as a fairly clinical approach to the study, became much more personal and caused me to be a more reflexive, and I hope, a better listener and researcher. Using guided conversations (comparable to the Chicago School) rather than interviews to explore experiences, I searched to ‘develop an interpretive methodology that maintains the centrality of the narrated life history approach’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p.21). Additionally, the objective of my research was to provide a powerful and collaborative voice to ‘circulate between all the actors’ (Denshire, 2013, p8), to give voice to thoughts and to begin to understand experiences and actions.

3.1 Why I conducted qualitative research.

I begin by unpacking the words quality and quantity. *Quant*itative, derived from *quant*ity means the measurable amount of something and *qualit*ative, derived from *qualit*y implies the nature and characteristics of something (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Whilst this is not a perfect definition, it seeks to give the methodologies parity and helps to recognise the literal complexities and the often opposing nature of the research methods.

Although I value positivist interpretation and scientific analysis, my auto/biographical standpoint was partially influenced by my previous role in charge of whole school assessment in a state secondary school. I developed distrust for the growing amount of quantitative data I was forced to gather and analyse without the means to critically question its validity. This experience made me interrogate the rationality and the truth of such data, which I concluded was often incorrectly formulated and resulted in, what I describe as, the accountancy of children. Often the ability, achievements and strengths of the individual children I worked with were not always reflected in their numerical data; they needed a narrative to be fully understood. For this research I prefer to understand the truth and diversity of a very small sample of people, as opposed to the extent and untruth of (possibly in the case of school data) thousands (Holliday 2012). My choice of theoretical position and research method reflects my personality and values (Mertens, 2009). Coming from me, and also about me, I am fortunate that I have not had this work steered by a third party who may have insisted I work in a particular manner that is in conflict with my values and character.

Whilst there is still relatively little research using auto/biographical methods, various examples of literature (Golby, 1994; Hawthorn, 1987; Roberts, 2009) concur that it is a valid approach to exploring the direct experiences of self and others, making this method particularly pertinent to my research. It is also a way of understanding the parallels and divisions between past and present voices. Although the written 'oral' is historical there is a consciousness between past, present and future and this question of 'time' (Roberts, 1999) raises epistemological concerns. For example, my distinction between justified belief and opinion may differ from that of my participants and from that of the reader. Furthermore, there are complex issues relating to the exploration of time and memory (Stanley, 1994). How the past and present are textualised is very personal. Despite the debate over the shifting boundaries of past and present voice, I am comfortable with the idea that auto/biographical narrative is an historical source where we can learn of and from 'the direct experiences of the individual' (Golby, 1994, p.103). The 'individual' here being others and myself.

I deliberated on the term 'material' to replace 'data', because the word data, at least in my experience, seems to have been hijacked as a quantitative term. However, the etymology of 'data' derives from the Latin 'to give' (Maxwell, 2017).

As the participants were giving me their time and stories, to use the word data is appropriate.

Auto/biographical approach

On a personal level, I enjoy listening to other people's stories, and consider listening to people a good way to understand their world and their lives (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). This is not on a voyeuristic level, on the contrary, it is because I am interested in the experiences and perspectives of others (West, 2007). Listening as a methodology is evidently a way of gently building relationships and has the capacity to expose what an individual considers important to their narrative (Haydon, Browne and der Riet, 2017). Clearly, when this dialogue becomes a method of research it is intimate and relational (Sikes, 2010).

I find people with whom I am not acquainted are willing to tell me a lot about themselves if I give them 'a good enough space' (Merrill and West, 2009, p.182) and quiet encouragement. The negative side of this is I often come away from a conversation or meeting without having shared my stories. This could be a reason why I chose auto/biographical approach to this research; to give myself a voice. As my gaze turns inwards, I see that 'choosing a topic for a biographical study tends almost always to be rooted in our own personal and/or professional biographies' (Miller, 1997 in Merrill and West, 2007, p.5). There is no compromise here as I gave myself a voice too. Rapley (2007) concurs that this type of research can be a way of giving voice to previously veiled or silenced stories.

Initially, I wrote this thesis in the third person, referring to myself as 'the researcher'. However, I then clarified my position to become more rooted within the text and writing in the first person (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), gave myself ownership of my work. I agreed with Silverman (2010) who advocates that methods of research should be directed by the research problem as opposed to the research task dictating the method. I also proposed that the character and experiences of the researcher similarly guide the theory and their approach to the research.

As previously stated, this research is very personal. As it developed, the trail of reflection and emotion continued to become more intense. The research also became re-search as I drew upon the ‘why’ and ‘how’ (Marshall, 1996, p.522) of my story and the participants’ stories, contributing to the understanding the ‘thought-worlds’ (Savin-Baden and Major, 2010, p.95) and the ‘experienced- worlds’ of my participants. Narrative inquiry suits the issues of complex human stories and places the individual firmly in the centre of this work. Similarly, qualitative research is used when ‘a problem or issue needs to be explained’ (Creswell, 2007, p.39) which was my intent here.

By shifting from biographical research to auto/biographical research, the stories and the context in which they are told have become richly complicated. An explanation of this is what Zinah Barnieh (Barnieh, 1989 in Cladinin and Connelly, 1990) defines as a ‘plurivocal’ approach where the researcher and participants remain one person, but whose multiple roles transform throughout the process of writing. Stake (1995, p.64) highlights how the conversation becomes ‘the road to multiple realities’. With auto/biographical research there are two protagonists (Corfield, n.d.); the researcher and the participant. Indeed, identifying the ‘conversational partners’ (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 24) by way of colluding as tellers of narrative encourages me to learn from my participants (McCormack, 2012), deepening the interpretivist process. As a researcher, I responded to the stories, following directions as the narrator meandered through memories of experience. I guided the conversation, helping the participant navigate through their fragmented map of recollections. As the narrative evolved from stories, they became representations of experiences as opposed to reproduced experiences (Crotty, 1998; Lin and Guba, 1985).

As Amir Marvasti wrote: ‘the central criterion for auto ethnographic text appears that the explicit voice of the author must be embedded in a broader social context’ and as I progressed my voice became stronger. Likewise, Stanley, (1994) holds the view that in auto/biography the positioning of self, as generator or reader of the text, has the main focus of attention. I do not profess that this way of working was easy. This is exemplified by Watt (2007, p.82) who highlights ‘learning how to conduct qualitative research may seem a daunting task for those new to the task, especially given the paradigm’s emphasis on complexity and emergent design.’

Similarly, ‘the whole notion of storytelling is more complex than is often supposed’ (Savin and Neinkerk, 2007, p. 463). Making sense of other people’s lives through biographical narrative enquiry would be complex enough. However, by adopting the auto/biographical position I further complicated the process and the analysis as making sense of other people’s lives become intertwined with my own life, beliefs and personality. However challenging this method of research, my experience was that participants were ready to contribute and have a positive and enjoyable view of the process, often seeing themselves as ‘co-inquirers and co-collaborators’ (ibid) in the research.

During the first two years of my Doctorate in Education, my lecturers told me to remain open to a thesis subject and that the focus would ‘find me’. In a similar manner the methodology has become an instinctive element of this project. Rather than consciously seeking a specific research approach, narrative inquiry has meandered its way into this work, becoming part of the underpinning structure from the source. It was important that the participant or storyteller’s voice leads this research (Ferguson, et al. 2017) and what mattered from the participant’s point of view (Haydon, Browne and der Riet, 2017). Moreover, the auto/biographical nature of this project includes me as an individual and develops an intimate relationship with what and who I am studying (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). My objective was to understand each life story in context, delivering a deep sense of meaning and understanding from each individual and also to be able to extract a collaborative meaning to the experiences of living with dyslexia. To do this I tentatively adopted the role of expert conversationer (Meuser and Nagel, 2009).

3.2 Narrative inquiry

Bruner (2002) argues that narrative is an established technique for talking about human experience. For example, I was able to listen to the participants as they explored how and why their experiences affected them. I was also able to understand more about what is significant to them, and in the reflective process, to me. In their paper ‘Narrative Inquiry: Theory and Practice’ Savin and Neinkerk (2007) put forward the idea that there is a disparity between narrative enquiry and traditional ethnographers, who argue that stories emerge from questions the researcher asks of the contributor. The implication of positionality was important as I was the researcher and also the contributor. It was important that I contextualised these life stories, as through narrating and locating the speaker, the positioned story becomes particularised and makes experiences concrete (Goodson, 2003). As the research progressed, I distilled the theme's particularities and replaced them with generalities, thus producing the essence of the narrative. Delineating the two roles proved complicated as I would interpret my story as I interpreted the story of the other participants. Rather than viewing this as a weakness, participating in my research situation and understanding it as an insider (Thomas, 2009) became part of the interpretation. However, I did not want this research to become my position and for my understanding and values to degenerate into solipsism. By adopting a dialogical approach I gained a greater understanding of myself as the 'I' (Barcinski and Kalia, 2005) working with another voice as opposed to independently. As Bakhtin (1984, p.7) argues, 'it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and valid voices of other characters'.

Conversely, those within the interpretive tradition lean towards open ended prompts and value the participants' construction of their narrative in a way they wish to be heard, as opposed to how the researcher may want to hear. In turn, it was my role as the researcher to recognise the importance of these stories in the context of my research (Webster and Meratova, 2007). There is to be a clear understanding here that the collection of the narratives told will tell part of the whole story. While biographical methods value human agency, there was a struggle to understand the differences that are embedded as the plurality of voices are heard. Furthermore, I recognised that it was difficult to give equal balance of power to the researcher and the subject, and to remove the power struggle from the equation.

Whilst this narrative life history approach gathers thick descriptions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) from a small number of people it remains very valuable (Patton, 2002). This approach of collecting life stories and critical events through conversation or discussion provides a record of important life events in great detail (Webster and Meratova, 2007). Indeed, Savin-Baden and Niekerk (2007) explain how there is a ‘whole that is more than the sum of its parts’ informing our individual life. Additionally, when people disclose their experiences, they are as close as I can get to what was actually experienced and interpreted by the narrator (Rosenthal, 2004). The difficulty is that ‘narrative data can easily seem overwhelming: susceptible to endless interpretation, by turn inconsequential and deeply meaningful.’ (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou 2013, p.1) and to compound these potential difficulties, McMahn and McGannon assert that ‘narrative inquiry is never final’ (p.111), leaving me with the knowledge that the story of the participants and my story will continue after this research has finished.

My participants

Like Pollack (2005) I sought the experiences of those who are officially diagnosed as having dyslexia. In the initial outreach emails and contact, I asked for respondents with a formal diagnosis, but did not ask for validation as I felt this would cause immediate lack of trust between myself and the participants. In all of the conversations, the participants talk about their experiences of diagnosis; and how this could be seen as a friend or a foe. As the definition of dyslexia is medicalised, a positive diagnosis would state that the ‘problem’ requires management (Conrad, 1992) especially if understood as a deficit model. Dumit (2006) suggests to medicalise dyslexia is contentious. However, currently, in order to access educational support such as extra time in examinations and IT software, a formal diagnosis that legitimises a condition is essential. Indeed, people ‘are at risk of been denied social recognition of their very suffering and are accused of simply ‘faking it’ (ibid, 2006, p. 578). Furthermore, until a formal diagnosis was received, some of the participants, myself included, doubted the extent of their difficulties. For some of my participants, diagnosis was sought by their parents while they were in primary education. The experiences of these people was different to those, myself included, who gained a formal diagnosis as an adult. There were also three participants who were formally diagnosed during higher or further education, again for them, experiences were different. Closer analysis of this is explained in Chapter 5 and

Chapter 6. Diagnosis for some was a critical event and this arose in the the data (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

At the start of writing this thesis, I assumed the identity of having dyslexia, but did not have a recognised diagnosis. It soon became clear, that in order for me to position myself honestly and with authority in this research I needed to be officially tested. Although the positive result was not a surprise, the details and the extent of my dyslexia was a surprise (see Chapter 5). I feel it is necessary to explain at this stage of the thesis that part of my diagnosis indicated an extremely poor understanding of the written word. This was one of my critical incidents and with such personal significance, I continue as a doctoral student to construct and reconstruct its meaning for me (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

3.3 Designing my research method

My reflective approach to the organisation of this chapter begins with questioning the eventual meaning of the research, and this then formulates my methodology and theoretical perspective. I enjoyed this process, using what I call ‘thought diagrams’ (Appendix 5 – 9) to visualise and organise my ideas. Silverman (2010) also proposes that the research methods are not what should motivate the researcher. This reverse engineered way of working felt instinctive to me and seemed more genuine than attempting to arrange my work in any other order. Not born from Chamberlain’s stance of rejecting off the shelf methodologies, at this early stage of the thesis I did not want to adopt a ‘pre-existing methodology’ (2012, p.1). Nonetheless, I was abandoning the more orthodox route and allowing my methodology to be more reactive, original and reflexive. I felt comfortable with this approach knowing that the precise nature of the questions, or even if there would be any set questions, could not really be determined until the study had actually begun (Holliday, 2012). Additionally, this route allowed me to engage in the core epistemology and theoretical thinking before becoming preoccupied with a methodology. By moving away from an ordered methodology, which is representative of qualitative methods of research, I did not hold such a hierarchy of positivist approaches. Indeed, Wyse, et al., (2017) maintain that since theory informs practice and vice versa, connections between the two are often impossible to extricate. I centred my research on human agency and the plotline of individuals, furthermore, my auto/biographical approach stemmed from oral histories such as that resulting from the Chicago School, spanning the end of Modernism and the birth of Post-Modernism. It is also thought-provoking to note that this methodology stems from ‘oral traditions of a pre-literate world’ (Merrill and West, 2009, p.17), and these narratives are given by people with often weakened or compromised literacy skills.

The recounted life stories narrated to me during this research could be considered a presentation of past-self (Ricœur, 1994) and the story of the lived-life (Wengraf, 2001). As the participant verbalised and recalled the past, they were also giving order, structure and relevance to these events, often for the first time. By organising these narratives more meaning could be made of the individual events and the impact of these events (Sarbin, 1986). This collective and pervasive (Gergen, 1994) form of verbal communication was key to my investigation. I collected data by asking people with dyslexia to tell me details of their lives and experiences (Bruner, 1987) giving me a deeper grasp of the complexities and impact this hidden disability can have on individuals.

Guided conversation

At the outset, and with some naivety, I considered the participant and researcher to be taking part in an interview. However, after analysing the pilot meeting with Samuel, I became uncomfortable with this way of labelling or defining the event. To describe Samuel as an ‘interviewee’ felt as though he was passive and submissive (Richie, 1995). When listening to this and the proceeding recordings, the participant is the primary speaker. Although my role was important, I was not interviewing in a traditional sense, but rather guiding the narration and encouraging responses. Whilst Coffey (1999, p.10) uses the term personal narrative/confessional to describe auto/biography, Reissman (2004) explains how the teller and listener become co-constructors of stories through collaboration. This collaboration and dialogue draws on Freire and his approach to positive action for change, and Habermas’s tradition of communicative rationality, with all participants contributing on an equal level (Merrill and West, 2009).

Apart from the initial request to ‘tell me as much or as little as you like about your experiences of dyslexia’, I did not ask questions during this initial phase. This was the only structure to the conversation, from then on the participant controlled their responses and I guided their route. This avoided familiar complications with how the mode of the question can influence the response (Holliday, 2012). I did not want to predict or control the human responses (Caduri, 2013), but to collect sufficient experiences and memories to enable me to go on to analyse and understand. The idea that the participant should be allowed to set the agenda is corroborated by Thomas (2009) describing the unstructured interview as a conversation, suggesting the researcher’s general topic of interest being the only predetermined format. There were times, during each conversation, when the participant hesitated or paused sufficiently that I read this to be the end of that particular focus. Rather than ask a direct question, which was contrary to the procedure of the conversation, I revisited the themes they had initiated by asking for more information. For example, ‘you mentioned having a diagnosis. How did that make you feel?’ or ‘you said you found note taking difficult. Can you tell me more about that?’. These invitations to talk were following up the participants’ initial responses by ordering and rephrasing their words. I was not asking ‘why’ as this could be seen to be judgemental (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000), but I was asking for clarification and definition to the participants’ initial statements.

Each conversation was individual, and was without an established route or directed workings. By encouraging reflection and by giving time, critical events were brought to the fore of memory. Some of the participants told me they thought they rambled during the conversation, which I suggested was positive as they were reflecting on their experiences and allowing their minds to wander to wherever it felt valid or important (Grumet, 1976). The verbalised chronology of their reclaimed experiences was of no importance during the conversation. What was important was the participant’s ability and willingness to saturate their narrative with rich and detailed descriptions.

The location and the timing of the conversation was the choice of the participant from the onset. Each participant chose to see me in their own environment, either at home or in their work place. Some home conversations were not entirely private as other members of the family or household staff were in adjacent areas. Although, due to ethical reasons, I was uncomfortable with this, the participants were not. Likewise Karen's conversation took place at work. Karen chose a day when she would be alone in the office, however, there were interruptions from colleagues during the process. All conversations were face-to-face, possibly allowing for a lengthier dialogue (Shuy, 2003) and permitting the participant to talk more freely about their experiences in a more relaxed environment (Gillham, 2005).

Constructing and carrying out the conversations

To be able to answer my research questions this study used a life history conversation, drawing upon narrative conversation techniques such as those discussed by Rosenthal (2004), Wengraf, (2001) and Murray, (2003). Although the term narrative is used by qualitative researchers to describe a variety of methods (Polkinghorne, 1995), I saw this research investigation as collaborative and interactive conversations, without power struggle or competing voices. In essence I was gathering "in-depth and intimate understanding of people's experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics" (Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillman-Healy, 1997, p.121). Narrative conversations allow pervasive collection of rich material but have differing approaches, which can have an immense impact on the research process and outcomes. Whilst my aim was for the participants to be comfortable and open when sharing their experiences, I also needed their responses to have focus and therefore I needed to give guidance.

The participants for this study identified themselves through various ways. Selena, Jonathan, Karen and Amanda answered an email sent to work colleagues and associates. Georgia is a relative and comfortable to share her story. Schools and places of work are not mentioned by name, and respondents were ascribed pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Face-to-face meetings were conducted with each of the participants over a period of three months in 2018. Each meeting, which lasted from 45 to 60 minutes, was recorded and transcribed with permission for subsequent analysis. The discussions were conducted with flexibility as a means of gathering the experiences and views of the participants (May, 2001). While the participants described their lives as a collection of events and happenings (Polkinghorne, 1995), they also revealed how critical incidents went on to shape and construct their lives. These key features of each individual's narrative were gently used as a way of encouraging deeper responses during the initial conversation, allowing me to capture 'the core of what is important' (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.71). As the research continued, I felt it useful to have a pen picture (Figure 2) of each participant that would help locate the individual within the wider participant group. This stated the age band the individual was in, gender, at what point in their life they were diagnosed, whether they had state or independent education and their broad category of profession. This helped me to cluster participants and identify similarities and differences. It also enabled me to continue to understand these participants as individuals within an all-inclusive framework as opposed to simply chunks of information.

Figure 2 Table showing details of the participants.

Name	**Age**	**Gender**	**When diagnosed**	**Highest qualification**	**Type of education**	**Occupation**
Samuel	35	M	18 – at university	Level 6	State	Teacher
Georgia	38	F	18 – at university	Level 4	State	Psychiatric nurse
Jonathan	46	M	? - at primary school	Level 6	State	Civil engineer
Selena	40's	F	? - at primary school	Level 5	Independent	Interior designer
Karen	32	F	17 – at college	Level 4	State	Accountant
Amanda	43	F	19 – at university	Level 6	Independent	Master's student, mother.
Julie	54	F	53 – at university	Level 7	State	Teacher/student

Preparation and process of conversation

I asked a colleague to assist with the pilot conversation. Samuel knew of my dyslexia and we had often discussed its implications and frustrations. We also found some aspects of dyslexia to be highly amusing and found shared humour to be a release to what can be a stressful condition at times, especially in the educational setting we worked in. During the design of my pilot conversation, I explored the idea of adopting Wengraf's (2001) biographical-narrative-interpretive method (BNIM) and using a solo question to prompt the participant to tell their story. Paraphrasing Wengraf (2001, p.141) I asked Samuel to 'tell his own story, beginning wherever he likes and for as long as he likes' which allowed Samuel to decide what he felt was the most important place for his narrative to start and this is the primary focus of analysis. Wengraf's technique is to allow the participant to complete telling their story before adding further questions thus inducing wider or deeper narratives. The difficulty here was that the context of the question was not mentioned and the participant might have disclosed much about their life that was not helpful in exploring the research questions. Bearing this in mind, what may be considered a more useful but similar approach is that of Rosenthal (2004). She advises that the preliminary narrative eliciting question be accompanied by questions relating to themes that have already been mentioned by the participant. This should be carried out before further questions that are designed to extend responses are asked. This issue is also discussed by Henwood et al., (2008) who discuss the importance of framing questions correctly in order to avoid the researcher imposing their own priorities; I feel this is of particular importance with auto/biographical work when the researcher is involved with their own stories and responses. Rosenthal (2004) concurs that topics should not be discussed until the last minute to avoid influencing the participants' responses. In determining the introduction for the conversations, Samuel and the following participants understood the nature and the subject of the conversation as the details were explained in the initial email or telephone conversation. Furthermore, they would not have replied to my initial search if they did not meet the criteria. Transcribing Samuel's conversation allowed me to understand my role as the researcher and refine how I approached prompting and encouraging further responses. From the onset, I was concerned about focusing on themes or matters that I found important and having a bias in my interpretation. This awareness was helpful in avoiding such preferences. I was also able to perceive areas of the discussion that had more meaning to Samuel.

When I reflect on the participant's experience of my research, there are arguable similarities with the process of leadership. I had time to consider the meaning, process and implications of this research long before the idea of contributing to this research had been suggested to the participants. In a similar vein this happens in the leadership process; the leader has an idea, evaluates it, changes it, talks it over with other leaders, puts time and emotion into it and then suggest to others that the new idea is implemented. The leader then wonders why their colleagues are asking questions, why they are reluctant to participate, why they lack enthusiasm. It is because they are playing 'catch up'. However, as the leader of this research, I did not seek to gain power and was primarily interested in understanding the participants' experiences and to 'co-operate with them to achieve goals' (Alonderiene and Majauskaite, 2016, p.156).

Although it was not possible to completely avoid the disparity between time frame and knowledge of researcher and participant, the intervening period between the initial introductory invitation and the conversation allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences of living with dyslexia. This was confirmed in the conversations with Jonathan and Selena, both of whom had spoken to their mothers about childhood experiences prior to the conversation. However, Georgia felt that, in hindsight, talking to her mother would have been illuminating and beneficial to the conversation. From the outset I was resolute in wanting to carry out face-to-face conversations. I rejected the idea of using Face Time or Skype partly due to unreliability of the technology and the way silences would be more difficult to interpret and non-verbal language would be compromised. Face-to-face conversations allowed me to use multi-sensory channels such as verbal and non–verbal communication (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) and rapidly built rapport and trust with the participants.

There is a strong relationship between the descriptions of the life history conversation by Murray (2003) and Rosenthal (2004). Both state how important it is to encourage without bias when in dialogue. Consequently in the pilot conversation I adopted the use of paralinguistic prompts such as ‘mmhhmms’, which Schegloff (1982) describes as primary continuers, signalling that I was attentive and encouraging. This interpretation differs from that of Ochs and Capps (2001, p.8) who describe these cues as ‘passive narrative conduct’ and that it may signify the interlocutor becoming socially distant as opposed to encouraging speech. I felt that using primary continuers teamed with neutral non-verbal gestures, such as nodding of my head, and eye contact in an empathetic and supportive manner helped to retain impartiality and encouraged further dialogue. It also enabled me to learn the value of silences and not to fear them.

As the research progressed, these ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984, p.102) became reflexive as the life story was re-constructed, modified and re-created. I anticipated that within each individual’s identity, there would be shifting and contradictory constructs, which developed over the duration of the research. As I sought a dialogical approach, I did not view myself as more important than the participant and I was uncomfortable with such descriptions. However, this is not to overlook that with this method come barriers created by imposition of my own frame of reference (Henwood, et al., 2008). An example of this was, ‘You mentioned the support you received from your wife. Can you tell me more about that?’ This meant that my frame of reference was not persuading or imposing influence until a late stage in the research. It was important that the participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts and permitted time to reflect and rephrase; this allowed the speaker to become the writer and then the reader of their own work. Furthermore, the conversations were not isolated by time or individual as there may be meta narratives woven through and across the stories, plus, I hoped and envisaged ambiguities, tensions and uncertainties that I was unable to predict. Although this hermeneutic research has a simple objective, to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of experience, it is not without challenge. Consequently I needed to be open in the way I interpreted the stories, not giving a fixed meaning to what I heard. Merrill and West (2009) explain how the researcher should listen with attention and respect to each individual, as this approach does not 'other' the participant by converting their stories into a set of data for the researcher to use. It is critical that the participant does feel listened to and they are not simply part of my doctoral process.

3.4 Framing the data analysis

Processing the data

The next process was the transcribing and analysis of the recorded conversations. Although this process was time consuming, and made more so by my inability to retain many of the spoken words in my memory as I listened and typed, I found the conversations gained significance and the interaction between the participant and myself become more meaningful. I also found my interpretation of the conversation changed during the process of closely listening to the words of the participant. During this section of the research, I became more aware of how my dyslexia had an impact on my approach to the process. In the initial conversation, I found I had to concentrate on remembering critical incidents whilst still listening to the participant talk about more general experiences. At a pause in the conversation, I would then relate the participant's critical experience, prompting them to talk more about this. However, in the time from the first mention by the participant to me asking for more detail, some of what they were saying was simply not stored in my short term memory. It would have been easier for me to make written notes during the conversation, however, I did not want to do this as it seemed a disturbance to the flow of the conversation and disrespectful. Listening is a very different procedure to reading. For me listening is a simple process, that gives clarity to understanding, however, reading means I have to convert symbols into sounds and give those sounds meaning. I understand the spoken word more easily than the written word. Therefore, listening to the initial conversation as a primary source, then listening again as I was transcribing the conversation as a secondary source, helped me to understand the text of the conversation during analysis and coding.

Analysing the conversations

Samuel’s pilot conversation was transcribed in the Microsoft software, Word and then I colour coded topics and themes. This was a good starting point, however, became more difficult when one section required two themes. I decided an easier system would be to use a Microsoft software Excel spreadsheet which enabled me to code, tabulate and interpret in a visual format. Having produced spreadsheets, I started to analyse, then I backtracked. Realising I was at risk of converting qualitative data into quantitative data, I stopped. This was a critical incident for me in this research process, as I had to consciously prevent myself from reverting to my Master's researcher default setting which is to find visual patterns within the numbers. Merrill (2007) writes about how we can be profoundly affected by researching the lives of others. It was during this time I became reframed as a qualitative researcher. I deleted these spreadsheets and returned to listening to the recording and reading the transcript. I immersed myself in Samuel’s conversation and stories and themes began to emerge. However, that was one person’s narrative and it was not until I had held conversations with all the participants that I was able to fully explore and detect the patterns and repeated story lines. This was to be a gentle process and I had to be aware that, as I sensed a repeated experience, I did not over focus on this to the exclusion of other experiences. Each participant told me their story exclusively as they did not know who else I had met with and what I had been told. I had to respect everyone’s experiences and avoid prioritising or dismissing them over someone else, or indeed, my own.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Validity: content boundness and thick descriptions

Validity is a more basic concept than reliability (Maxwell, 2017) and has several principles including ‘content boundness and thick descriptions’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). These can provide detail to support findings, and as a consequence ensure validity. Empirical research methods generally have a narrow notion of the concept ‘validity’ (Webster and Mertova, 2007), not holding the same connotations as it does in qualitative research. Validity gives authority and trustworthiness to qualitative research as the outcomes are true from the position of the researcher, the participant and the readers (Creswell and Miller, 2000). This can be further understood by Polkinghorne's (1988) proposal that validity of narrative is related to meaningful analysis. Mishler (1990) contends that unstructured narrative conversations are highly valid when compared to quantitative methods, but would be less reliable. Ganzevoort (2005) goes further, challenging the principle that the probability of duplicating similar results is difficult to achieve in narrative research.

In order to ensure validity, Creswell (2004) recommends multiple strategies are employed by the researcher to check for accuracy. I have considered and largely adopted seven of these strategies which are shown in Appendix 10.

Although Creswell's approaches are commonly applied to validate qualitative research, it is worth observing they do not always suit narrative inquiry (Webster and Mertova, 2007). To illustrate this the use of triangulation to validate my research would imply that, from the onset, I was looking for shared experiences. In small sample narrative research this may not be found, but it does not invalidate the research. It is more likely that similarities in the type of event or response to event be identified as triangulating patterns. Since the truth is multiple (Lather, 1993) the idea of using triangulation to identify one story or one truth is not appropriate to my research. Creswell also examines the presentation of 'negative' information. To describe elements of the life stories of my participants as 'negative' because they do not correspond with the stories of the other participants could appear to be discourteous. However, I do agree with the value of using stories, experiences and recollections that are unique to the individual, as they remain a valid and truthful part of their story.

Reliability – the trustworthiness and consistency of the research.

Termed simply, reliability can be understood as the way a research method, such as a set of conversation questions or an observation will give the same result at different times (Thomas, 2009) and questions how dependable and reliable it is. However, qualitative research and narrative enquiry do not claim such simplicity of the precise ‘truth’, but an interpretation of the ‘truth’ that is authentic and credible. Unpicking the language of simple definitions highlights the complex nature of understanding qualitative research in relation to linguistics and meaning, reflecting Karl Popper’s (Gilbert, 2008) declaration that this research can establish the falsity of accounts, but not their truth. Huberman (1995) proposes that by establishing rigorous methods of reading and interpreting data that would allow other researchers to agree with their conclusions, then truthful reliability can be reached.

In their influential work ‘Naturalistic Inquiry’, Lincoln and Guber (1985) suggest that to establish the trustworthiness, and, therefore the reliability of a qualitative research study the following four areas must be established: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Replacing the traditional terms used in quantitative research, Lincoln and Guber posited that that area of qualitative research required alternative criteria to ascertain validity and reliability (Ellis, 2015).

Using these four terms as direction in my research I applied them to the design and application of the conversations and also in the analysis of the data. This helped me to understand how to conduct the research and how the new knowledge was generated (Hammersley, 2007). While this list is not definitive, it is complementary to Creswell’s strategies and contributed to evaluate the significance of my study.

Credibility – expertise shown in this research and how it is worthy of trust.

As well as relating to how the results make sense, credibility also refers to the truth value (Lincoln and Guber, 1985). Credibility is understood to be the confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings, how this is made sense of and, alongside trustworthiness, is fundamental for the concept of all research (Maxwell, 2017). This was reinforced by a prolonged stay in the field of research and was achieved by close familiarity with education and dyslexia as a researcher and as a participant. My participants were involved in the study over the course of a year and had opportunities to ask me questions about the research throughout this time and after the formal participatory process. The group of men and women spanned three decades in ages and whilst some had a formal diagnosis of dyslexia since early childhood, for others, the formality of their diagnoses was very new. The participants also experienced varied work locations so reflecting Shenton's (2004) opinion that credibility can be established through the involvement of different types of participants in different locations.

Transferability – how my research is applicable in other contexts or settings.

Lincoln and Guber (1985) posit the term transferability as to how the findings of one particular inquiry can be useful or applicable to another. Considered similar to external validity (Moon, et al., 2016), it is the researcher's obligation to explain the degree to which findings may or may not be applicable in other contexts and so allowing the reader to make an informed decision about transferability. With my small sample, qualitative research, the transferability of results may not be suited to an extensive population (Shenton, 2004). However, the in-depth nature of each story becomes more important than the number of participants (Polkinghorne, 2005) and the development of new perceptions and understandings of the phenomenon studied in this research gives credible transferability (Moon, et al., 2016). Transferability is understood as the findings and conclusions applicability and connectivity to other areas (Lincoln and Guber, 1985). In order to meet this criteria I needed to ensure I gave adequate background information about the contexts, situations, times, and participants in a similar way to the idea of external validation. From this, the reader is able to conclude how the information can be applied to their context.

Dependability – how my research can be consistent and repeatable.

This can be compared to reliability in quantitative research and how the data collection and analysis is evaluated as an integrated process. Dependability refers to the degree in which the researcher has been vigilant in conceptualising the study, collecting the data and interpreting the results. By documenting my research design and implementation including transcripts of the conversations, reflexive diary entries, and field notes I have produced a paper trail that can be audited for trustworthiness.

Confirmability – the trail of my research.

To achieve confirmability in this research I have had to demonstrate that the results are linked to the conclusions in a way that can be tracked, easily followed and therefore replicated. The dilemma here lies in the biases of me as researcher, and how I categorise the 'truth' (Moon and Blackman, 2014). Furthermore this can impact on the philosophical and epistemological position of the research (Moon, et al., 2016). To negate this, I have truthfully explained my predispositions, views and motivation which could influence the degree of neutrality of this research.

3.6 Ethics

This study has the ethical approval required by the university and is conducted under the British Education Research Association (2018) ethical guidelines. Acquiring ethical approval was not a simple process, and nor should it be as it is an important stage of the research process. The process of seeking ethical approval was worthwhile as it enabled me to consider aspects of this work that I may have neglected to understand or include. For example, although I considered the well-being of the participants, I failed to consider how this research would impact on me as a participant and as a researcher. By re-viewing my ethics application I was able to consider my involvement as a participant and also gain greater understanding of how the conversations may impact on my participants. The pilot conversation also helped me to reconsider how the participants would feel having verbalised their stories. At the end of Samuel's conversation I asked him how he felt talking about his experiences, he replied 'it's just some things are best left in the head I think'. Warren (2002) suggests that interviews are dangerous to participants because of the nature of listening. As stated very clearly in Samuel's conversation, participants are often required to confront their past experiences in the company of the researchers. I was aware that I should not be too conspicuous or overbearing when carrying out the conversation, and I encouraged the participant to feel comfortable in allowing them to choose when and where the meeting took place. In each case there was some preamble and I encouraged the participant to ask me questions if they wanted to. This was also a way of reducing tension and so encouraging the participant to talk freely about their life experiences. To conclude the conversation, I asked the participants if there was anything else they wanted to add or ask and also gave them contact details about organisations that can help with dyslexia and give counselling. The participants were fully briefed in the purpose of the study and how their data was to be collected, transcribed and used. I also explained to each participant that they could contact my supervisor if they felt they needed to and that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time and without reason. Although this information is written on the participant information sheet, I felt it important to explain it myself as well, especially as I was working with people who may find understanding what they are reading difficult.

As the process of ethical considerations and application became more prominent I was guided by the work of Merrill and West (2009) to develop the research activity. In the chapter, 'Thinking about ethics' Merrill and West (ibid., pp.169-178) propose that four key questions shape ethical considerations when working with people:

> - *How can we make the relationship between our participants and researchers as equal as possible and avoid exploitation?*
> - *How can we ensure that our participants are fully involved in the research process, including analysing material?*
> - *How do we deal with painful, sensitive and emotional issues? What might we choose to ask, and why?*
> - *How do we ensure confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, particularly in situations where it might be easy to work out who the participants are?*

I used these as a framework for structuring the research process in relation to the human interaction before, during and after the conversations. Whilst these questions became my ethical guiding framework, there was overlap with the reliability protocols identified by Lincoln and Guber (1985) and Creswell's (2004) strategies of validity.

As part of the validation process of this research, I felt it necessary for me to have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. I felt I lacked credibility to assume I had dyslexia when I hadn't actually experienced the process of a test for diagnosis. This experience was useful in a number of ways. Firstly, I now have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia, meaning I have an understanding of the mechanical and emotional process of undergoing the test and how I feel about obtaining a positive result. Without ‘going native’ it makes me feel as though I am equal to the participants, as I expect them to have a formal diagnosis for this research, it is ethical that I have the same. Recognising my susceptibilities as a researcher helped me to realise the possible vulnerabilities felt by participants as they divulged their stories and internalised the experiences of dyslexia. Furthermore, I can write about my experiences of dyslexia in a truthful auto/biographical approach.

Narrative research especially that which includes the ‘self’ has a number of critics. Molly Andrews speculated that it is a ‘popular portmanteau term used in contemporary western social research’ (Andrews et al., 2008, p.2). Whereas Silverman posits that narrative research can become egotistical and a by-product of popular media conversation-culture (Silverman, 2007). Having an understanding that this method of research could become a written version of reality television helps me to avoid being inward looking. My approach to plot lines and life stories is circumspect, and although here I probe, and otherwise attempt to reconstruct and make sense of actual and possible life experiences’ (Kramp, 2004, p.3) it is done with utmost respect and deference. To summarise my view, I use Peter Dorman’s (2014, p.21) powerfully written comment ‘the ethical dimension of the research is driven by a cherishing of the individual within systems’.

Due to the iterative nature of the conversations, the detail of the method adapted and evolved as the study proceeded. For this reason it was important that I familiarised myself with the ethical dimensions at regular intervals throughout the research process. Ethics is not an activity to be done once and passed, as in a box ticking exercise, it is to be re-examined and adjusted as the research progresses. If, as a researcher I fail to do this, I have two possibilities; to break the code of ethics or to use the initial ethical approval as a way of controlling the advancement of my research. It is clear that ethical considerations underpin this research and were not considered subsidiary, rather, an integral part of the whole process.

Ethics of the research procedure

Research involves collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2005); more than this it is people collecting data from people and interpreted by people. By understanding how this influences the discussion for making this study also impacted on the design of this study. Minimising harm and preserving anonymity are key ethical considerations in contemporary qualitative research (BPS, 2009; ESRC, 2010; Reavey and Johnson, 2008). With this in mind I identified five stages (Cresswell, 2014, p.93) of the research process noting the ethical issues that could arise and how they should be addressed. These stages were:

- Before the study is conducted.
- At the start of the study.
- During data collection.
- During data analysis.
- The reporting and storage of data.

This aided the fluidity of my ethics application and also, through the processes of anticipation, enabled me to foresee, plan for and avoid problematic areas, not only of the ethics, but also any procedural difficulties that may arise.

At the start of this research I felt it important to investigate an area of dyslexia that had previously been ignored. As stated in Chapter 1, there is much research given to the experiences of children and young adults with dyslexia, but little focusing on adults, providing scope for the focus of my research. I combined this with my observations and experiences as a secondary school teacher, which led me to conclude that while much is done to support those in education, once in work, adults with dyslexia are given little acknowledgement of their difficulties and little, if any support. Ultimately, I felt if this was to be the experiences of my participants, it could be used to challenge employers' understanding of dyslexia. In order to identify research participants, I drafted a letter and an email that outlined the nature of the research, its purpose and who would meet the criteria for this research. An initial response of eleven was narrowed down to seven as my second email and requests for meetings were ignored. I understood this to be rejection of participation and did not pursue these people further.

Meetings with my participants were arranged through email or over the telephone. As mentioned earlier (p.9) I allowed the participants to select the time and the place of conversation. At the start of this meeting I answered any questions they had about the research and explained how I would conduct the conversation, including the recording and transcribing of it. I was aware of the possibilities of power imbalances during the meeting. A conversation will always intrude into a participant's life (Cohen et al, 2007) and may make them more apprehensive about taking part in the research process. A further ethical consideration was the possibility that it would highlight personal dilemmas through reflection and expose concerns they may have supressed or forgotten. By avoiding a rigid approach to the conversation, I was able to avoid sensitive topics and personalise the discussion. However, this had to be balanced with the need to treat the participants fairly. I adopted the stance that the participants should be treated equitably rather than equally, as this approach allowed for the participants to be treated as individuals. Whilst the collection of 'thick descriptions' does not pose any specific ethical considerations, the recording and sharing of such data does (Creswell, 2014). Howe and Moses (1999) argue that it is not possible to give participants complete anonymity when using thick descriptions as so much information is conveyed and reported. Once the conversations were transcribed, copies were given to the participants for approval of use and the thesis sections where they were quoted were also sanctioned. However, such thick descriptions usually involve other people because 'there is very little that we do in total isolation' (Sikes, 2010, p.13) and although I may have received the participants' approval, I did not have the approval of the third party. Therefore, writing with sensitivity about other people mentioned in the narrative is authorial honesty, as I would not wish to threaten the participants' relationships with family, friends of associates as part of my research (Ellis, 2009).

3.7 Summary and concluding thoughts

My research questions aimed to highlight the possible inconsistency between how children and young adults with dyslexia are taught coping strategies which are transferable to their adult life in work.

As I reflected and confirmed my research questions, it was worth considering if this topic was interesting enough to sustain me for the next three years and is it 'important enough to justify the time spent doing it?' (Taylor and Beasley, 2005, p.87). I have had the goal of achieving a Doctorate for all my adult life. While gritty determination is part of the soup of doctoral success, so is the requirement to 'make an original contribution to knowledge and understanding in the subject' (ibid). Despite my initial reluctance to have dyslexia central to this research, I am concluding that this subject and the question's frame and content meet all the criteria for a successful thesis. The trigger for my research was driven by my curiosity about others like me and by my own experiences, which helped sustain my interest.

Whilst Silverman (2010, p.10) maintains that no methodology is inherently better than another, for me, qualitative research was an appropriate approach as it examined the individual's experiences in a very deep and personal way. However, this research was subjective, as Weber (2004) argues, all qualitative research is. This research aims to understand how and why this group of individuals behave the way they do, but not as individuals, as I see this work more as 'an accomplishment of shared goals' (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p.11). The reflection here is that the thinking was participatory, ignited by others as much as by myself. Additionally, it offered more than a human element, as it delivered human experience with an attempt to convey and understand the critical events of small numbers of individuals creating and conveying 'broadening' (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 115) knowledge. This is visibly echoed in the research questions.

Despite the fact that Foucault was 'depressingly cynical about the value of human stories' (Merrill and West, 2009, p32) declaring the possible knowledge/power struggles of conversations, I lean towards Paulo Freire (1997) in his values of egalitarian dialogue when working with adults. In brief, this thesis gives voice to the unheard or oppressed, in this case adults with dyslexia.

Although I will not be resolving issues, it is as Shipman (1997, p.viii) states 'the responsibility of the researcher *[is]* to lay out the claim for review'. My intention was to do so by adding to the understanding of how formal education supports children and young adults and if it is perceived as providing adults with dyslexia with the tools to help themselves when in work. Furthermore, this research has allowed the voice of adults with dyslexia to be heard and for the participants to be able to articulate and report on their life experiences, hopefully leading to an understanding of the issues they face, how education can best support those about to embark on a career and make their lives more fulfilling.

In Chapter 4 I will focus on the embodied narratives of Amanda, Karen, Georgia, Jonathan and Selena. Although Samuel's story was thought-provoking and relevant to this research, as my pilot contributor, I felt to include his data would reduce the reliability and conformability of this work. I have strived to tell their story as a speaker actively contributing to the 'co-telling of personal experience' (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p.259), respecting their narratives as individual experiences. However, as part of my tellership, I also analyse and evaluate these stories, allowing comparisons to emerge and understanding that they are influenced by social values and 'norms'. It is in this chapter that my own story will filter into the narrative of the participants. Here it becomes implicit that the constructs of others become part of and are reflected in my own story.

3.8 Personal reflection

I've decided to include me in this study, but I'm not sure how to include myself. I think I've just got to let it evolve, but without it getting too fluid or out of control. To begin with these personal reflections were hidden. They were my thoughts and were to remain personal. But as the thesis has developed, I feel they need to be visible. The thesis would work without them, as a study, but I feel these reflections add richness to the narrative.

Chapter 4 Participants, interviews and analysis

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I have presented the process of interviewing and data analysis, explaining the themes that link the experiences of the participants as well as highlighting individual experiences. Having drawn out the themes from the conversations, I have focused on how the participants describe the importance of having support from other people, especially during childhood or challenging times. I have also focused on positive and negative experiences during education and employment, and identified coping strategies described by the participants. The possible tension and relief or disclosure and concealment were examined, opening up the debate of if, why and how. At this stage in this thesis it is useful to understand the background of the participants. A brief profile of each participant's life story is located in Appendix 11. This helps the reader to have clear understanding of how the individual is placed in this research and helps the reader to comprehend and appreciate their experience of disclosure. Finally, I presented the participants' reflections on the way the impact of diagnosis influenced their identity.

4.1 Analysis of emerging themes

The combined experiences of the participants are shared over the course of their lives and demonstrated through emotional and pragmatic responses. This collective story will be presented in this section under discrete themes which are pertinent to this research and emerge as the narrative is explored. The aim of this narrative investigation is the interpretation of experience of these participants (Josselson and Lieblich, 1995). However, interpretation and experience are both comparative terms and are not absolute, making the understanding and elucidation of this material highly complex (Atkinson, 1998).

Here the narrative analysis focuses on the meaning and of the stories that are told during the conversation. I work out the plot, giving structure and coherence to, what start off as, dispersed stories or accounts. As the conversations progressed it became evident that as well as 'obtaining systematic knowledge' (Kvale, 2007, p.5) I was also interpreting and collating experiences through a process of dialogic interaction (Bakhtin, 1984, p.110).

Initially I become absorbed in each individual life-story by listening to the recording several times before the transcription process. Once this stage of data analysis was completed I compared transcripts and this allowed me to identify the main themes, as they emerged. Some of the themes were obvious to me from the start, for example, supportive others. However, it was not immediate that the mother would be such a strong feature. I felt that by maintaining the components and overall unity of each life story noteworthy variables were acknowledged.

It is pertinent to consider how my own cognitive functioning influenced the process of data analysis. When in discussion with a friend who knew me very well and my research not so much, an interesting idea was put forward. I excel at finding visual patterns in images and symbols, such as numbers and letters. This was confirmed during my formal dyslexia screening. During the Wide Range Intelligence Test (WRIT) I was assessed for ‘fluid’ intelligence, which is related to flexible thinking and ‘learning-by-doing’. It is not related to language. In this I achieved a standardised age score of 136; 100 being average in the population. Although I saturated myself by listening to the transcripts, as I transcribed and re-read the data, I feel I was identifying the shape of the repeated words as well as their meaning. It enabled me to capture the particularities of experiences as well as having in depth knowledge of the life story overview in a unique way. Qualitative work seeks to understand the viewpoint of the researched and to discover theories that emerge from the data (Goldberg, et al. 2003). This method enabled the researcher-me to uncover the ‘emic’ account.

The intent was to deconstruct the framework of the conversation to gather an interconnected understanding of experiences whilst keeping the integrity of each individual voice. While Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p.174) ‘conclude there to be no unequivocal quality criteria for research interviews’, following Atkinson’s (1998) guidance I have sought a balance between objectivity and subjectivity when interpreting these life stories.

Thus the substantive themes (Appendix 13) were discovered and elucidated as a result of knowing the gaps identified in the literature review and contrasting them to the information gathered from the participants, and with an amalgamation of my own experiences.

This section is underpinned by the participants' accounts, which appear in italics. The full transcripts, or living conversations (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) can be read in Appendix 12. I have purposefully included frequent and lengthy sections of the participants' words in this analysis because I felt it was important for their words to be a strong presence and, as far as possible to remain their voice, bought together, but not dissected by me as the author, in such a way that they become little more than fragmented quotes. My reflections are at the end of each section. In essence, these are my conversations and are to be considered in the same frame as the transcribed conversations I had with the other participants. Written as thought, hence grammatically loose and in a more conversational language than the body of this thesis, they offer an insight into my story. The deliberateness of writing, I felt allowed for more introspection.

Support

From the onset of many of these conversations, help and intervention from a significant 'other' was cited recurrently. This is in line with the findings of Cosden, et al., (2002) who uphold that the support and accessibility of an understanding 'other' with whom they can discuss their dyslexia can be particularly important when accepting and understanding their condition. In the case of Selena, Jonathan and Amanda their mothers played an important role in the identification and then formal diagnosis of dyslexia. Although, in the case of Selena, a kindergarten teacher suggested the presence of learning differences, it was Selena's mother that took the initiative. Jonathan's mother had an understanding of the difficulties her son was experiencing; this could have been due to her own undiagnosed dyslexia and knowing that it can be hereditary (Voeller, 2004). In addition to this, support from a parent with dyslexia can offer corroboration and understanding (Dales and Taylor, 2001; Nalavany, et al., 2011b).

As reflected in the article by Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars (2000) in the case of all the participants the most influential sources of support were parents and not educators. Amanda explains how her mother played a critical role in the early development of her reading skills. She spoke of their close relationship when she was young and how her mother was able to support and develop her learning more because she was a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator (SENDCO) and a teacher.

As the conversations progressed there was repetition in how the participants' mothers helped them during their school days and also when at university. For Selena and Jonathan this meant a twice weekly visit to a specialist dyslexia centre.

> ***Selena***
>
> *Mum worked very hard to get me the extra tuition all the time and in English and maths particularly, um, and never too much expectation of me I don't think.*
>
> *I should say to my Mum 'my god you put some work in with me'. Mum didn't work she had all the time to help me with this sort of thing.*

Georgia explains the important role her mother had to play in both her and her sister's success at university. Georgia explains her difficulties with essay writing and how her mother would assist.

Although the participants' mothers played a very positive and critical role, there were times when there was non-intentional conflict. Not all intervention was seen as helpful, although it was obviously carried out with good intent.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *Even at college when I was younger and Mum wanted to support us it was covered up because she would read all of our work and correct it all because I didn't want the embarrassment, yes and she was trying to help us, but she was covering up so it wasn't evident to teachers because my Mum had gone through everything corrected everything, done all the grammar and I'd rewritten it. So, although she thought she was helping it was probably just hiding it from people because they didn't actually see.*

Jonathan talks about how his opinion about disclosure differed to that of his mother's. When he went to university he chose not to tell his lecturers and preferred the 'anonymity'. Further to this Amanda mentions her and her mother's geographical isolation and emotional closeness as both benefit, enabling her mother to spend a lot of time with her.

Parents helped the participants' siblings too, with this support going beyond this generation and with grandchildren. Amanda talks about how her son had difficulties with learning when at primary school and her mother suggesting that 'you should get him checked out', meaning take him to be assessed by an educational psychologist. She also explains her difficulty helping her own children to learn to read as she doesn't understand phonics. On occasion, Amanda telephoned her mother to ask about the correct pronunciation of words so she would be correct when helping her sons.

During each conversation, the participants mentioned colleagues who became significant in the help and support they offered. For some participants telling colleagues of their dyslexia was more of a concern than with other participants and this is discussed in more detail in Section 4.13. When talking about work, Georgia explains how she uses the support of specific colleagues when she needs to write patient reports. For her, co-workers who she has known for a number of years are the most supportive, as is a colleague with familial experience of learning differences. A common view amongst the participants was that support often came from long term colleagues and Karen exemplified this with her account of three significant women colleagues that have supported her, in particular when she has needed guidance with letter writing. While Karen chooses to conceal her dyslexia from her line manager, she is willing to explain her learning differences with close colleagues, but only when she feels secure in their company and can trust them. Jonathan remains neutral with disclosure, nonetheless will ask colleagues for nominal help.

> **Jonathan**
>
> *I don't stand up and announce it so, but occasionally, once I get to know people well I'm happy to, because I'm always asking 'how do you spell this, how do you spell that?' and I say 'you know, it's because I'm dyslexic.*

These important insights into experiences of adults with dyslexia show how they are supported by close relatives during education and by significant colleagues when in employment. What does seem to have emerged is the ‘grey’ period; when young adults are moving from compulsory education to further or higher education. It was during this time when parental support was less prevalent that three of the participants received their formal diagnosis of dyslexia. Even in the case of Selena and Jonathan who were diagnosed at primary school, their experiences of support during college and university was sporadic. While the reasons for this are uncertain, the implication is pertinent to this research and raises the possibility that the ‘pinch point’ of transitions from school to further and higher education and then to employment are times when management of dyslexia is both perilous and significant.

4.2 Reflection - The support of others - my significant mother

During this study I have asked my mother how her children learned to read and if they found this difficult. While she has no recollection of my two brothers struggling or otherwise, she recalls with clarity the problems my older sister had when at school and beyond education. Janet, the oldest of four children, was born in 1945, to young parents who themselves, for different reasons, struggled with literacy. Almost 20 years later I was born in a country and to a family with more resources and different priorities. With a higher standard of living, my parents were able to dedicate more time and money to my education.

Growing up in an Italian migrant community, my Mum didn’t speak English until she started primary school. Money was extremely tight and the family couldn’t afford to buy shoes, let alone books. However, the desire to learn was inherent. The local school was bombed during air strikes and the tiny family living room was used as a makeshift classroom. Public libraries were introduced to my Mum by her younger brother and Mum thrived in the environment. This, she passed on to me. As a child I took great delight in our library visits. In a way that some mothers and daughters shop together, we would go to libraries and read together.

I did write to Mum a few years ago and thanked her for all the time she spent taking me to libraries. They are still my 'happy places'.

4.3 Experiences in education

The participants experience in education is complex, and within these diverse stories are what Ely (1991) defines a 'composite' where the meeting of experiences overlap or intersect. The stories of each individual remain distinct to some extent, nonetheless sharing experiences with each other participant individually and together in what Atkinson (2012) describes as the deep relational exchange of stories that take place in interviews.

Learning to Read

Although dyslexia is a complex condition, it is often characterised by difficulty gaining and processing linguistic skills and often comes to light when children are learning to read and write in primary school (Nalavany, Carawan and Sauber, 2015). However, as in the case of the participants of this study, a recognised struggle to gain literary skills of parity with their peers, is not inevitably understood to be dyslexia. Amanda's experiences as a young child learning to speak and to read show that what was perceived as a child finding the mastery of literacy easy, was more complex when understood as part of a narrative over time. Karen suggests her difficulty originated from the way she was taught to read.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *I learned to sight read. So I learned 'I' means me, right means this, the classic 'A for apple' which I think was very common in those days, rather than phonics itself and because I was able to pick up it up, I just learned, but I mean you don't know what's what you are doing but that's what word I could work how to put them together. So when there is a new word I couldn't work out how to put them together and my spellings never been great.*

> ***Karen***
> *I really struggled at primary school. We weren't taught phonics. We were taught A, B, C. I think that must, or it contributed to, that I couldn't then read. I found reading really hard and then spelling, and also, everything back to front.*

The diagnosis of dyslexia

The shared experience of Jonathan and Selena involved their early diagnosis when at primary school and also the attendance of specialist dyslexia centres soon after this. Both describe how they attended these centres twice a week for a number of years, which meant that both families needed to finance the classes and someone, in both cases the mother, needed the motivation to take them to the sessions. Selena explains her early diagnosis due to the vigilance of an observant kindergarten teacher.

Jonathan's mother identified her son's learning difference, which was discounted by Jonathan's primary school until a formal diagnosis was gained. In his words, Jonathan suggests 'trouble' and 'fighting' to describe the approach of his school and his 'struggle' with 'admitting' he has dyslexia.

> ***Jonathan***
>
> *It wasn't the school who diagnosed me it was my Mum and she had a lot of trouble with the school because they basically said 'oh, don't be so silly, that's not a thing'. You know 'some kids just aren't as clever as others'. So just accept it sort of thing. And she didn't um, she got an educational psychologist and basically paid for an assessment and that came back you know, positive for dyslexia. And then I think at that point then the school accepted it and took it on board, but they were sort of fighting all the way.*
>
> *Going back to when I was at school, it is a lot more common now and they are geared up for kids with special needs and stuff like that and back then, as I said, it was almost like a struggle getting them to actually admit I wasn't just thick. And that's all they wanted to put it down to.*

Intervention

In their conversations, Jonathan and Selena describe the intervention of the centres for dyslexia as positive, although there were negative experiences associated with it. Jonathan attended his centre twice a week for two hours, having to leave school early and miss religious education and history lessons. He feels because of this he lost out on these areas of the curriculum and in particular, regrets not attending history lessons. Jonathan also mentions the reaction of his peers saying that *‘everyone knew you were going out of school for 'special help' or whatever it was and yes, you got teased about it’*. Although he experienced some teasing, Jonathan was vague about the impact it had on him, concluding that it didn’t really bother him. He also stated that the dyslexia centre explained to him that his learning would be different from many other children, but that wouldn’t prevent him from excelling in areas such as mathematics and physics: subjects which are the mainstay of his career as a structural engineer.

While Jonathan explained that the centre never set out to cure his dyslexia, he and Selena talk about learning coping strategies such as learning words and spellings in a particular way.

Selena’s adverse experience come from the children in her class. An independent school, some of Selena’s peers boarded and had parents living overseas. With Selena’s mother a visible presence and taking her out of school twice a week Selena feels the teasing she experienced was partly due to an element of jealousy. She recalls the other children going off for their 11+ examination and she remained behind which also lead to some teasing.

It is interesting that none of the participants mention bullying during any of the conversations. However, children and young adults with dyslexia and other learning differences are known to be at increased risk of teasing and bullying (Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars, 2000). Furthermore, teasing is mentioned by Jonathan and Selena, but not by the other participants. For Jonathan and Selena the teasing relates to being seen as ‘othered’ or different by their peers.

Behaviour

The plotlines of Jonathan, Georgia and Karen connect when they discuss behavioural concerns when at school. This is reflected in the findings of Hellinckx, Claes and Grietens (1993) and Ingesson (2007) who concluded that students with learning disabilities show more behavioural and emotional problems than children without learning disabilities. However, the poor behaviour of the participants may well have been as a reaction to their frustrations at not being able to learn and this was likely the case with Georgia. She talks about recognising her differences and perceived inferiorities compared to her peers.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I think I wasn't aware of being dyslexic I just thought I wasn't as intelligent as other people. And I think it started from a very young age and I just had no interest in academic work, I deliberately became uninterested because I wasn't very good at it. And I sort of failed myself because it was easier for me to do it than for someone else to do it. I'd just then start playing up in class. It was never recognised and I was never given any support in first, or middle or high school. I don't think it was until going to university and that was only my own knowledge and realising through listening to other people 'oh that sounds like something I've got' that um, that not anyone in education picked up on it. I was just put in the lower classes um, as I said there was no support at school and I became more and more disheartened ended up failing everything you know and I put it down to not being very clever, you know.*
>
> *It wasn't I had withdrawn myself to the point from education I was just seen as a naughty child at school and um, that's how I saw myself really I didn't see it as a….you know I can't actually say there was anything that actually made me. I can remember being continually embarrassed, my biggest dread, and I hated it. We had these classes and teachers would make you read from books and we'd all have to take our turn and I'd sit there, would be sweating.*

Karen and Amanda discuss their differing experiences regarding support in school. Here Karen explains how she felt lack of money in the state system may have impacted on the support she received.

> ***Karen***
>
> *And I think um, especially in primary school and in secondary there was people below me who needed a lot more help. You had the bright ones. I think because I learned to blag quite easily. I found it very difficult to I think because even then money was tight the money went to the more, the ones that really needed the help. Then the ones, you know, like me who needed the extra help, you're coping that's how you are going to get on with it.*
>
> *I was given extra time, but I think they just thought I was slow, so I would be in the bottom sets at school and what that caused problems with was to do with the children that didn't want to learn.*

Conversely, Amanda’s reflections on the support she received show that she felt it could be as a result of attending an independent school. Her final comments here are very powerful.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *I had good teaching, so it probably wasn’t ever a problem in itself. If I hadn't gone to a school, schools, which had smallish classes, I could easily have floundered, but I did, so I was really lucky. Um, and maybe they just taught round it or taught well, it wasn't a problem. But would I have done if I'd have gone to a big comprehensive, you know thirty-five kids in a class with different abilities, would I have found the ways around the strategies, I don't know. So, no it didn't hugely impact me.*
>
> *I just find that quite scary. How many children get lost in the system?*

On the contrary, Selena explains at length about her brother’s experiences at an independent school that had a reputation for pushing academic achievement. She feels that the school failed to understand her brother’s lack of academic progress because they were inexperienced in dealing with children with different learning needs. Selena narrates how her mother was the momentum in the school’s understanding of her brother’s needs ensuring they gave him the *‘skills set that Selena had been given’* by the specialist dyslexia centre.

Contrasting Experiences of Independent Education and State Education

The debate between state and private educational experiences is interesting and valid to this research. With two of the participants educated in the independent sector, it is interesting to hear their experiences and compare them to those participants educated in the state sector. Selena tells of her insistence that she continued her education in the independent sector even though her father felt that state education would suffice. This raises the question of how and if additional resources can help to support children with dyslexia.

> ***Selena***
>
> *But my Dad was definitely 'I'm not paying for private education when you go to senior school'. He wanted me to go to the local comprehensive state school. I said 'I'll be mullered' I'm not going there because I already had some kids teasing me and saying 'she's ****ic' cause I think dyslexic had an 'ic' on the end, and there was definitely a lot of that.*
>
> *In the end I said I wasn't going to a state school, partly because we had a nice house and smart cars and I'd get the **** kicked out of me anyway and um, I said 'no you are going to pay for an education for me and I'm going to go to that school'. And luckily my cousin was there already and the rest of the family is getting it all, so you know, I'm going to have it. Um, and I think once we'd got to that point he was more educated I think about dyslexia because my Mum had taken me to all these different things and it had been explained and by then he was staring to go 'oh, I think my Mum is' and seeing it wasn't not, an illness, but just something that could be dealt with.*

From an early age Selena understood that, although the way she learned may be different from that of her brother, she was not going to miss out on, what she felt was the education she was entitled to.

Higher and Further Education

The way in which the educational trajectories are under scrutiny here and how decisions were made by and for the participants emerged from their stories. It appears that transitioning from school to further education and then to higher education was often a critical experience. For Selena it was affirmative. She had found her niche and understood where her strengths lay.

> ***Selena***
>
> *And when I went for the interview there at KIAD [Kent Institute of Art and Design] up at Fort Pitt they said 'What is your name, how old are you have you got dyslexia?' and I said 'Yes', and then 'you've got a place'.*
>
> *They very much said 'dyslexics can think in three dimensions' the lecturers in art seemed to kind of understand that.*
>
> *And then when I was the one that went off to art school and did further educational and stuff and had more of a career path than my brother had, then I think he [father] was proud of me.*

However, for Georgia and Karen, the struggle continued well into further education. Both took time to settle into a place they felt comfortable with, in relation to their personality and their cognitive strengths. Georgia feels she went to college after school because that was the expectation within her family. Here she started on a catering course and felt this suited her more as it was more technical than academic. However, this was short lived and she transferred onto an art course, despite, as she says, art not being a strength. Georgia did not complete this course and went on to study health and social care. The challenges associated with dyslexia continued into Georgia's adulthood (McNaulty, 2003) and, although she found her niche in nursing, her route to a settled and happy career was still a little way off. It may have been that Georgia felt her difficulties were impacting on her aspirations as confirmed in the study by Taube (1988). For Georgia there was a conundrum between following her vocation in nursing knowing that this would cause difficulties due to the level of literacy skills required. It was only after having a baby, then a brief and unrewarding job in accountancy did Georgia finally realise her ambition and train to be a psychiatric nurse. This also highlights the differences in training and working and how you may thrive in the former setting and struggle to succeed when in a working environment.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I really wanted to be a nurse and I started to but in the back of my mind 'I can never do this job, because how can I do this job because I can't spell'. And how, at the time, I was working in hospitals and I'd see bits of people's notes as you do as a care assistant and I'd be, people would see me. I'd be absolutely mortified, I can't do this job, I'd be um, and I think I did my training and getting pregnant with Leo was a bit of an excuse I didn't actually carry on to do the nursing. I didn't have the confidence to carry on. I did the training and I achieved the qualification, but I couldn't do the job, I feel, I just can't do it. And I was pregnant with Leo and it was just an easy way you know, I've got a baby now. And as he got older and also I worked in the same hospital so I became very comfortable with people I worked with, the fact I could work in here, I feel supported these people are my friends that I then felt that I could do this. Because I've always felt I wanted to do it but just couldn't bring myself for people to see I couldn't spell things and for people to see.*

Karen had experiences in compulsory education and in further education that turned her away from learning. At college, tutors identified that Karen might have dyslexia and following a formal test she was diagnosed. Following this she received regular support to help her re-take her GCSE English. Despite excellent coursework grades, Karen states that taking the examination element of the curriculum was unsuccessful.

> ***Karen***
>
> *I got extra time in college for my exams as well, but that did no good. I didn't really get, I think I'd lost interest on education by then, because I found it quite a struggle and then I went in and did IT which I loved, but it was when we had floppy discs, everything was on floppy discs and I gave it to my extra support tutor, she had lost it, but didn't make out she had lost it, so when it came to hand it in no one knew where it was and obviously I didn't take backups. So then I think I lost all interest there. And then I from there I just did an admin job, I was able to get an admin job. I lied about English on my CV because no-one would….*

Extra Time and Additional Support

Extra time for examinations and the topic of coursework is mentioned several times in the conversations. While it is common practice in schools, colleges and universities to give students with dyslexia additional time, sometimes up to 50%, it is not always beneficial. Karen, Jonathan and Georgia explained that this concession was not helpful to them. Georgia received her formal diagnosis when at university, so had already journeyed through compulsory education and college without support or recognition of her learning differences and when support was offered it was a free laptop and specialist software. Equally, Georgia states that she did not seek out help and was not overly accepting of support.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I'm one of these people that doesn't need extra time in exams if I know it I know it if I don't I don't. I don't sit there for hours on end I haven't the patience. you know I've got a very short concentration span which is probably to do with my dyslexia you know I get bored very easily and you know you get people who can sit there for hours in exams but I get there very quickly which is probably my downfall because I'm a little bit impatient. I don't read questions properly you know, I never read questions properly, I*

> *don't read instructions properly, you know, I know I should take more time to do it, but I don't have patience for things I don't have the interest. I think it would help for me to slow down and take the time a bit but it's not in my nature to be like that. But there was the support in some respects but think you had to be very severely dyslexic to get one-to-one in class. To me that would be my worst nightmare. I wouldn't accept that type of help.*
>
> ***Jonathan***
>
> *At school they sort of for exams you can have extra time in exams for the dyslexia, although that never actually helped me in any way because no matter how much I sit there, it doesn't improve in time. So that wasn't particularly helpful concession to my dyslexia.*
>
> *I never actually passed English at all the actual O Level or GCSE so I think I did O Level and didn't pass it the GCSE and didn't pass it I think I might even have done it again when I did my A Levels the first year, and didn't pass it.*

Jonathan and Selena experienced more similarities in their education as they studied and sat GCSEs during the initial phase of introduction. Selena explains how she feels these examinations suited her, and the use of computers and spell checkers coincided, positioning her in, as she describes as a '*lucky phase of things.'* Selena recalls how history essays were initially problematic, but with academic support she worked through this phase and became more confident as a result. Coursework benefited Selena as she was able to work at her own pace without the urgency and time constraints of an examination. Comparing her written work to that of her peers could have had a negative impact on Selena's self-esteem. However, she describes how understanding these difficulties to be as a result of a diagnosable condition enabled her to accept her learning differences, and with determination and skill, overcame any setbacks with determination. With an early diagnosis and regular, encouraging support Selena compartmentalised her dyslexia and was able to positively adjust accordingly (Petersson, et al., 2006).

Compared with the wider curriculum Jonathan struggled with literacy when at school and like Karen was unable to pass GCSE English. Unlike the current time, having a GCSE or equivalent in English was not a prerequisite to a higher education course and Jonathan had a suitable combination of examinations which enabled him to enter university.

> ***Jonathan***
>
> *Everyone saying you need English and you need maths and could never pass the English, so you know, it’s not nice not being able to do something, but you know, ultimately the fact I haven't got English hasn’t actually mattered. I managed to get onto a - I didn't get great A Levels either - you know I did ok, I passed and got two and an AS level.*

As I write this the numerical grading system and new, examination based GCSEs have just completed the first academic year with some 590,000 young adults (Telegraph, 2018) collecting their results. Because of this change it is pertinent to understand the participants’ experiences and views of the preparation and formal examinations. Jonathan struggled with rote learning and suggested this may be due to a weak short term working memory which he understands to possibly be due to dyslexia (Jeffries & Everatt, 2004; Smith-Spark, et al., 2004). He struggled with reading and recalling information and this impacted on his ability to revise. Karen also describes how her struggles with memorising information impacted on her achievements when in secondary school. At this point neither her teachers, parents nor she were aware of her dyslexia, so, although Karen was given some one-to-one support it was not specifically for strategies to support dyslexia. Describing how she would have information ‘in her head’ she was unable to transfer this as a written essay.

Amanda recalls how she learned to read with the support of her mother. Although she was reading by the age of three or four, Amanda understands that she was sight reading initially. She felt this did not pose a problem and she continued to progress using flash cards. On further recollection, Amanda felt that she *‘clearly did have issues’* as she was reading very fast and getting ahead of herself, meaning it appeared she was reading words, but was actually memorising passages. Amanda also recalled transposing letters within words incorrectly. Georgia relates a similar problem she has and gives the example of writing the word ‘brian’ instead of what should have been ‘brain’. She tells of the reaction of her colleagues, finding this error amusing and laughing at Georgia’s mistake. Georgia, internally embarrassed and humiliated, laughed along with them.

In Amanda’s narrative she continues to describe how she learned to sight read which was common practice in education during the 1970’s and 1980’s, the time when all the participants learned to read. Amanda also explained how she struggled with learning foreign languages, which is was what initially alerted her university tutor to her possible dyslexia. Latin proved easier than French and her struggles with this language puzzled Amanda as she was in the top set for all her subjects, so as a child assumed she would also be good at languages. Amanda explained how she found and continues to find pronunciation of multisyllabic words difficult. In addition to this she finds syntax, the grammatical structure of language, indecipherable, feeling that this may have been the reason why she found languages so difficult to comprehend.

Amanda’s story is different from the other participants as she did not obviously struggle at school, although on reflection, she has identified areas in her education that indicate a learning difference. Evidently able to succeed at school, Amanda achieved high ‘A’ Level grades in mathematics, philosophy and English Literature gaining a place at Oxford University where she completed a theology degree. Similar to Georgia, she was not diagnosed until at university.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *The reason it came to light, I went to university and did theology and had to do Greek. And I was on flash cards for Greek. But I was doing early modern doctrine and the set-up is that you go and have tutorials and early modern doctrine...no it wasn't, no it wasn't, anyway, it was all the philosophical Greek terms and you're meant to learn all these Greek words. So two sessions, two tutorials and I'd read out my essay and on the third session the tutor said to me, ‘the first two I thought it was a student gaff to see if how you could manipulate these words’, cause Greek is pronounced incredibly phonetically and I was mutilating them, absolutely mutilating them so he spent the first two sessions thinking this was some kind of gag and it must have been a joke between them and then he realised by the third one he realised I genuinely couldn't say it. And he would say 'it's so-and-so' 'oh, ok' and the next time I'd say it wrong again and he said 'I really think you need to go and get it checked out'.*

After a break in her education to focus on a career in marketing and bringing up her children, Amanda is now studying for a Master's Degree in Psychology. Aware of her learning differences she feels that she compensates by ordering her work in a very structured manner.

4.4 My Reflection - experiences in education

With encouragement from Mum, reading came easily to me. I remember being close to the top of the reading chart when I was at primary school, but refusing to read the Ladybird Reading Scheme because it was so boring. After the teacher met with Mum, I was allowed to choose my own reading books.

I suppose because Dad worked so hard and made good money, Mum was able to spend time with me supporting my learning. I think he was frightened of formal education. He wouldn't go to Parents' Evenings. He would drive Mum to the school and sit in the car. It might seems unsupportive, but I don't think he was. I really think he was out of his depth and scared.

Primary school was ok. Nothing special or interesting. We did tests once a year and they were what I now understand to be cognitive ability tests. I loved these. It was honestly one of the highlights of my school year. I must have done well because when I went to secondary school they put me straight into the second year. It was awful. All my friends from primary school went into the same class together and I went into a class full of children who were at least a year older than me and had already made friends. I was completely socially 'othered'. It was a disaster. Subjects like English and humanities I was ok with, but Maths and French, you can't just jump a year. And no one told me I was going to skip a year. I left with three mediocre 'O' Levels and a CSE in Maths.

I went to a sixth form college. I loved it. I was me again and I was enjoying learning and the social life. I didn't really get any proper guidance for further or higher education. I thought I'd had enough of making stuff so I applied for a degree in social sciences at Trent Poly. No-one in my family had been to higher education. Anyway, that degree was a bad choice. I couldn't sit still for long enough, so I went on to a teaching degree in Craft, Design and Technology.

I could always write though. I did dissertations and essays for my A Levels as well as for my degree. I did really well in these. There was no sign of dyslexia. Not that I can think of anyway.

4.5 Experiences in employment

The evidence that dyslexia impacts on individuals throughout their lives is considerable (de Beer, Engels, Heerkens, & van der Klink, 2014; Leather & Kirwan, 2012). In the U.K. policy aimed at decreasing discrimination against those with disabilities includes dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia and other hidden learning differences. However a recent study by de Beer et al., (2014) revealed that employers, colleagues and individuals with dyslexia in the workplace viewed having dyslexia as a disadvantage. Conversely, in a study by Lyons, et al., (2017) dyslexia would be considered a non-controllable disability, and not the fault of the individual, making it less of a stigma than a disability or difference that was seen as the 'responsibility of their condition' (p.1376).

In this section I identify areas of each participant's narrative that relates to their experiences when in paid employment.

Finding a niche and remaining stable

For Jonathan and Selena, finding a career that suited their strengths happened early on in their adult lives. Selena's positive experience gaining a place in Further Education gave her the confidence to continue in a field that she enjoyed and thrived in. Apart from a short period working on a switchboard for a magazine, she has worked for various companies and also free-lance in interior design. Selena feels that the unstructured and informal environment of this industry made employment more enjoyable as there were fewer rules and formalities than there may have been in other areas of employment. Jonathan understood from a young age that his strengths lay in science and mathematics and his degree steered him into the field of structural engineering. Having entered employment directly from university, Jonathan is comfortable in this environment and feels that he has had a successful and enjoyable career. In the past 24 years of post-graduate work, Jonathan has worked in three different companies and has never felt the need to move just for the sake of it, indeed, his first move was due to the company's closure and his second move to his current employment was when he was offered the role without having applied for the position. Having worked for three companies has enabled Jonathan to have a settled career where he has built relationships, furthermore, his current employment is with a number of colleagues with whom he was worked in a previous company.

> ***Jonathan***
>
> *I don't like new situations and change. Not that I don't like change at all, but if you go to a new job it's like, what are they going to get me to do, ask me to do presentations....*
>
> *I don't like getting put into situations like that so I will probably try and avoid them. If I'm comfortable with the situation and I know the people around me and I know what I am doing then I'll probably take the easier route and just stay doing that.*
>
> *Yeah, it could be related to it. Who knows what the reason is, you know...*

There are some elements of Jonathan's story that are reflected in Georgia's employment history. Georgia has found employment on several occasions through networks or contacts. Although seen as unsuccessful, in Georgia's opinion, her work in accountancy was gained through a friend. Georgia's current employment is as a result of a friend acknowledging her skills as a nurse and asking her to apply formally for the role. It is here that Georgia feels secure, stating that her colleagues know she is a good nurse with specialist expertise and there is mutual respect and support.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *So even now I struggle with it but I've come to terms with it a lot more and I'm well supported. But it blocks me because I sometimes think I'll go and work somewhere else but my confidence even now because I'm comfortable and supported I would feel sort of naked again and going through that whole*

> *thing of embarrassment and shame. Um, that stops me from moving around a bit so it still holds me back. I don't think I'll ever be comfortable with it....*

Georgia's comment about 'moving forward' and her background of resolutely following a career that she knew would be difficult reflects the findings of several reports (Green, 1994, Cobley and Parry, 1997, Harrison, 2004) in that a diagnosis of dyslexia can preclude entry into nursing, obstruct career progress or make nurses feel like leaving the profession.

The need for detail is a necessary element in most jobs and this can be problematic for some adults with dyslexia due to the executive functions required to carry this out effectively. With good humour, Selena describes how she struggles with tax returns, legal documents and other detailed written documents.

In addition to this, Selena describes how she doesn't feel she is very good at detail such as proof reading and fears mistakes could make her appear foolish. A supportive husband enables Selena to focus on these undesirable but essential tasks giving her the space and time to work at her own pace and without interruption. This is an example of how literacy weaknesses extend into adulthood (Rice and Brooks, 2004). Selena talks about her fear of making mistakes, dread and self-doubt in a similar manner to the emotions expressed by Georgia when describing her struggles with literacy in work. Making an error in nursing could potentially be catastrophic and this highlights the anxiety felt and articulated by Georgia.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *So I will write everything down on this A4 piece of paper as my day, so when I first started it was 'how am I gone to remember all of this?', it was so daunting these things aren't little things its someone's medication this is really important different things, this is you know, so I would carry around little note books and I'd have that many bits of paper flying everywhere and scribbling through things, so now I just get one sheet of A4 paper and even if I'm not the one doing the hand over I take my own notes of what needs to be done that day and I just work through them, ticking them, ticking them. Because I used to go home when I first started and I'd think 'god, oh, god what have I forgotten?' I couldn't switch off and real anxiety all the time because it was you know important things, messages to consultants and*

> *different stuff, and I'd be like 'I haven't done that'. So this way I know that it’s done, it works for me it’s a coping strategy I suppose. You know, my brain will just not retain that amount of information I just, I just or if it does it’s a bit scrambled and it’s you know, not quite what has been asked or it’s a little bit sort of you know, there's so many thinks going on in the day to remember, I've just constantly got to write it down and I've just learned to do that and realise it's my way at the end of the shift I can go to bed otherwise I'm kind of going over 'have I remembered that have I remembered that?'. If I've ticked everything, then I've done it. So…*

Although Karen has positioned herself in a career that focuses on her strengths, she is still required to communicate through email. When meeting new colleagues she will often explain that she tends to send very short, direct emails and does not mean to cause offence by this. However, this is more of a way of avoiding writing necessary detail which she finds challenging. While Karen does not like to focus on the detail of written communication her work in accountancy does require accuracy and in-depth detail, but with numbers rather than words. This could connect with Amanda’s preference to write reports and use PowerPoint when presenting to colleagues. She suggests her way of structuring presentations would be different to her colleagues due to her brain working in a slightly different way. However, Amanda does not consider this to be unfavourable as she was repeatedly complimented on her capability. When asked if she felt her dyslexia gave her an advantage, she considered an ability to think differently from others a benefit.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *I do think that I do think in a slightly different way. I'm very flexible in my thinking I can move from one thing to another very quickly, um, I kind of 'get things' quite quickly and move on. Things I've had from working and comments I've had from people I'm working with [pause] I think the problems I've had I compensate for so they aren't really problems and the benefits are you think of things in a different way. Quite butterfly like. I really don't like detail, really, really not interested in detail. I don't know whether that is something linked to the dyslexia I can do it. And I can do things, but checking over, proofing. Hate it, hate it, hate it. Um partly because um, I'm trying to think, like when I'm reading I just follow the plot. I find it really I have to make myself proof, make myself proof, go through it, because it’s not something I enjoy doing or find easy. Um yes, I think just, I think, I can*

> *think in quite a creative way and being able to cope with quite a lot of stuff, which I don't know if it’s to do with it at all.*

Amanda shows that her possible strengths associated with dyslexia include oral and visual skills (Reid and Kirk, 2001). While Amanda is proficient and confident in public speaking, this is an area that Jonathan seeks to avoid.

> ***Jonathan***
>
> *I just try and avoid situations you know, when you go on training courses they say 'you go up to the front and write on the whiteboard'. And that would always fill me with dread and I would do anything to avoid that, just because I am so uncomfortable doing that. Because I would go up there and freeze and can’t even spell the easiest words.*

However, it must be pointed out that Amanda is comfortable presenting work she has produced herself and has had time to reflect on and rehearse, while Jonathan is reluctant to be spontaneous. Indeed, Amanda describes how she prefers to avoid public reading of text written by others. Although not work related, this is the case of reading at ceremonies such as weddings. As well, Georgia relayed how she would become anxious when asked to read aloud in class as a child.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I can remember being continually embarrassed, my biggest dread, and I hated it. We had these classes and teachers would make you read from books and we'd all have to take our turn and I’d sit there would be sweating.*

Again, the anxiety caused may be more to do with the lack of time to rehearse as opposed to the public nature of the episode.

Jonathan, Amanda, Georgia and Karen talk about how they use information technology (IT) to help them overcome their difficulties in work. Although they have all disclosed their dyslexia to some extent in their past and current places of employment, none of these participants have officially requested reasonable adjustments to their working practices or formally asked for additional support, whether it be physical support such as computer hardware or less tangible support such as time. The support they have received has been informal and often hidden from their managers. The difficulty here is that, if the learning and working differences are hidden, either intentionally or inadvertently, managers are unable to make reasonable adjustments for this group (Minskoff, et al., 1987). In her first job after leaving college at eighteen, Karen used to get around her spelling difficulties by using a spell checker on her mobile phone. This was carried out surreptitiously, as was Georgia's use of the device, causing more anxiety.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I'm sneaking around with a little spell checker in my pocket, so you know. On a daily basis having to do that is quite stressful, having to hide your embarrassment, pretend that everything is you know, every single day is really draining.*

But for Georgia and Karen, it wasn't just the case of using a spellchecker as they were unable to break down the words phonetically. The advancement of technology and the regular use of computers with built in spell checkers has made writing work easier for people with dyslexia. Selena explains how she no longer worries about incorrect spelling now that she uses computers. Jonathan has the same experience and uses spell checkers frequently. The use of IT in the work place has become more sophisticated and has become mainstream. A program that was developed for everyone has made significant improvements to the well-being and working practices of individuals with specific learning differences that would otherwise highlight their difficulties.

4.6 My Reflection - experiences in employment

I can't really remember dyslexia impacting much on me when I first started work. And it only really influenced what I have done more recently. I've always really enjoyed writing and love creating projects and schemes of work. I used to be responsible for assessment and enjoyed analysing cognitive ability test scores and other statistical data. I could see patterns easily, which I think is one of the positive aspects of my dyslexia.

There have been a few times when it's not being good. I was been observed once and I spelt a word wrong on the white board. The teacher observing me jumped up to correct it. Honestly, it was as though there was a fire or something. Another time in a meeting I had to read out lots of long numbers. It was horrible, really difficult changing the shapes of numbers to sounds and then back again and in the right order. No one noticed, but I was shattered afterwards.

I started going for deputy head's positions. There was always a written task, and it had to be done by hand. When the paper was collected I knew that would be it. They would see that I hadn't written as much as the others and there would be spelling mistakes. That was it – go home. And the interviews were hard too. You would be asked really long questions. Often I couldn't remember what I was being asked. And there is no time to process. So you just look thick. And feel thick too. I've had about seven of these deputy head interviews. I wasn't going to get one, so I stopped applying. I can do without the humiliation and stress.

4.7 Coping strategies

As with Amanda, both Georgia and Karen spoke about difficulties when helping their own children to learn to read. Karen feels that her children's generation have 'been taught well' in regards to using phonics to learn to read, a method that was not used during that stage of her early education. Initially Karen didn't read to her children as she states she was 'too scared and not confident enough' to read out loud to them. However, helping her children to learn to read has also improved her own reading ability and she is now a keen reader. Her experiences of reading impact on how she encourages her children. Karen wants her children to love reading, as she does now, but doesn't want to push them in any way fearing that may have a negative impact on their view of reading for pleasure. Georgia is also an avid reader, and like Karen prefers to read on electronic devices over traditional reading material. Amanda, Georgia and Karen still feel they struggle at times with reading. And this is particularly the case with multisyllabic words.

Georgia described how she didn't understand how her son learned to read using phonics. She described how individual letters such as 'o' and 'w' sound similar to her and that she is unable to hear the sounds. This is a similar experience to Amanda who talks of mishearing word sounds. She feels that her inability to use phonics became apparent when her children were learning to read and although Amanda did not initially understand phonics, she went on to teach herself this method of reading. Multisyllabic words pose a difficulty with Karen, Georgia and Amanda, however, they have their own approaches for dealing with them. When reading silently to herself, Karen chooses to replace a word she finds difficult to read with a simpler word. Karen seems to have come to terms with her difficulties with reading and found an equilibrium with the need to write for work and wanting to read for pleasure. On the other hand, Georgia still feels she struggles with literacy, and explained her hindrance at not progressing.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I read all the time. And this is what is frustrating. People say 'the more you read the better your spelling will be' and not for me. It doesn't do anything for me, I read every night, I read to Leo all the time, I read my own books, I read at work all the time. It doesn't - maybe it has a little bit yeah, but, no. People say 'but you will be able to spell'. No, my brain doesn't recognise or memorise the words, I write them how I say them and always have done, and I find it very difficult, as I said, to you now, how we use different phonics, you know, get it.*

Reflecting on her education, Georgia understands that she used to withdraw as a coping strategy and this resulted in a cycle of learning difficulty, modification of behaviour resulting in further difficulty in learning and so on. It is interesting to realise deliberate failure and withdrawing from learning is a strategy for coping and one which should not be neglected or misunderstood by educators. Georgia describes in detail how she deliberately became disinterested in learning because she felt she wasn't good at it. It was easier for her to fail herself rather than someone else tell her she was a failure and when this became a pattern of behaviour it resulted in disruptive conduct in class. This became Georgia's coping strategy and her identity.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I've just got on with it, always have done really and whatever coping strategies whether it be negative when I was younger which it often was, rebelling and just withdrawing myself it was my way of coping with it.*
>
> *Well, I just became naughty in class. I became this disruptive, naughty child because I wasn't seen as thick, because it was my choice, I was withdrawing myself from it. Because I didn't want to do it. But wasn't so much the case of that, it was a way of me not feeling thick, because if I wasn't trying then, that was me doing that, and I was so frightened of trying and failing that it was easier to deliberately fail myself, and I think that was my way, of you know, dealing with it really because I just couldn't bear to work hard and then to fail and to feel so upset over that, it was easier to not bother at all.*

Unable to be the 'clever person' at school, Georgia rebelled and withdrew putting on a façade and choosing to be popular rebel. Georgia also describes how she hid her dyslexia as a child and continues to do this as a way of dealing with her embarrassment. Her approach to hiding and disguising her difficulties continued at work. Using concealed note books and pieces of paper was an approach that developed into a single piece of paper that Georgia uses to record the day's occurrences and also as a 'to-do' list. Georgia's approach is not unusual and has been adopted by other nurses with dyslexia (Illingworth, 2005, p.42); 'I had a list of phrases that I would commonly use. I would carry it round with me and pick the appropriate phrase for the appropriate patient'.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *And with nursing there is so much written work and people see all the doctors see, the consultants see you know, I just think I'm going to be humiliated in a daily basis. I've got to do a handover and write it in front of people. Even now, I can't read my own hand over sometimes, because I've just scribbled it I don't want other people who are sat at the table to see that my spelling is so bad. Sometimes I can read my own words because I'm trying to disguise that I can't actually spell half these things that I am writing down. All the different little sayings that we use in nursing and all the bits that you use repetitively in people's notes and memorised them, so I could churn out what looks like very academic...and I just took the best of everything and I just learned to deal with stuff. And even now they'll say and I've got to write if somebody is having or trying to revoke their section and I have to write a legal document of a nursing report on that patient I am like 'oh my god'*

> *because I am totally out of my comfort zone because other stuff. As I said other stuff that is like it's got to come from me and that's when I'll often go and find a senior nurse and we'll sit down and go through it together and that's how I'm supported by them.*

Illingworth (2005) describes how meetings can cause challenges for nurses with dyslexia, particularly when they are needed to speak to the group or represent colleagues in meetings.

Jonathan also concurs that he avoids rather than hides his dislike of public writing. He explains that he does not hide his difficulties, but copes with them or gets round them by changing his behaviour.

> ***Jonathan***
>
> *Um, and you know, most of the time it doesn't, you just avoid doing stuff that highlights, like standing up in front of people and using a white board or something like that. I'll just, and it has happened and I'll just say 'no' I'm not doing it and then they go onto someone else. I will just not put myself in that position. I just know it would be a disaster.*

A number of the participants spoke about being taught strategies while in education. During his sessions at a dyslexia centre, Jonathan was taught how to approach and difficulties with learning he may encounter. He was also given the confidence to understand that, although he would have dyslexia permanently, it wasn't completely negative and that there were advantages to it, for example his mathematical and scientific skills. As mentioned in the previous section, the participants use IT as a way of managing, but this isn't necessarily helpful to Selena. She organises paperwork and belongings in a three dimensional manner explaining how she has piles of documents that are categorised into a system that works well for her. Selena and Karen use the term 'visual' to explain their learning preference and method of working. Karen has to see information and used mind maps when revising for her accountancy examinations. She continued to explain that, although these mind maps contained text and colour, she didn't actually read them, but would visualise the content. Grouping information together, using the physical location of information to construct answers to questions in examinations. Further to this strategy for revising, Karen realised early on in her studies that reading and rereading texts would be unhelpful. However, for Amanda she recalls that her preferred method of learning is auditory as opposed to visual, sounding words out rather than visualising them.

The participants have learned to deal with difficulties they have and, on occasion, this has been through trial and error as with Karen when taking her accountancy examinations or Georgia making notes at work. Amanda feels that she has learned to compensate for her learning differences over time and uses detailed structure when constructing her assignments in a similar way to how she produced presentations when working in the marketing industry. Caskey, et al., (2018) state that little is understood regarding the social challenges faced by adult students with dyslexia. This understanding is pertinent to my study as several of the participants including myself were and are students as adults. At the time of writing this thesis, Amanda is studying for her Master's degree. Diagnosed during the start of her first degree, she states that her way of working is very organised and methodical and that she generates plans for assignments very early on into the process. I also find that preparation is essential and that I scaffold my work and use a writing frame for each section of my thesis, breaking it down into manageable amounts.

As Karen points out, embedding and repeating strategies is an important process in dealing with difficulties. With some of the participants, they seemed to be pitting themselves against their dyslexia and this seemed to be the case with Georgia and with Karen. For Amanda and also for Selena, the feeling was that, while there were difficulties, they were less of a battle and just something to be navigated around.

4.8 My reflection - coping strategies

It's difficult to think about how you cope, because you just do what you do. I think Neil is how I cope. He does a lot of the organising of things such as finances, paying bills and all the house stuff. He is really well organised. People tell me I'm well organised at work, and I think I am because I have to be. But at home it all falls apart a bit. I know I do my bit, but in a different way. I suppose I'm the emotional and cultural homemaker. I do the aesthetic stuff, so we are a good balance. If it was left to Neil, the house would look like an office. If it was left to me we wouldn't have a house because it would have been repossessed! He plans all the holidays too. I'm fine with planning flights if it's a straight forward journey, but if its multiple flights across time zones, I'd need him to check. I'm not great with telling the time. I can't read digital watches easily. I have to change the numbers into an analogue watch in my head. Or I draw lots of pictures of clocks on bits of paper to try and work out times. I'm really bad at directions too. People don't realise because I will leave hours early to get somewhere on time. I'd rather sit in the car or a café for a couple of hours than be late. I get really anxious. Before SATNAV I used to have Post-It notes with directions on. I'd remember the shape of the road number rather than the name or the sound of the road. And I could never stop and ask for directions. I'd have to write the directions down. I couldn't remember them.

I suppose a coping strategy is to opt out of things. So I don't do music or languages. Languages are really difficult. I get the words the wrong way round. Lots of opportunity to feel stupid. It's like trying to read the nonsense words you get in tests for dyslexia. I just can't do it. It's the decoding thing.

I've have lots of note books with reminders and lists in them. My memory is pretty bad, so I have to make lots of notes and 'to do' lists. And when I'm writing I make writing frames. Funny. Doing a Doctorate and still need a writing frame.

4.9 The impact of diagnosis

The experiences of diagnosis for the participants was generally positive, regardless of the individual's age or stage of education or employment. Glazzard, (2010) concludes that an official diagnosis is imperative to develop a positive self-identity and self-esteem. For Jonathan and Selena an early diagnosis may have enabled them to view themselves in a positive way (Riddick, 1995) which was supported by their pro-active mothers and the guidance they received from specialist dyslexic centres. Early diagnosis enables children to form a positive identity whereas a later diagnosis means that a child may have understood themselves to be different from their peers in negative way and made attempts to compensate for this. Jonathan explains how his mother had to fight for his diagnosis as the school felt him to be of low ability as opposed to having a learning difference. This is not an unusual scenario and Riddick (1995) suggests that educationalists including classroom teachers and educational psychologists feel parents want a diagnosis because they are anxious or unable to accept that their child is ‘slow’. Elliot (2005) suggests that parents want to have a diagnosis for their child because of ‘the human need for labels’ conversely ‘dyslexics and their parents commonly have issues over labelling, which come from the acceptance of difference’ (Alexander-Passe, 2015, p.212). Amanda spoke about her mother’s reaction to Amanda’s diagnosis when at university.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *I went home and said it to Mum and she said 'oh, yes I've always thought you were dyslexic but there was no point in getting you labelled up at that point’. I think it was slightly different as well when you were labelled up you were really labelled up and actually I was quite bright enough it wasn't really impacting on me so.*

Although I have not ventured into financial affluence in this study, it is thought-provoking that the experiences during compulsory education of the state educated participants was less supportive and favourable than those educated in the private sector. Indeed, Selena felt that her school was able to offer her early diagnosis and support because it was well funded. Karen, on the other hand, suggested her school limited support because there was little funding and this had to be allocated to children in more need of support than her. Karen also talks about receiving a formal diagnosis and with this, extra support when she went to college. Having failed GCSE English at school, she needed to re-sit this at college and received regular support and strategic advice. In Macdonald’s (2009) study, the working-class participants experienced more disabling barriers, and were less likely to view dyslexia positively than middle-class participants.

Compulsory education for Georgia was a struggle and it wasn’t until she moved to college that an informal diagnosis was gained. However, Georgia was not officially diagnosed until studying at university.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *But I think I wasn't aware of being dyslexic I just thought I wasn't as intelligent as other people.*
>
> *I don't think it was until going to university and that was only my own knowledge and realising through listening to other people 'oh that sounds like something I've got' that um, that not anyone in education picked up on it.*
>
> *I was properly diagnosed at university, but I had a good idea before I went to university and I think it was sort of…this is going back such a long time, but at college it was recognised because I’d been to see people but it wasn’t formally because I hadn't got the forms and diagnosis and that was at university.*

Although the two women’s experiences of education are very different, like Georgia, Amanda was diagnosed when at university.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *Yes, I had a diagnosis at that point and....so it has fundamentally changed how it affected me today.*
>
> *On feeling about diagnosis - Um, I don’t think, to be honest, I don't think, it sound quite, to be honest [sigh] I think if you have already got decent A Levels and got yourself into Oxford I don’t think I'm badly shaken up by dyslexia. It didn’t necessarily make me…um…I've had a hard time.....I think it just explained a few things.*
>
> *So it’s never felt like a hinge issue to me, but it might have done if I’d have being diagnosed earlier ...or it might have done if I hadn't had a mother who taught me to read sight.*
>
> *I can’t think of anything particularly. I just think it’s a really interesting debate that if I’d been diagnosed earlier would that have different…would that have been a benefit or not a benefit…and I don’t It probably would have helped some of my modern languages, but would it have particular in those times, put me into a group, well, she obviously can't do English A Level, she's dyslexic. I don't know.*
>
> *So yes, it never really occurred to me that it was going to be a problem for me. I didn't know until I was so much older.*

Amanda's narrative is quite complex and separating her stories highlight contradictions in experience. A late diagnosis for Amanda does not appear to have prevented her from excelling at school. Indeed, she comments that if she had received a diagnosis when in compulsory education she may have been guided away from subjects that she was passionate about, such as English 'A' Level. Diagnosing adults may be more difficult than children because adults generally develop coping strategies that may mask difficulties (Reid and Kirk, 2001). This may also be the case that diagnosing dyslexia in more able children. Montgomery (2003) suggests that able children with dyslexia have their needs concealed in school because they could read fluently. This may well have been the case for Amanda and myself. Both perceived able to read well at an early age, during an era when children were taught to sight read, we masked our difficulties. Like Amanda, I struggled to learn French, and languages are still an enigma to me. Georgia also explained how she has difficulty understanding languages and compares herself to her partner. Knowing this difficulty is as a result of her dyslexia helps Georgia understand why she cannot grasp languages, however, it does not prevent her from feeling embarrassed and frustrated.

Although this study focuses on adults' experiences in work and in education, it should not be overlooked that dyslexia can have a significant impact on the personal lives of children and adults. While diagnosis can increase self-esteem (Glazzard, 2010) and validate learning behaviour, support from others is not always automatic. Until Selena's father learned more about dyslexia he was reluctant to pay for her education, which is reflected in the findings of MacDonald's study (2009) stating that parents who do not have dyslexia can stigmatise their children. Conversely, Selena's husband is very positive and understanding about her characteristics and feels they are welcome attributes to Selena's personality. Adult experience is central to this research and it must be remembered that having dyslexia can impact throughout personal and public life, nevertheless, differences or disabilities do not necessarily 'represent a master status' (Taylor, 2000, p.84) and a diagnosis, like dyslexia can be hidden. This has disadvantages and advantages.

4.10 My reflection - impact of diagnosis on me – October 2017

I'm not sure what to make of it really. Because it's hereditary I suppose I've known really, all along. But it's made it formal now. I had to be tested for this study. But I wasn't really prepared for the severity of my dyslexia. When I did the on line assessment I felt quite down when I got the email back because it said 'significantly dyslexic'. I was expecting mild. Then I did the proper test and while I was doing it I was thinking 'this isn't good'. There were parts of it that I just couldn't do. But then there were other parts, like the shape making and pattern recognition that I found really easy.

I'm still mulling over the diagnosis that I'm in the bottom 1% of the population who understand what they have read. How have I managed to get this far? I just couldn't comprehend what I was reading and I didn't understand the questions. Best not to over think these things. I'm still pondering on its significance to me. I need some time.

4.11 Personal Identity

Dyslexia has an impact not only on how an individual learns but also on their character and personality (Arkowitz, 2000). While learners with dyslexia often seek to shield themselves from feeling inferior and 'stupid' (Singer, 2007, p.329) compared to their peers, this can also lead to impact on their wellbeing and self-esteem (Eissa, 2010). In this section I explore the identity of the participants through their narratives. These reveal a variety of views to having a diagnosis of dyslexia and give an insight in how they view this label.

Early family life and educational experiences as a child have a profound impact on an individual's lasting sense of identity (Caskey, et al., 2018). For Amanda, her positive experience of learning to read with the support of her mother may have had a direct influence on her self-esteem as a young person working through the education system and as an adult (Nalavany, et al., 2015). During school she was in the highest sets for all her subjects, and although she struggled with French, there was no indication of any learning differences. Although diagnosed with dyslexia at university Amanda received good marks for academic writing. She feels having a diagnosis earlier on could have been detrimental and may have even prevented her from taking the more academic courses she preferred. It is interesting that once diagnosed, Amanda's mother disclosed her theory that her daughter did have dyslexic. Amanda does not conceal her dyslexia and explained that when she discloses to friends they tend not to believe it because she attended a highly academic university. Following this, Amanda was also a high achiever in employment working effectively in a market driven, competitive environment. She feels her dyslexia enables her to work using slightly different methods to colleagues without dyslexia and sees this as a positive attribute. Confident in what she does, Amanda has never felt stigmatised or disadvantaged because she has dyslexia.

Dyslexia as a Disability

Common amongst all the participants was their rejection of the label 'disabled'. This is also mirrored in my research which reflects the findings of Blankfield, (2001) that on an individual level the participants did not regard themselves to have a disability. This is at odds with the legal employment framework. The lenses through which dyslexia is viewed by institutions and policy makers seems at odds with how it is viewed by the people with dyslexia themselves, as highlighted by Amanda's experience.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *It doesn't feel like a disability, I don't feel it has impacted on my life hugely....um....and I don't remember being....limited when I was younger.*
>
> *My boss went 'you know you are dyslexic, we can put that down as a disability'. And I went 'oh, ok, that's fine'. 'You sure you're ok with that?' It doesn't really bother me, I thought it was a bit farcical, but hey ho.*

Georgia expressed a high level of discomfort (Stanley, et al., 2011) with the label of 'disabled' wanting to disassociate herself from such a term that may undermine her confidence and self-image (Illingworth, 2005).

> ***Georgia***
>
> *'Have you got a disability?' I've always put 'no'. I wouldn't think that I don't see it like I've got a disability I'd be embarrassed to say I'd got a disability. I did at work when I applied for the job, I found it very difficult to write that. I don't see myself as having a disability. I don't think it's a very pleasant word, I don't know what it conjures up in my mind but I don't like to associate it with me really.*
>
> *Umm, and I just think it sounds horrible. You know I don't want to see myself like that. Not really, so I will put 'no'. So, and a learning disability, well, no, I know there are all different types, but it sounds so extreme such a horrible label, so I don't want to put myself as that. That what stops me as putting myself as that and getting the help and support because I won't actually put that to be honest because I don't want to actually tick that box.*

Knowing that dyslexia is considered a disability under employment law may have resulted in preventing some of the participants from disclosing they have dyslexia. Indeed, wholly or partially withholding this information when applying for jobs or when at interview could be due to the threats associated with disclosure (Stanley, et al., 2001) and as a result of this they may not have received the support they are entitled to. People with 'invisible stigmas are confronted with excruciating decisions in choosing if, when, how and to whom to disclose their stigma', (Nalavany, et al., 2015, p 570) and it may be that Georgia and Karen feel this to some extent. Research focusing on the experiences of nurses with dyslexia supports Georgia's actions stating that disclosure is complex and requires a receptive environment (Evan, 2015). For Georgia and Karen, they have to judge if the environment they work in and the people they work with will be receptive and positive to their working differences. Georgia talks about how struggling with literacy impacts on her work, causing her to feel humiliated and anxious. Purposefully choosing a career that involved a significant amount of writing that would be publicly shared made Georgia face daily embarrassment which would considerably impact on her self-esteem. She describes how she constantly worries that her poor spelling will cause ridicule amongst her peers, causing her to feel that she is unable to do her job well.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *And the anxiety I used to have all through university when I started a new placement, my level of anxiety to deal with it all over again and settle and it was all based around my dyslexia.*
>
> *I've never been so mortified you know, just when you are building your confidence up as a student it completely knocked me back down, I can't do this as a job I don't want to put myself in a situation where I am humiliated, I would rather not do it, than have to go through that.*
>
> *On a daily basis having to do that is quite stressful, having to hide your embarrassment, pretend that everything is you know, every single day is really draining.*
>
> *But it blocks me because I sometimes think I'll go and work somewhere else but my confidence even now because I'm comfortable and supported I would feel sort of naked again and going through that whole thing of embarrassment and shame.*
>
> *But to me I'm constantly worrying about it.*

Although often considered limited to children and young people, empirical studies show that adults can suffer from low self-esteem (Carawan, Nalavany and Jenkins, 2014). Confidence and self-worth are significant notions and are seen to impact on an individual's lifelong ability to function and sense of well-being (Hunt and Guindon, 2010). Indeed, the narratives of individuals with dyslexia tend to be defined by low self-esteem (McNulty, 2003).

For Karen, her positive identity developed through her focus on her mathematical skills and turning this into a career that she enjoys and excels in. At school, Karen realised she enjoyed mathematics and this was her most successful subject. Despite a pause in focus when leaving school, Karen realised her ambitions to complete accountancy examinations and feels proud of her achievements. Karen also reveals other personality traits, explaining her behaviour and her attitude to life.

In a similar way, Selena frames her experiences and behaviour in relation to her personality. Despite her father's initial uncertainties about the value of Selena's education, she attended an independent secondary school. She explains that she was the only child in her extended family to go to university and has had more of a career path than her brother. Because of this she feels that her father is proud of her achievements. When working for design companies in London, Selena's confidence grew and she felt that she was pursuing a career that fitted her skills well and that she loved. During this time, she never considered her dyslexia as a disability and did not feel that it was inhibiting. Selena is very positive about having dyslexia and considers it to give her advantageous traits that suit her creative temperament. From the onset of her career, Selena experienced dyslexia as positive and felt comfortable in an environment where many of her peers also had dyslexia. This overrepresentation of students with dyslexia in visual and creative arts is the focus of the qualitative study by Bacon and Bennett (2013) which concludes that people with dyslexia have a propensity to imaginative problem solving. However, empirical evidence to support the theory that people with dyslexia have superior imaginative or visuospatial aptitudes is debatable (ibid).

Selena describes what dyslexia means to her and her attitude towards trying different paths in life;

> ***Selena***
>
> *It's not until you are an adult when you start questioning what does this dyslexia mean to me?*
>
> *You were saying you have that tumbleweed moment when you can see other ways of doing it and other ways of seeing it I have more certainty in myself.*
>
> *I'll be much more certain I think because I know I've got a different way of thinking about it.*
>
> *[On thinking differently from others] I'll, not stand my ground that makes me sound like a stroppy, stamp footing person but I'm just more certain I think. Yes, don't doubt myself I think. Probably a good thing.*
>
> *I think I had enough skills and enough tools to deal with it. I think the determination to crack on.*
>
> *I'd rather life live, but that is as much about living life as about being dyslexic and you have to bring all elements into being dyslexic and that's an ever changing thing as well.*

Owning the label of ‘dyslexia’ and a positive diagnosis was a significant factor to self-esteem in students (Glazzard, 2010) and could be attributed to Selena’s and Jonathan’s positive views. Furthermore, many experts in the field of dyslexia (Ehardt, 2009; Gerber, Ginsberg and Reiff, 1992) have discussed its positive traits in relation to visuospatial processing. Brain scans of adults with dyslexia while reading have shown stimulation in brain areas characteristically connected with visuospatial, rather than linguistic, processing (Grigorenko, 2001; Shaywitz, et al., 2002). Jonathan states that he has always struggled with language, but excels in his field of engineering which requires developed visuospatial skills. Like Georgia and Karen, Jonathan is a good mathematician. Throughout school Jonathan was known by his teachers and peers to have dyslexia. The decision to have this as an identity was not his choice, but that of his mother. When he went to university, Jonathan chose to change his identity by concealing his dyslexia label.

> ***Jonathan***
>
> *But I'm lucky in what I've always enjoyed what I'm doing you know, it’s been a good career progression really. I haven't needed to jump around a lot and get different experience because it’s quite a specialised industry the fact that I've stayed in it for a long time probably means I'm more experienced or whatever at what I'm doing so I find it easier so.*
>
> *I preferred it, the fact that no one knew, so no one treated me any differently as it were, and by then you know what you can and can’t do so you don't put yourself in situations where you become an issue. So you avoid it, you know, no one necessarily needed to know, if you see what I mean. My lecturers didn't know, I was getting good marks and doing the work.*

Now at work, Jonathan is open about his dyslexia and this may be because he is confident in his abilities and feels it does not impact negatively on his work, indeed Jonathan and Selena consider having dyslexia to be a help in their work rather than a hindrance. Bacon and Bennett (2013) suggest that people with dyslexia have a greater sense of their academic achievements and of their creative skills due to the extra work entailed in succeeding.

Teasing or bullying?

Bullying is defined as repeated behaviour that is aimed at certain groups and intended to hurt someone (www.gov.uk). It is interesting that the word 'bullying' was not specifically mentioned by any of the participants. Apart from Amanda, they all spoke of receiving unwanted attention from peers when in school. Georgia mentioned one incident of ridicule by a superior when on a work placement. Jonathan talked about getting teased at school because he had dyslexia but felt he was not really bothered about it at the time. He recalls how sessions at the dyslexia centre helped his self-esteem as they concentrated on helping him to understand he had strengths. Even at a young age Selena anticipated she would be the recipient of bullying had she attended a state secondary school.

> ***Selena***
>
> *[On been sent to state school] I said 'I'll be mullered' I'm not going there because I already had some kids teasing me there was definitely a lot of that.*
>
> *[On comments from her father] 'She's not going to do very well in school and let's not bother', and actually I was the one that did the best. So ok, there was always an element of trying to please him. I said 'no you are going to pay for an education for me and I'm going to go to that school'.*

Selena mentioned teasing by other children when she was in preparatory school and again by specific girls at secondary school. Her suggestion that this wouldn't happen because she was in an independent school did not materialise and it is not possible to say if she experienced less bullying or teasing attending an independent secondary school than if she had attended a state school. Georgia and Karen both attended state schools, but neither of them mentioned bullying or teasing during their conversation. This does not mean to say participants were immune to emotional harm, as it is understood that dyslexia can have a long-term impact on the psychological well-being of children (Jordan and Dyer, 2017). In their study Caskey, et al., (2018) state that the significant interactions in early schooling and family life had a profound impact on the sense of a negative social identity amongst adults with dyslexia. Furthermore, this deleterious impact on emotional well-being also undermines the ability to realise cognitive potential (Gilger and Oluade, 2013). Contrary to these findings many researchers (Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002; Reid, Came, & Prince, 2008) state that adults with dyslexia can work successfully at the highest level in many areas of employment.

Othering Self

Karen uses the term ‘struggle’ to define her experiences in primary school. Although her teachers did not appreciate her difficulties were due to dyslexia, she was given extra time to complete tasks. She describes how she was identified as ‘slow’ and put in the bottom sets.

Georgia explains how she withdrew from her education and saw herself as the naughty child as this was preferable being seen as a failure, in essence she swopped one label for another because she couldn’t have the identity she really wanted which was to be seen as intelligent. Becoming disheartened and feeling they were not succeeding due to lack of ability caused Georgia and Karen to ‘give up’ on their education.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *I had withdrawn myself to the point from education I was just seen as a naughty child at school and that’s how I saw myself.*
>
> *I was just put in the lower classes, as I said there was no support at school and I became more and more disheartened ended up failing everything you know and I put it down to not being very clever, you know.*
>
> *I can remember being continually embarrassed, my biggest dread, and I hated it.*
>
> *And my way of dealing with it would be to rebel against it, to withdraw and become, you know I couldn't be the clever person so I'm going to be you know the popular girl that was the rebel and that was my sort of front that I put on at school.*

While the well-being of children with dyslexia can deteriorate significantly upon reaching school age (Jordan and Dyer, 2017) strategic early intervention can be put into place to reverse this decline. Managing the psychosocial factors for children and adults with dyslexia is important to the continued development, behaviour and overall wellbeing of these individuals, but this can only be achieved if understanding and support is available. However, the predicament of provision, identity and disclosure continues and is enhanced because many adults may be unaware they have dyslexia. This is common for those aged over 35 as understanding of dyslexia when these people were at school was still in its infancy (Malpas, 2012).

4.12 Disclosure and concealment

The decision to disclose or to conceal was central to this research and was a theme that was explored with the participants during each conversation and an area that is pertinent to myself. Disclosure or concealment varies according to the age of the individual, for children or young adults the decision to share the diagnosis of their dyslexia is often taken from them. This narrative research gave voice to these individuals and helped me to understand decision-making from their point of view (Prevett, Bell and Ralph, 2013). Many people with dyslexia remain 'hidden' because they do not tell anyone at work for fear of unfair treatment in the workplace, ridicule or discrimination (Fitzgibbon and O'Connor 2002). Furthermore, they do not wish to be perceived as ‘different’ from their colleagues in a manner that may be perceived as negative. In this section I report how the experiences of disclosure or lack of admission impacted on the participants and the quandaries faced regarding concealment.

For students following academic courses at university, disclosure is optional and confined to academic staff (Morris, et al., 2007) however when taking part in work-based placements, Georgia would potentially need to disclose to healthcare employees. Of course, in higher and further education, the benefits of disclosure are tangible, such as extra time in examinations and Disabled Student Allowance providing IT equipment (www.gov.uk). However, in the workplace, Georgia’s experience reflects the findings of Blankfield (2001) with negative responses and discrimination. Georgia explained how she often felt uncomfortable and anxious when starting a new placement or working in unfamiliar places.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *It is hard enough settling in to a new sort of ward, but when you are trying to hide this embarrassment and when you are left with feeling very open to people and then its picked up on and you have to go through the whole sort of explain and feeling embarrassed. I used to dread it and I can’t do that you know I just don't want to put myself through this.*

It is not unusual for adults with dyslexia to feel vulnerable with colleagues and managers (Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars, 2000). Karen also experienced anxiety when settling into a new job and she feels that this is one reason why she has only had three places of employment since leaving full time education. While there is no legal requirement to disclose (HMSO, 1995) the dilemma of if and when to tell employees and colleagues can open up the potential for benefit and for emotional risk. Karen has chosen to conceal her dyslexia from her manager, however she chooses to share with close colleagues, and only after a period of time when she feels she is safe and can trust these individuals.

Disclosing a disability

Although there have been abundant anti-discriminatory campaigns, such as ‘It’s Time to Change’ and the Campaign for Civil Rights, the concerns regarding employability of people with disabilities remains deep-rooted (Morris and Turnbull, 2006). One such campaign during Amanda’s employment in a high-profile national company could be seen to compound this view. Here Amanda explains how the organisation needed a quota of senior managers with disabilities.

> ***Amanda***
>
> *My boss went 'you know you are dyslexic, we can put that down as a disability'. And I went 'oh, ok, that’s fine'. 'You sure you’re ok with that?' It doesn’t really bother me, I thought it was a bit farcical, but hey ho.*

None of the participants in this study described themselves as disabled. Here Georgia articulates her feelings towards such a title.

> ***Georgia***
>
> *But then at the same time I don't really like this 'I'm dyslexic, I'm dyslexic' 'have you got a disability?' I've always put 'no'. I wouldn't think that I don't see it like I've got a disability I’d be embarrassed to say id got a disability. I did at work when I applied for the job, I found it very difficult to write that. I don't see myself as having a disability. I don't think it’s a very pleasant word, I don't know what it conjures up in my mind but I don't like to associate it with me really.*

Although Selena and Jonathan have known they have dyslexia since early childhood, disclosure is still an area of debate for them both. Like Karen and Georgia, Jonathan does not choose either to hide or publicise his learning and working differences, however, he will choose to disclose in an indirect manner. The main reason Madaus, et al., (2002, p. 364) found for concealing dyslexia was ‘no reason or need’. When Jonathan was at university he chose to conceal his dyslexia from his tutors for this reason. His grades were good and he was achieving so felt it unnecessary to disclose as there would not have been any benefit. Amanda deliberated on the need to disclose in a job interview. She felt her dyslexia to be inconsequential and for this reason it wouldn’t have occurred to her to tell a prospective employee of her dyslexia when she was in her early twenties. Reflecting on this, she did consider some work-place support may have been useful.

Selena’s experiences in the technical and creative industry of interior design have been positive and she has never felt the need to conceal her dyslexia.

> ***Selena***
>
> *I've had people say 'that’s wonderful, you can think about things differently and produce something different from everyone else and I look forward to seeing it. I've had lots of that positivity really.*

Disclosure is a complex matter as it is of such a personal nature, the result of which cannot be accurately predicted prior to the act. Not only is each individual’s experience of dyslexia different, the response to their dyslexia and the response of managers and colleagues will also be different. Whilst there is legislation in place to encourage disclosure and mitigate any negativity as a result of this action, it remains a contentious issue for the individual with estimates demonstrating that only 30 per cent disclose their learning difference to managers (Madaus, et al., 2002). Although the disclosure experiences of the participants in this research were skewed towards the negative, Bartlett and Moody (2003, p.184) state that ‘the majority of employers, when told a staff member has dyslexia, is usually very positive.’ Furthermore, it can be claimed that there is a combined responsibility of the employee and employer when co-operating fully to ensure the work place is a positive physical and emotional environment. This, I feel can only be achieved when there is a clear understanding of all the implications of this learning and working difference and where the individual is appreciated and valued.

4.13 Summary and concluding thoughts

These narratives have unlocked an unexpected range of themes that have woven intricacies linking the experiences of the individuals across their life stories, including that of my own narrative. Listening to and reading the conversations repeatedly has allowed me to filter and sort what matters to these individuals and also to view their experiences from afar. What began as individual stories has merged into a group narrative, with individuals supporting and echoing each other. Comparisons have emerged as have contrasting experiences, presenting intersecting life stories first suggested at the start of this chapter.

While Hales (1995) argues that dyslexia is autonomous of essentially every other influencing factor such as ability, age and gender, social and educational expectations, misconceptions often define the experiences of individuals with dyslexia. However, I conclude that those factors have influenced my participants and likewise my experiences. Here I refer to Tanner (2009) who suggests that personality plays an important role in the profile and experiences of an adult with dyslexia. In my opinion the factors of ability, age and gender, etc. help to create a person's character. On the contrary, McNaulty (2003) seeks to highlight similarities amongst his respondents stating that his findings discovered very strong repetitive indicators. This may have been due to his use of a checklist, thus narrowing down and limiting responses. Given that my method did not use any predetermined themes or questions, participants were allowed more freedom in their responses. To conclude my participants shared several themes, such as disclosure and support from others, but the particularities of their life experiences were diverse. The stories of Karen, Georgia, Amanda, Jonathan and Selena can be told in a variety of ways according to personal and societal influencing factors and also to temporal distance between the experiences, the time of storytelling and when I interpret and analyse. The participants have told their story, handing them over to me to narrate and to make sense of in relation to this research. In Chapter 6 I will seek to understand the clusters of experience in relation to the themes that have emerged through the analysis. This has given me time to consider how dyslexia is understood by my participants and how I co-construct their stories in parallel with my own. Reflecting on Mead (1932), my consciousness and understanding of dyslexia as a narrative and as life experiences have responded when I detach myself from arena in which I inhabit. Authenticity is also represented as the narrative focuses on the life that is lived and the story told by '*real* people, in the *real* world and from their *real* experiences' (Ferguson, et al., 2017, p749). Throughout this research I have had to clarify my own personal values as a researcher and also a person with dyslexia and in doing so I have also found my own voice (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). As I move to discussing in greater detail this study's findings, it is important I consider the limitations of research and draw upon Ricœur's (1992) hermeneutic philosophy understanding the self as a 'narrative project' through which I can weave interpretations of the differing stories of my participants (Sparrowe, 2005).

Chapter 5 Discussion and Analysis

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will reflect on the process of the research in relation to its purpose and also in relation to the findings. I will use narrative inquiry to study and to bring understanding to the experiences of the participants (Clandinin, 2006, 2007, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, 2000). Without generalising, my intention is to discuss the shared experiences of my participants and provide insight into their collective narrative as a result of their dyslexia. This, despite each individual having different experiences as children and as adults. I will also identify areas of discrete experience that may be unique to each participant. Where applicable, I will link critically examined literature to the research outcomes.

As mentioned previously in this thesis, there has been much research carried out investigating the needs and experiences of children with dyslexia (Bartlett and Moody, 2003). Yet little work in this field has focused on the life stories of adults and how their reflections and experiences can influence the lives of children. Hence, the life challenges and benefits of dyslexia are insufficiently explored and understood. After an extensive literature search, no research, as far as I can tell, has used auto/biographical narrative inquiry to study this already under-researched area. Although it was not possible to analyse all texts used to support this thesis, the key texts were compared to my own work (Appendix 2) and this clearly shows how my work differs from the work of other researchers in the field of adult experiences of dyslexia. The benefit of my approach is the empathy between the participants and the researcher and also how the researcher can write with more authority and validity than a 'by-stander'. I have found the auto/biographical method to be a valid way of understanding the parallels and contrasts of stories told in the past and present voice thus allowing me to deconstruct and reconstruct and individual and collective narrative in the process.

I will refer back to how the collective story gave access into the participants' personal worlds to provide rich data. During this process I was able to reflect on my own experiences and use this to re-search my understanding of what it means to live life as an adult with dyslexia. This adds further layers of complexity and understanding to the narrative and to the research findings. I will consider the patterns that emerge from the data, reflect on how this has impacted on the participants and theorise how their experiences can help adults and children with dyslexia to thrive in education and in employment in the future.

Listening

As I analysed and interpreted the conversations by listening, by writing and finally by reading, I became more familiar with the stories and I was able to induce a story. I have already explained that, to me, ‘listening is a very different procedure to reading’ (p.56) and this notion became more evident as the research progressed. I often listen to audiobooks to gain an understanding of the story, before I read the book in text, as this method provides me with a deeper understanding and a different experience. This process was reflected in the transcribing process. I also used my time travelling from home to my place of writing as a way of absorbing the stories by listening and giving myself more time to engage and analyse. Writing became a third route to understanding the conversations, and this slow but methodical process enabled me to consider the stories in a deliberate manner. I feel my own dyslexia influenced this process. My short-term working memory meant I could only retain a small number of words when listening to the recording and I often had to replay many times to achieve accuracy. In addition to this I often misinterpret what I read or what I hear, so to ensure truth of comprehension I re-listened and re-read the conversation many times. To fully understand the participant’s experiences in the context of this research is also a way of reframing, as I am making sense of them and of myself. It is clear to me that through enlightening others through storytelling (Lynch and Kuntz, 2019) I have also built on my own personal experiences. Prior to this research I had never met or spoken to Jonathan, Selena or Amanda. I was acquainted with Karen as a colleague and Georgia is a close relative. I had perceptions about all of them and how they would respond to the research process. However, I was unprepared for the amount of detailed information they would disclose, their generosity and their openness. Handling their stories has enabled me to become a more ethical human (Markula and Pringle, 2006) through encouraging me to reflect on my own truth and to respect the truth of others'.

5.1 Key findings and emerging issues

In Chapter 1 (p.7) I set out to explore the following themes:

- How adults with dyslexia experience incidents throughout their life that may be as a result of having dyslexia
- Coping strategies they may have developed or been taught
- How they feel about their dyslexia and how it impacts on their identity
- The impact dyslexia has on emotional wellbeing and behaviour
- How and to whom they disclose their dyslexia and the impact this has had on their lives.

These were informed by my own professional experience as a teacher and by my personal experience as an adult with dyslexia. Further to this, I intended to explore critical incidents the participants may have experienced as a result of living with dyslexia. Interrogation of the transcripts allowed me to identify experiences that may have been considered insignificant at the time of happening, but on reflection were critical incidents, such as Amanda's difficulty pronouncing Greek words when an undergraduate or humiliation faced by Georgia when in work. Due to the open nature of the conversation, I did not direct the participants towards any themes, but allowed them to tell their story, allowing them to focus on what they considered to be relevant and important to them. As the research progressed and more conversations were completed, some of these suggested themes became dominant, and previously unanticipated ones emerged. Sub-sections appeared from the transcripts that I had not become aware of during the actual conversation, and I feel this added to the richness of the material, confirming my views that other forms of research, such as structured interviews or questionnaires, would not have disclosed these points. While the body of the discussion could be described as 'life experiences' it was necessary to dissect them. The original four themes were transformed into seven distinct areas of conversation and within these are noteworthy sub-sections. Showing how the main themes or broad generalities could be sliced up into specific generalities, the table (Appendix 13) became an important tool in understanding the data as a whole whilst enabling the individual stories to become more organised, usable data for my research purposes.

These seven themes have been distilled into three areas of focus which I consider to be the new impact of this thesis;

1. Supportive others
2. Disclosure and concealment
3. Identity anxiety

The language of the participants was also of interest and I feel important to this narrative. Although there was opportunity to discuss the positive aspects of dyslexia, the participants rarely spoke of this. Dyslexia can cause different behaviour and differences in achievement. Furthermore, because of the societal construction of education, dyslexia can also cause difficulties in learning. Education and society identifies dyslexia foremost as having difficulty in literacy skills and development. However, for many of the participants learning to read did not cause any significant problems at the time and all of the participants are functional readers. Still, dig deeper into the experiences of the participants, and they have all struggled with literacy in some form. This confirms the findings of McNaulty (2003), Tamboer, et al. (2016), Nalavany, et al (2015). Although I continue to maintain that for some participants the development of literacy at an early age was not problematic, but became more of an concern as complex literacy skills were required, for example when studying at university level. Although my participants have all devised approaches to deal with their literacy difficulties, whether they be avoidance or creating supportive tools, this difficulty remains regardless of their age, employment choice or level of education.

5.2 Support and intervention

Common with all the participants was the question of appropriate and personalised support. This is a theme running throughout education and is not restricted to compulsory education or limited to the formal examination process. With approval of their primary schools and the support of their mothers, Selena and Jonathan were able to attend specialist dyslexia centres for a number of years. This additional provision was only available outside of their school and was self-funded. Nothing similar to this was appointed to Georgia or Karen whose schools placed them in low ability groups, certainly neither child received sufficient accommodation or appropriate instruction when in school (Leij, 2017). This lack of effective intervention could have been due to an absence of identification (Dyslexia International, 2014). Karen received limited support during further education, while Georgia's diagnosis at university allowed access to funds, but she felt provision was inadequate as it was not specifically targeted to her needs. Participants had different experiences of support, some of which was personalised and specific to the needs of the individual, while others were given general support that did not necessarily have a positive impact on their behaviour and understanding of learning. Likewise, little support about the additional impact of dyslexia was discussed. For example the strategies needed to cope with personal financial management, job application, and how and when to disclose was never mentioned by participants in this research. Although Jonathan was told that, despite his dyslexia he would be good at some things, none of the participants were given information about the positive aspects of this condition, leaving them to understand dyslexia as an insufficiency of character and intellect.

Early identification is essential as this can lead to appropriate intervention, therefore negating the impact of misunderstanding and incorrect support when in education. Further to this early intervention can have significant and long lasting effects (Elbro and Petersen, 2004). It is essential that support and intervention is fitting to the age and the stage of the individual. Children with dyslexia may learn coping strategies when in school, but life experiences change, therefore provision for people with dyslexia should be accessible throughout their lives should they feel they need it, as a learning difficulty such as dyslexia can 'play a critical role across the life span' (Godlberg et al., 2003).

5.3 Support from a significant parent

While it is unsurprising that the participant's recollections of their experiences of dyslexia were narrated from childhood. What did surprise me was the strength of feeling Jonathan, Amanda and Selena had for received support from their mothers. In Jonathan's case he had contacted his mother prior to our meeting to clarify some points about his childhood experiences and early diagnosis. Amanda explained how her mother was integral to her early and lasting academic success. In recent years, as Amanda's children have learned to read, and at times struggled with their education, her mother has also been a source of continued help and support. However, it should be noted that the support Georgia received from her mother, may, in the long term, have been unhelpful. In her attempt to support her daughter, Georgia's mother masked Georgia's dyslexia. This overprotective support is discussed in the report by Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars (2000). However, they state that their participants found this stance beneficial rather than detrimental.

My own mother had an important role in my narrative. Her Italian parents were illiterate non-English speaking emigrants to England. Poverty prevented my mother from owning shoes, let alone books. However, on discovering a free source of books in public libraries, she taught herself to read English. My mother valued and enjoyed knowledge, and, because of this, reading for pleasure featured highly in my childhood. While maternal support is evident in these narratives, paternal involvement was different. For Selena, her father's lack of understanding resulted in her struggle to gain the same type of education as was offered to her brother. Georgia also states that her father seemed unaware of her difficulties in learning and the associated complications. Jonathan felt his mother understood his difficulties because she also has dyslexia. However, Jonathan's wife lacked understanding of their son's possible dyslexia and was reluctant to acknowledge a possible learning difficulty. I agree with Riddick (2010) in the suggestions that there should be more research into what the label of dyslexia means for children and their parents. It may be that Jonathan's wife felt uncomfortable labelling her son as having a learning disability and did not like the negative connotations that comes with this.

Although I found learning at school easy, my semi-literate father's refusal to attend my school events such as parents' evenings left me feeling he was disinterested in my education. On reflection, I have a more sympathetic understanding of his reluctance to be a partner in my education. I do not envisage the fathers mentioned in this research were intentionally neglectful or deleterious regarding their children's education. It is important to remember the era and culture during the time the participants were growing up. Although a generalisation, it is accurate to state that the mothers of the participants were the main carers, either as stay-at-home mothers or having part time jobs, thus giving them more time to focus on parenting. In all cases, it was the fathers that worked full time, and their primary task was to financially provide for the family. Although there is not any research to validate my view, I suggest that the current parenting landscape will be more gender balanced than during the 1960s to 1980s which was when the participants of this research were in compulsory education.

There is a growing body of literature that demonstrates family support effects self-esteem in adults with dyslexia (Nalavany and Carawan, 2011) and my research agrees with this. The support of parents is of paramount importance (Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars, 2000). My findings show that the experiences of my participants in regard to parental support was gendered and the mother took on the role of educational champion for their child.

5.4 Support within education

Starting with an inclination from an observant and newly trained teacher when in kindergarten, Selena recalls positive support from her school regarding the encouragement of an initial diagnosis. However, this is in opposition to Jonathan's story which details his mother's struggle to obtain recognition of her son's dyslexia. This supports the findings of Riddick (1996). In her study of 22 families, in 15 cases it was the mother that first suggested that her child had dyslexia. For Karen and for Georgia, their teachers assumed they were of low ability, and placed them in classes with other children also deemed to have low intelligence. This resulted in sharing lessons with children whose behaviour was not always conducive to learning and in the case of Georgia her behaviour became disruptive. A recurring theme with all the participants was inappropriate and misaligned support. While it is often assumed that extra time is useful to children and young adults with different educational needs, this study shows that this strategy is not always useful. Indeed for some learners with dyslexia, extra time can result in over analysing answers in examinations and making more errors. However, as with other support such as a scribe, IT provision and one-to-one help in the classroom, it has to be tailored to suit the individual. Although a university tutor was singular to prompting Amanda in seeking a diagnosis for her dyslexia, she didn't comment on receiving a mentor to support her learning needs after this event. Indeed, none of the participants spoke of a 'significant' professional adult that gave exceptional or specialist support. Unlike when in employment, the participants do not mention a peer who they confided in and gave informal and useful support during their time in higher or further education. Georgia spoke of receiving money from the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). While students with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia can apply for financial support and receive a grant to pay for computer equipment and other devices, in the past they often lacked other support, such as receiving notes prior to a lecture or teaching assistant support. Karen spoke about her tutor's lack of understanding regarding her learning style, but doesn't state why she felt this was the case.

I do not suggest that parents are always right when suggesting their children may have dyslexia. However, my personal experience and the experience of my participants shows that an informed parent can often identify specific difficulties and differences in their child's learning and behaviour before it is identified by teachers or other educational professionals (Riddick, 1995). There should be more opportunity for collaboration between parents and teachers, and there should be a more balanced approach to listening. I feel the teacher is often the one giving the information as opposed to listening for it. In defence of teachers, there is often little opportunity for comprehensive and current training regarding dyslexia, as there is a time conflict with learning about other specific learning difficulties such as autism and dyspraxia. In my experience, staff development days are organised by senior leaders. Their priorities are often different to that of the SENDCO, who is often a middle leader and has less negotiating power to secure time and training for teachers.

5.5 Resources, time and additional support

This section will take account of the participant's experiences when in further and higher education. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the influence of a highly supportive mother was key to the success and confidence of a number of the participants. Linked to this is the financial ability of some parents to give additional support through independent support organisations such as that experienced by Jonathan and Selena. Furthermore, Selena and Amanda felt that they benefited from attending fee paying schools, which they felt, offered better support for them as a child with dyslexia than if they had attended maintained schools. This is an interesting view and one that did not have any evidence to support it, especially since they could not compare their experiences to children in state funded schools. Although my experience of independent education is limited, I do not feel that the independent sector offers a better education to children with dyslexia. However, the generally larger class sizes experienced in state schools compared to independent schools does mean that a teacher will not be able to spend so much time with individuals and also they may not know individual children as well as those taught in small classes and in small schools. Nevertheless, in my experience, additional and special educational needs departments in maintained schools have a very good understanding of individual children's needs which is passed down to colleagues. Georgia spoke about having resources offered to her at university. She felt that although she was given financial support which could be used for computer equipment, her needs were more complex than this. Like Karen, Georgia explained that human support in the form of mentoring may have helped her to organise her studies, she would also have appreciated guidance on how to explain her learning and working differences to employees. It is apparent that additional support must be strategic and specific to the learning and emotional needs of the individual.

Dyslexia Action's report (2013) note that teachers lack the skills to effectively differentiate for dyslexia and for the personal needs of other learners in their classes. This was experienced by Georgia and Karen. Transitioning from compulsory to further and higher education can cause a student with dyslexia additional difficulties and anxiety, and this was the experience of all of the participants apart from Selena. In a creative and artistic environment such as Selena's art college, dyslexia was accepted and celebrated. Lack of diagnosis or reluctance to disclose were identified in this research. Providing tutors and lecturers with training to identify the common traits of dyslexia could help with identification and assessment of dyslexia (Glazzard and Dale, 2013) thus leading to appropriately adapted pedagogy.

5.6 Support within employment

Common to all the participants' experiences in employment was a lack of structured and formal support. Despite dyslexia being categorised as a learning disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and now the Equality Act 2010, participants did not cite legality as a reason for colleagues and managers offering help. Certainly Jonathan, Georgia and Karen are assisted by colleagues, and Georgia talks of a particularly compassionate manager, but this help is given on an ad hoc basis which she pre-empts. The likely result of this could be a power imbalance and the receiver of the support feeling a burden and at a disadvantage. Jonathan, Karen and I work in medium sized organisations who employ with-in the region of fifty employers. This is well over the legal requirement for a company to make reasonable adjustments to our working conditions, however, none of us have asked for this and none of us have had this offered. When working for vast organisations such as the National Health Service (NHS) in Georgia's case, and for a publicly funded national corporation in Amanda's instance it could be expected that policies and practices were in place to avoid discrimination and foster good relations between people from different groups. The NHS have an extensive guidance document (www.nhsemployers.org., 2014) detailing their responsibilities and outlining good practice. Likewise Amanda's employees have recently published (2018) meticulous and all-inclusive equality schemes. Here categories for all staff and leadership are itemised and state the following categories; women, disability, BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) and LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex). As a senior manager with dyslexia Amanda was able to contribute to the diversity statistics of the organisation she worked with. It is laudable that organisations produce inclusion policies, however, if the culture of the organisation does not support diversity it may be difficult for individuals to divulge their differences and explain support they need in order to thrive in work. Furthermore, the continuum of dyslexia may be considered to be a disability by some, but not for others, as in the case of Georgia and Jonathan who do not categorise themselves as disabled. Without question dyslexia is a life-long condition, but to judge that it 'has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities' (Equality Act 2010) may differ between individuals. The participants in this study have developed multiple strategies to alleviate any negative impact their dyslexia has on their ability to contribute to the organisations they work in. For example, Amanda states how well planned she is and how she structures her reports in detail. In a similar way Georgia, Selena and I have paper lists and all are avid note takers which act as a support to poor working memory. Alexander-Passe (2016) in his study into the origins of success of adults with dyslexia suggests that there was a need to break down information into manageable sections. Further to this Beetham and Okhai (2017) suggest that common challenges to people with dyslexia when at work are planning, structuring written information and presenting information. It could be that all the participants are aware of this due to previous experiences and have devised their own strategies to compensate for their difficulties.

According to Kirby and Gibbon (2018) there are several conditions commonly co-occurring with dyslexia including ASD. Karen spoke about feeling she has autism in some way and that she also has obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). She also talks about her brother having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) which is another commonly co-occurring condition. Although it would be wrong to stereotype individuals and have a narrow approach to supporting people with developmental differences, understanding that there is an overlap with these conditions should be recognised. However, diagnosing and supporting someone with one condition that presents as a continuum and has a variety of indications can be difficult. Even more so if there are multiple symptoms and signs.

My thoughts move to how these strategies impact on mental well-being. Although McNaulty (2003) claims that children should be protected, my research suggests that developing a child's resilience and giving them strategies to deal with learning differences is more beneficial to their long term self-esteem. Unlike my research, McNaulty (ibid) focused on children who were diagnosed only during childhood and was unable to compare experiences with adult diagnosis. As a generalisation my participants benefited from a diagnosis early in their childhood. This may be an area for further research. To disclose can be as a result of choice or pressure, likewise employees may elect to conceal as a positive decision or because they feel this could lead to unfair and adverse treatment. The participants in this study chose to selectively disclose. This allowed them to retain some power over who was told and in what circumstances. Weighing up whether to disclose during the application process is fraught with uncertainties. Only during the last stage of the interview for my current post did I disclose my dyslexia, and it was, much to my relief and surprise, greeted positively. However, when applying for more senior positions in the past I did not disclose, and during interview it became apparent when completing written tasks, I was at a disadvantage to other candidates. It is impossible to say if disclosure would have resulted in a more constructive experience for me.

The increasing awareness of dyslexia and other related conditions is positive. Awareness hopefully develops an understanding and knowledge about how to cope and adapt, and this is on the part of the individual with dyslexia and also with employers and colleagues. Several companies and organisations including Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), Microsoft and the BBC encourage neurodiversity amongst its employees understanding that this can bring a varied and creative edge to the organisation. For my participants, the experience of employment has varied and in order to gain an optimal work environment and therefore be a productive worker has not always been easy.

5.7 Support in personal life

Although this study does not focus on the impact of dyslexia on the participant's personal lives, supportive and positive relationships were a recurring theme. Several studies (Alexander-Passe, 2010, 2015; Scott, 2004; McNutty, 2013) state that many adults with dyslexia develop a façade to conceal difficulties and to portray normality. While this may be feasible in the wider community, to continue this concealment with close family would be stressful and could put a strain on relationships. As family structures vary so will understanding and support. While it is likely that parents and siblings understand and possibly share the struggles and benefits of dyslexia, partners, especially in the early phases of a relationship may be unaware of the impact it can have on an individual. Selena describes how her husband is very understanding of her learning and working differences and he celebrates this. During our conversation, Julian, Selena's husband joined us and praised the diversity of the dyslexic way of working. Selena told me how he calls her 'Madame TomTom' due to her ability to recall directions. TomTom being a term of endearment from the name of an early car satellite navigation system. The positivity of their relationship reflects the findings of Schultz (2008), stating that collaboration needed in daily life strengthened relationships. Georgia's partner is understanding of her dyslexia and is continuing to recognise how it impacts on her daily life. What may appear simple tasks to him, such as correctly spelling words on shopping lists, are for Georgia, a source of embarrassment and frustration (Alexander-Passe, 2015). Selena commented on her difficulty completing tax returns and similarly I find managing household finances difficult. While Selena's husband supports her by giving her uninterrupted time to complete this task, my husband has complete knowledge and more control over our finances, which gives him devolved power. Although there is an authority variance here (Parker, 1993a and 1993b), in our relationship it is comfortable and accepted as an established way of working in partnership. In The Experience of Being Married to a Dyslexic Adult, Alexander-Passe (ibid) concludes that many partners without dyslexia are unprepared for the depth and range of difficulties their partners with dyslexia experience. However, long term relationships can thrive if both partners are open to unconventional sharing of tasks that can clash with society's norms. Dyslexia can have a great impact on daily life. However, positive and protective relationships with peers, parents and teachers helps adolescents with learning difficulties including dyslexia to reduce both internalising and externalising issues (Al-Yagon, 2016).

Society often misunderstands learning differences such as dyslexia. The emotional and social impact of this misperception is not limited to childhood (Nalavany and Carawan, 2011). Enduring family support and a sharing of experiences may encourage a robust self-esteem that will help the individual withstand inevitable difficulties faced by living with a learning difficulty.

5.8 Disclosure and concealment

In this study the participants understood themselves to be different from people without dyslexia. However, they all wanted to take control of their lives. While none of the participants completely concealed their dyslexia in their place of employment, Jonathan, Georgia and Karen chose to selectively disclose. This disclosure is also framed in time and becomes more of a comfortable behaviour as they felt safe with their colleagues and trusted as a colleague in their place of employment. This positive experience is in conflict with Tanner (2009) whose findings suggest that disclosing in the workplace brings negativity. The implications of this is that my participants did not disclose at the point of job application or during interview. It is up to the individual to choose when, to whom and if they disclose. However, if the employee withholds information and requires support or modification to work practice at a later date, the employer is under no obligation to make reasonable adjustments. Furthermore, apart from Selena, all the participants work or have worked for companies who employ 15 or more people, therefore making reasonable adjustment due to disability a legal requirement. Should they work for smaller companies, it could be argued that disclosure, understanding and support may be more necessary for the individual and the company to flourish together. Jonathan and Karen have found their employment niche to be compatible with having dyslexia. However, for Georgia, she understands that having literacy difficulties and short term memory deficit can be discordant with her role as a nurse. Nevertheless, her personality is best suited to this people-centred profession and she has had to reconcile this knowing that she would find some important aspects of her job demanding and stressful. At work Georgia is reluctant to make known her dyslexia. This could be for several reasons, one of which is Georgia's experience while at school. Unrecognised until in her early twenties, Georgia's troubled schooling resulted in low self-esteem and difficulty accepting the implications of her diagnosis. Georgia's reaction to her diagnosis contradicts the findings of Goldberg et al. (2003) who posit the idea that self-knowledge of dyslexia aids success. Furthermore, a lack of understanding at home resulted in misguided action taken to support her when Georgia was in further education. This produced a negative cyclical period of inappropriate educational and career choices, making positive action difficult and building self-esteem challenging. Now that Georgia recognises her dyslexia she is able to accept and manage its consequences, putting her back in control of when and who to disclose to. In many ways Georgia's narrative mirrors that of Karen; diagnosed after compulsory education, a period of niche searching before finding a career suited to her skills and personality. Karen accepts her dyslexia, but like Georgia is hesitant to reveal.

The participants, myself included have undertaken what Gerber et al (1992) describe as a reframing process with stages of recognising, accepting, understanding and taking action on their dyslexia. However, I would not describe this process as a neat linear cycle, but a path that is indistinct and can be disordered depending on the experiences and personality of the individual. As part of this research it is likely that the participants went back to the reframing process as they told their stories. Initially the thought of eliciting negative events from the participants' memories concerned me and I questioned the ethics of this. However, my personal experience of this was positive and resonant with Reiff's (2004, p.195) findings of 'the likelihood of reconstructing a negative event into a positive attribution ... if the individual currently has a set of positive experiences that cast the event in a new light'. It is also relevant to understand that disclosure is also a process of reframing and retelling experiences and the result of this may not always be positive. Indeed, in my experience telling managers of my possible working differences has been an external manifestation of an uncontrollable negative experience. On reflection, it could have been my approach to disclosure was incorrect. In the chapter on ‘Telling employers’ Bartlett and Moody (2003) recommend discussing the positive aspects of dyslexia and to teach employers what it is. However, this may be difficult if the person with dyslexia is unsure of its complexities and understands it to be a deficit model without appreciating the positive benefits it can bring such as divergent thinking. Indeed, during conversation the participants rarely mentioned the positive characteristics people with dyslexia often have. For Selena, positivity in disclosure seems to have been part of her being and her experiences were generally affirmative. She embraced her learning and working differences and was resourceful about how she constructed her career and personal life, seeking to exploit her dyslexia for the good.

Recognising and accepting her diagnosis of dyslexia as a university student was also a constructive experience for Amanda. She was already academically successful and Amanda was able to intellectualise the situation and understood that dyslexia would not prevent her from academic, social or employment achievement, choosing to ‘persevere and not give up’ (Goldberg et al., 2003). She was comfortable disclosing to friends as well as to work colleagues, relaxed in the knowledge that it did not negatively impact on her ability. In a sense this is reflected in Jonathan’s experience in employment. Identified and approached for a senior position in the engineering company he now works for, Jonathan is secure in his own identity. Jonathan ‘doesn’t stand up and announce it’ nor does he conceal his dyslexia. Jonathan is largely impartial to it and accepts his dyslexia expecting others to do the same.

Although I expected the subject of disclosure and concealment to be complex, I did not anticipate the participants to express such confusion and dilemma. Further to this, as I explored my own experiences and feelings, I realised how difficult this subject is. For the participants and for myself disclosure at work, as opposed to education or in our personal lives, causes the most anxiety. When discussing disclosure Nosek (1997) categorises people with dyslexia into three categories; candid, closet or confused. I argue that all of us were confused up to the point of diagnosis, and even then, coming to terms with our own individual meaning of dyslexia can be confusing. I also suggest that Selena and Amanda are candid about their dyslexia and do not seek to hide it at any time. However, Jonathan, Karen, Georgia and I are a blend of candid and closet disclosers. We all, with good reason, choose to disclose when we feel we are comfortable and when we feel it is necessary.

5.9 Avoiding Embarrassment

Evading embarrassing work situations caused by their dyslexia was a topic that emerged during these conversations. Jonathan spoke of how he steered his participation in group activities away from leading written presentations. Georgia explained how she would avoid speaking to groups of colleagues during shift handovers. Jonathan's experience resonates with me. I am often asked to be the scribe when presenting group ideas because my handwriting is pleasing. I am comfortable with this task, however, will need guidance from others in the group to help me with spelling. This can cause embarrassment, but it is something I feel I just contend with. Amanda and I have had significant public speaking roles in our careers. Again, I pick up on similarities in our experiences. Neither of us avoid this task, but need to be well prepared and comfortable knowing that we are expert in the subject we are to present.

Georgia spoke about hiding her working difficulties because she was constantly embarrassed by her inadequacies. When people did notice her differences, she would make a joke of them, but internalised her humiliation. Contrary to this, Amanda explained that she never felt stigmatised by having dyslexia and that she is confident in what she does. She enjoys being paradoxical; amused how friends comment on her inability to pronounce or read seemingly simple words even though she has a degree from Oxford University.

Drawing from the overlapping experiences of Georgia, Jonathan and Karen, it appears that transitions from school, to college, to work and further work places are areas where anxiety can impact on well-being, performance and self-esteem. Indeed, this was also the finding of Nalavany, et al (2015, p. 572) who suggest that parental support is important even when the individuals are adults as they 'may experience life transitions and issues as particularly difficult'. I suggest the role of partners in these adult relationships should not be undervalued, and at times, the partner replaces the supportive role of the parent. Unsurprisingly, shifts in life place us out of our comfort zone and highlight perceived or genuine inadequacies. Although the participants have benefited from changes in education, employment and life circumstances, it is identified as a theme in this research that may need more consideration.

It is usual for adolescents to want to belong to a community and to have kinship with peers. However, to have the identity of dyslexia will often put them apart from their friends and 'other' them. Although the participants were reluctant to frame this as bullying, and did not use that term during any of the conversations, all apart from Amanda spoke about teasing and receiving unkind comments from other children.

The participants of this research did not disclose that they were bullied as children or as adults, nevertheless they described been teased or been anxious about getting teased. However, several studies (Scott, 2004; Edwards, 1996; and Alexander-Passe; 2010, 2012, 2015a) refer to exclusion from peer groups and bullying to be a common experience and that this is due to their learning differences. Anxiety caused by the participants' working and learning differences was cited several times in the conversations, especially by Georgia and Karen. Indeed, all the participants eluded to varying degrees of unease and worry as a result of having dyslexia.

5.10 Coping Strategies

Conscious or unconscious coping strategies devised by the participants were varied in approach and in efficacy. Jonathan and Selena spoke about the additional provision gained from attending a specialist support group. This was the only time in the conversations that any of the participants spoke about been given or taught strategies. It appears that for Karen and Amanda coping mechanisms were a result of trial and error. Georgia's conversation saddened me as she explained her approach to failure when in school. Her coping mechanism was to withdraw from her own learning. Similarly, Jonathan spoke about his way for dealing with English lessons, which was to distance himself and disengage in lessons. These strategies are supported by the findings of Williams, et al., 2009. However this study suggests some children with dyslexia completely opt out of a subject, whereas I suggest there are different approaches to opting out.

It is important to note that as a high ability child, Amanda developed alternative methods of managing her language difficulties. She learned the sounds of shapes relying on a strong visual memory as opposed to decoding the words using phonics (Montgomery, 2003).

In studies by Prevett et al., (2013) and Kinder and Elander (2012) links are made between the ability to overcome difficulties as self-esteem develops. This could be seen in the experiences of all my participants, but in different ways and at different times of their lives. Amanda and Selena gained in confidence when they started university. Amanda's academic ability was confirmed by her success in gaining a place at Oxford University. Selena was readily accepted onto courses that suited her technical and creative strengths. For Georgia and Karen, this confidence developed during their late twenties and early thirties as they found their niche in roles that suited their strengths. It is interesting that for both women, although they felt they were in the correct career which is accounting for Karen and psychiatric nursing for Georgia, they know their struggles with learning and working were going to continue. However, they coped with this and developed ways of dealing with their daily difficulties. Georgia devised lists and took notes to aid her memory, she also gained the support of certain, chosen colleagues. Karen learned how to revise for examinations in a way that suited her.

Not only do the results of my research highlight the inconsistency between how children and young adults with dyslexia are taught coping strategies that are transferable to their adult life in work (p.68), it also demonstrates that mechanisms to deal with learning difficulties and working differences are not taught in education at any level. Furthermore, in order to achieve efficient approaches to study and to work my participants have had to create approaches that suit their temperament and their working environment, often after experiences failure or difficulty when in education and in employment.

For an opposing perspective, when the participants had job satisfaction, even if they found certain tasks difficult, they exhibited good planning skills. It could be because they wanted to achieve because they had found their vocation, even if they knew it would be a struggle at times, they found enough motivation to adapt, survive and thrive. This theory is held by Witte, et al. (1998) echoing that adults with dyslexia who had the most job satisfaction displayed superior organisational skills and greater metacognitive awareness than those who did not have job satisfaction.

5.11 Identity anxiety and impact of diagnosis

As a generalisation, the experience of receiving a formal diagnosis was a positive one for the participants. There appears to be a correlation between an early diagnosis and favourable experiences in school and beyond. When identified as a young child, the diagnosis is easier to accept as part of your identity. Also, parental support is necessary for a child to receive a formal diagnosis. This is often in the form of financial support to pay for the test, plus for the assessment to take place, parents need to give their consent. Moreover, parents will need to collaborate with schools, or as in the case with Jonathan’s mother, be the driving force to accept and understand that a child needs additional support. The relief parents feel when their child is diagnosed with a learning difference, as opposed to lacking intelligence, can be passed onto the child. In my experience as a teacher this if often the case. Young children are often unashamed and even proud of their diagnosis, where as teenagers and young adults seek to hide their diagnosis as fear of appearing different. This was the case for Jonathan who became an ‘anonymous dyslexic’ when he went to university, preferring to be the same as his peers. For Amanda and Georgia a formal diagnosis received during university came as a relief and explanation. However, Georgia had already spent her compulsory education struggling to learn. There are clear implications here for the timing of diagnosis and how the individual is supported after diagnosis. The emotions and character of each person, regardless of their age needs to be taken into account. As a child ages, their identity is in flux and so their need to feel acceptance among their peers may change. This shows that diagnosis and identity are complex and interlinked.

My participants received a formal diagnosis of dyslexia at various stages during formal education. For Jonathan and Selena an early diagnosis was sought so they have almost always had the identity of being a person with dyslexia. Both Jonathan and Selena were able to access specialist support from a very early age and this, they claim, gave them a positive view of their dyslexia and supported their learning by giving them coping strategies. Georgia, Karen and Amanda they received a diagnosis during early adulthood, so they have known they have dyslexia for longer than they have been unaware of the condition. I received a formal diagnosis in 2017 and as suggested by Alexander-Passe (2015) this has given me less opportunity to access additional support in education and in employment. This confirms the theory by Glazzard and Dales (2013) that an early diagnosis of dyslexia may help to establish a positive self-image. However, Leitão, et al., (2017) disagree with this assumption. In their research some participants found diagnosis to be an encumbrance, as dyslexia was known to be a life-long condition; for others the diagnosis explained their difficulties and this felt encouraging.

Like Georgia, Jonathan and Karen were initially considered to have low intellect. However, since a diagnosis of dyslexia negated this, Jonathan had more years in formative and early education than Karen and Georgia to benefit from this knowledge. For Georgia and Karen their negative experiences and an incorrectly given identity as a child of low intelligence would have impacted on their self-esteem and understanding of their own ability to learn. MacDonald (2009) suggests that a diagnosis of dyslexia can be experienced as a positive label, replacing that of 'low intelligence'. This is also corroborated by Glazzard (2012) who states that a lack of diagnosis can leave children feeling vulnerable and unable to understand why they find reading and writing a struggle compared to their peers. According to Osmond (1996, p.21) 'the worst problem any dyslexic has to face is not reading, writing or even spelling, but a lack of understanding'. It is worth considering an early diagnosis framed in a positive light is more beneficial that the stigma of other incorrect and negative labels. Results from this research show that an early diagnosis of dyslexia, sensitively and appropriately explained to child and when teamed with supportive parents and teachers is a positive experience. To support this finding Lawrence (1996, p.x1) refers to how ‘people’s levels of achievement are influenced by how they feel about themselves (and vice-versa)’. When a child or young adult is diagnosed with dyslexia, actions should be put into place that help support their education and learning. However, there is rarely a focus on the emotional impact and mental well-being of the child or young person (Burden and Burdett, 2007) and this was reflected in this research.

Although Amanda and I have several decades between our diagnoses we were both successful in education and understood ourselves to be considered intelligent by society. I feel and Amanda states that a diagnosis explains certain behaviour and characteristics, but it has not prevented us from academic achievement. This said, for me a diagnosis earlier in my life may have helped me to understand certain characteristics of my learning and behaviour. On reflection I understand that my dyslexia has presented itself during many times, but I have developed strategies to compensate. However, studying at Doctoral level has been the first time in my education that I have really felt the need for additional understanding, if not support. I concede that Preston, et al (1996, p. 102) comments are a true reflection of my recent experience in that ‘mature students may face much greater difficulty, in first identifying that they are dyslexic and then securing the help that they need to succeed.’

5.12 Reflection

Despite this, I do not wish my Doctorate to be easier to achieve than for my peers who do not have dyslexia. I do not want any changes made to the qualification process, as I feel it would, for me, diminish my achievement. In reality this means I am making gaining a Doctorate more difficult for myself.

5.13 Identity, behaviour and labels

Jonathan, Georgia and Karen mentioned that they exhibited behaviour at some point during school that was detrimental to their learning and to the learning of others. Jonathan states that, while he couldn’t be unequivocal that his bad behaviour was due to his dyslexia, he explained that, for English lessons he was in the bottom set and messed around a lot with other children. However, his behaviour was good in mathematics, where he was in the top set. Reflecting the comments of Karen and Georgia, Jonathan suggests that inability to understand leads to disinterest and then to disruptive behaviour. I would take this further and suggest this is due to boredom. Behaviour that is unconducive to learning could be a way of externalising frustration associated with learning difficulties. It could also be the coexistence of dyslexia with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) as has been proposed in the focus of several research groups (Arnold, et al., 2005; Carroll, et al., 2005; Dykman and Ackerman, 1991; Heiervang. Stevenson and Lund, et al., 2001; Willcutt and Pennington, 2000a). However, apart from Karen, none of the participants mentioned the familial characteristics of ADHD.

Several studies (Dahle, and Knivsberg, 2013; Achenbach and Rescorla 2001; Boetsch, Green, and Pennington, 1996) focussing on the behaviour of children with dyslexia, examine the occurrence of internalised and externalised behaviour. Achenbach and Rescorla (2001) categorise internalised and externalised behaviour equating to total behaviour which can include social problems. They define internalising behaviour relating to the ‘self’ which exhibits as anxiety, depression and withdrawal. Externalised behaviour is defined as aggression, rule breaking and conflict. While Jonathan and Karen speak about displaying externalising behaviour while at school, they do not mention this as their conduct as an adult. Georgia spoke candidly of withdrawing from her own education and becoming disruptive in class as a way of coping with her perceived low ability. However, apart from Amanda, all the participants mentioned internalising behaviour while at school, which has continued to some extent into adulthood. I do not have the memories and opinions of my participants’ parents or teachers for this research, however, in the report ‘Internalizing externalizing and attention problems in dyslexia’ by Dahle and Knivsberg (2018), it is proposed that teachers have identified external incidents such as high instances of attention problems, withdrawal and social problems in children with dyslexia as opposed to children without this condition. Further to this they state that parents observed high internalised behaviour in their children with dyslexia. Studies by Humphrey and Mullins (2002b) and Glazzard and Dale (2013) suggest that children with dyslexia tend to have a poor internal locus of control. The result of this is that they attribute their failure to themselves and their success to others. This was reflected in Georgia's comments about accrediting her ability to complete a university course due to the support of her mother as opposed to her own ability. Reading Selena's and Amanda's reflections, it is difficult to conclude if their achievement was as a result of their mothers' support, as they suggest, or if it was their determination and ability. It is likely that both are interrelated and both are necessary for a child to achieve and to be content.

The child with dyslexia can often exhibit behaviour that could be considered disruptive to their own education and to the education of others. This is often a symptom of their inability to deal with struggle, failure and difference. Commenting on internalised and externalised behaviours, Leitão (et al., 2017) argue that, in an educational setting, internalising behaviours and emotions were reported by children with dyslexia more frequently that externalised behaviour. This conflicts with my research findings as the participants talk about exhibiting externalised behaviour in school.

5.14 To be considered disabled

Jonathan, Georgia and Karen spoke about finding a niche and settling into stable jobs in which they remained for a number of years. Here they felt comfortable, could make secure relationships where they were able to disclose their dyslexia to others and gain peer support and understanding. They considered their difficulties due to dyslexia a reason for remaining with the same employer for extended periods of time. This stability could hamper their ability to reach their potential, gain promotion, a higher income and further job satisfaction. Despite the Equality Act 2010 stating that applicants and employees with disabilities should not be discriminated against during the whole application process, completing application forms and writing a covering letter can seem daunting. The statement from the Equality Act 2010 requires the applicant to have the confidence to disclose at the beginning of the process. It also invites the applicant to identify as disabled, a classification none of the participants were comfortable adopting. Although the participants understand they learn in a different way to most, and that their functional skills may need modification or support, they understood that to recognise themselves as disabled would be describing their situation in an extreme way. To identify as disabled was considered to be disingenuous to individuals who do meet the official definition, but at the same time, the participants felt they were not the same as the majority of people and may, at times need adjustment accordingly. Once again to identify as disabled is understand oneself to be in a negative situation. The definition does not support any positivity, but clearly states that is it has a ‘substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities’ (www.gov.uk, 2010). Although dyslexia, along with dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are categorised as an impairment in the Equality Act 2010 guidance, when read alongside the other examples of disability, I question if dyslexia is incorrectly defined and requires a more moderate specification. Georgia states how she would be embarrassed to describe herself as disabled. Amanda felt to categorise her as disabled for work purposes to be ‘farcical’, both considering the label to be both exaggerated and demeaning to individuals who do meet the standards for the title disabled.

The participants in this study rejected the notion of disability to describe their condition. They felt it was negative and demeaning to those individuals with what they considered proper and true disabilities. The participants also felt discouraged from disclosing their dyslexia when applying for jobs as they did not consider themselves to be eligible for the title ‘disabled’. Despite clear guidance regarding the definition and treatment of people with dyslexia in the Equality Act 2010, the participants of this research felt uncomfortable and out of place with the suggested identity.

5.15 Summary and concluding thoughts

Searching within the detailed particularities of these narratives has released individual stories that, prior to the conversations, I would not have been able to speculate on. Listening to Jonathan, Karen, Georgia, Selena and Amanda has enabled me to determine generalities of experiences and isolate patterns. As I sift through their rich and divergent experiences, I have been able to adjust the lens from microscopic to telescopic, seeing the big picture without losing or ignoring detail. However, at this point in the thesis the shift is on the overview and the original.

It is unsurprising that parental support is important to children's success. However, here I understand the role of the mother to be significant and influential and this continued into adulthood. To my knowledge this has not been identified in any other research. Buswell Griffiths, Norwich and Burden (2007) investigated parent-professional relationships with a particular focus on mothers of children with dyslexia. However, that was the focus of their study, and, unlike them, I did not have any pre-conversation suppositions.

Having trusted and understanding colleagues was an important factor for the career success and security of Karen, Jonathan and Georgia. These participants all spoke about when to disclose and to whom has been particularly important and also a cause of anxiety because they could not know how their disclosure was going to be received.

I was unprepared for the depth of feeling of anxiety expressed by some of the participants, in particular Georgia. The way feelings of embarrassment and humiliation are held saddens me.

5.16 Reflection - how I have emotionally managed this study

For most of the time I have just 'got on with it', but the continuous need to reflect on my dyslexia and the dyslexia of others has had an impact on me emotionally – how could it not? But I still don't want 'it' to define me. Dyslexia is part of my identity but it isn't my complete identity. I suppose doing this study has impacted in several ways. I feel I am more intelligent, I know much more about education, but also about other things too. It's not just about education; I'm much more political than I was, I can engage more in a debate without feeling I don't have a valid opinion. Or I'm happy to keep quiet. I don't need to have extra attention. At work, because people know that I'm doing this and also because I can speak with confidence about learning, I have credibility. I get asked for advice. Some parents at school know what I'm doing. I had one Mum say how proud she was of me. It means I'm not just a DT teacher. Not that I don't mind that, but it's how I'm perceived I suppose. I was reading about Neo-Liberalism in the library, how did that happen? How did the daughter of an illiterate plasterer and a non-English speaker get to do this?

Now I'm coming to the end of the course I'm worried about what I am going to do after. I'm so used to studying, to learning. Spending days in the library. I like academia. Learning junkie.

I've got my Final Review in a few weeks. I'm feel a bit more prepared for it that I was for the First Review. I left that completely numb after that. I was asked questions about my work – probably quite simple questions. I didn't understand anything they were asking me. I felt so foolish. Like I was in the wrong place. I didn't even understand the questions, let alone be able to give an answer. I think I'm ok now. We will see. Maybe I will be knocked down again. Some days I think I know, then other days I'm not so sure. Maybe that's wisdom. Questioning yourself constantly. That's what I'm doing. Teasing out answers to my own questions. Thinking. Knowledge has made me apprehensive and hesitant. I thought it was supposed to be empowering.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Preamble – my reflection

As with many theses, this one is dedicated to the author's parents. Mum and I shared a craving to learn. Sometimes this was through books, other times it would be visiting places such as museums. We would also go to craft courses, attending different classes, comparing what we had made at the end of each session. As I conclude this research I realise just how important her contribution is to this thesis. She is 95, lives alone, but is far from lonely. She has a hugely supportive family, friends and community support. As she has aged her vision has deteriorated and she can no longer read. However, it is her love of reading, of knowledge and of the repositories of this knowledge – libraries, which nurtured my love of study. Mum is not an intellectual or an academic, none the less, that does not make her that much different from the scholars I am surrounded by in the university library. Mum was also a listener.

Dad was a maker, a creator, an inventor, a worker. In the house I was born and grew up in, he had a shed. Not like a little wooden B&Q shed, but a big, brick building with a circular saw in the centre of the floor and a wood burning stove. My brother and I spent a lot of time in that shed. Peter would make things, sometimes dangerous things that chopped the ends of his fingers off. We had the freedom to potter and mooch around. Saws, wood scraps and chisels were toys as familiar to me as my dolls. Dad didn't need the written word. He created a life devoid of the need to write and replaced it with technical expertise and creativity. Without Dad I would not have been about to write this thesis as an auto/biography. His heritable inability with words has given voice to my words.

The nurture and the nature.

6.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this concluding chapter is to reflect on my research, draw the research together and to a close. I consider the opening of the final chapter to be a timely place to reflect on the original research questions. My aim was to gain a deeper understanding of:

- How adults with dyslexia experience incidents throughout their life that may be as a result of having dyslexia
- Coping strategies they may have been taught or developed
- How they feel about their dyslexia and how it impacts on their identity
- The impact dyslexia has on emotional wellbeing and behaviour
- How and to whom they disclose their dyslexia and the impact this has had on their lives.

To address these points, first I will return to the literature in the light of the participants' experiences, and I will establish the extent to which their life stories echo the ideas critically summarised in the literature review. Next, I will outline the limitations of this research and propose additional topics for future research. Finally I will identify the contributions made by this research to the field of auto/biographical narrative inquiry and of the life-stories of people with dyslexia.

6.2 Returning to the literature

It is important to reflect on the life-stories in this research and to understand how living with a learning difference can cause difficulty working, learning and living in our literacy heavy society. However, as was told many times in the life-stories of Karen, Jonathan, Selena, Amanda and Georgia, I return to the point that the condition of dyslexia is much more than a difficulty limited to reading, writing and spelling and should not be restricted to an educational construct (Carawan, et al., 2015). The participants in this research can only experience their lives through the lens of a person with dyslexia. However, we live in a world constructed largely by and for people without dyslexia and it is in this context that the participants and I must narrate and build our experiences. Unlike many articles that investigate the experiences of people with dyslexia (McNaulty, 2003; Tanner, 2009; Goldberg, 2003; Gerber, 2012) my participants did not consider their dyslexia to be a completely negative characteristic. Selena, Jonathan, Amanda and I accept the difficulties we face but appreciate having dyslexia has its positive elements. At times, having to re-think how to work and learn or strive harder to achieve the same as our peers has made us more flexible as workers and resilient in life. Further to this, I am the keeper of these life-stories. I am immersed in these accounts and I am able to understand the parallels and dissimilarities of their experiences with reference to my own.

It could be argued I am not the best person to analyse the experiences of my participants, because I too have dyslexia, therefore I cannot differentiate between a 'dyslexic experience' and a 'non-dyslexic experience'. Furthermore, as told by my participants, dyslexia presents in many ways (Lawrence, 2009). For example, Selena has excellent directional memory skills and my sense of direction is limited; Amanda learned to read at a very young age, Georgia and Karen did not. Just as there is not a generic description for dyslexia neither is there a generic dyslexia identity. Each participant has constructed their identity through their life-experiences. Furthermore, the neurological, experiential, social, educational and psychological experiences of my participants are varied, but these aspects continue to be interconnecting and reciprocally supportive (Pavlidis and Miles, 1981). I maintain my view that current methods of diagnosis mean accurate identification is problematic, as the risk factors for falling on the dyslexia continuum (Yu, et al., 1998) may be a combination of genetic, neurobiological and cognitive. The co-occurring way in which dyslexia displays itself and the contributing factors to its origin mean that there are an infinite number of indicators.

Although all of my participants were educated in England, their experiences varied on a micro level. It is true to say that to achieve a diagnosis the participants had to fail (Poole, 2003) in some way. Certainly, this failure had a lasting impact on many of the participants, in particular Georgia and Karen who diagnosed later in their education. As Riddick (2010) suggests parents who have an understanding and experience of dyslexia are often able to identify this in their children. Knowing dyslexia is heritable has allowed all of the participants to recognise challenges their own children may face (Elbro, et al, 1998). It has also given them a heightened awareness of observable characteristics to look out for as their children develop. The feeling of being different was heightened by a diagnosis of dyslexia with some participants, and certainly, when in primary education, they disliked this. The responses of Karen, Jonathan, Georgia and Selena confirm the findings of Reid (2016) and Cooley (1971) who are embarrassed by their differences preferring to conceal them.

University posed different challenges for my participants. While Jonathan and Amanda flourished, it was a different experience for Georgia and Selena. As stated by Richardson and Wydell (2003), students with dyslexia are more likely to leave their course in the first year. Georgia struggled to find a course that complemented her way of learning and her personality and changed path several times before returning to psychiatric nursing. On reflection, my experience was similar. On leaving Sixth Form College I embarked on a social sciences degree, which was not in accordance with my previous educational experience or my personality. I found sitting still for lectures very difficult and transferred onto a technical and practical course after six weeks. Georgia and Karen comment on the provision they were given as students with dyslexia. In line with the findings of Byrne (2018) Georgia was given extra time to complete assessments and also given financial support. However, she was not offered any other guidance or support that would have required personal and human interaction. On receiving and understanding a diagnosis of dyslexia my participants understood their need to learn and to be taught differently from their peers without dyslexia (Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2002; Burden, 2005; Sousa, 2005), however, this adaptation of teaching style, as far as they know, was not forthcoming.

The participants’ rejection of the term ‘disability’ to describe themselves powerfully illustrates the extent to which terminology can isolate and pathologise (Glazzard, 2013) children and adults with dyslexia. There is much talk of the need to be a removal of the medicalised description of dyslexia, however, if dyslexia is genetic and neurological, is it not also medical?

The literature uncovered the theory that people with dyslexia often display an enhanced level of oral communication skills (Logan, 2009; Everatt, et al., 1999: Gilger and Olulande, 2013). However, none of the participants articulated this trait. It could be that my participants did not recognise this positive trait in themselves, or the small sample in this research did not support this observation.

6.3 Limitations of research

In this explorative qualitative study, the data was taken from six self-selected participants. These participants responded to emails sent out to people in my 'society'. Further to this one of the participants is a close relative. Goodson and Sikes (2001) do not recommend carrying out research with family members due to the potential for them to be cautious about what they say during interview. However, to mitigate this view, Georgia's life-story was honest and sincere, and she gave some of the most absorbing narrative of this research.

No attempt was made to secure equal numbers of men and women, this was partly due to the individuals who responded to the call to participate and also due to time limitations. The data was collected in one visit to each participant and there were no formal follow up conversations or interviews. Future research should consider involving groups that are not part of my life, and from minority or marginalised areas of society such as those from the LGBTQI+ community, BAEM groups, or those from a wider socioeconomic group. It would be useful to understand if the experiences of my participants reflected or indeed differed in a positive or negative way from a wider cohort of people with dyslexia. From my searches of academic papers, I found very few articles highlighting BAEM experiences of dyslexia. Black poet Benjamin Zephaniah (2015) approaches race and dyslexia similarly, stating that 'if someone can't understand dyslexia it's their problem. In the same way, if someone oppresses me because of my race I don't sit down and think, "How can I become white?" It's not my problem, it's theirs and they are the ones who have to come to terms with it.' However, Robinson (2013) balances Zephaniah's confident position, suggesting that due to the lack of Black male students in higher and further education, disability and racial problems continue for these learners. My search for study of the LGBTQI+ community and dyslexia proved even sparser, and I was unable to find any academic information relating to this group.

As patterns of inquiry emerged through the structure of the studied experiences, stories morphed into narrative. Each individual account was contextualised as part of the multiple research interviews (Riessman, 2008). The participants told me their stories situated in a time and place. I have collected a small number stories, and through listening to these stories, the big picture can unfold and give meaning to our understanding of leaning differences. However, these stories will be constantly re-structured as they are re-told and re-experienced. The narratives are told and interpreted by me, but under different circumstances, through different lenses, perhaps narrated in a different way. Elements of experiences were told to me, but if these same experiences were told to someone else, they would have differed in telling and in interpretation.

6.4 Implications for practice

There are several findings of this thesis that I feel are pertinent to educational and employment practice. I refer back to Poole (2003) who states that a child, or adult, will have had to fail to become recognised as having dyslexia. The problem here, I feel is twofold. Firstly, teachers in nursery school to university need to be aware of the indicators of dyslexia and fully understand that it is a condition that impacts on much more than literary skills. This is clearly a training issue. While there is an understanding of the causes, signs and support for dyslexia within schools, it needs to be both wider reaching and current. Furthermore, it should be comprehensively distributed and not seen as the domain of SEND departments or for those who teach literacy heavy subjects such as English and history. Secondly, a formal diagnosis by an educational psychologist is costly. Often schools, state or independently funded, are reluctant to pay for this. Not only is the initial assessment a financial burden, but once a formal diagnosis is gained, the educational establishment is obliged to act upon it. This too can be a pull on resources. Therefore, it is not always in the school’s interest to gain a diagnosis for a child. Unless the cost of diagnosis is vastly reduced it will be out of reach for many families. To mitigate this, we could place less emphasis on a formal identification. If those of us in education and the general population are more aware of the signs of dyslexia we will be able to identify it and adjust our teaching accordingly. Often good teaching for a child or young adult with dyslexia, or any other additional educational need, is good teaching for all. Teachers should not see adaptive pedagogy as a burden, but more to improve their practice. It is interesting that a qualitative study carried out by Burns and Bell (2010) found that teachers with dyslexia were better placed to understand their students' negative experiences in education. Once a child or an adult has a formal diagnosis there is then the decision of who to tell. For a child, there is little if any negotiation here. It is the parents' decision to disclose, not the child. I would like the child to be more involved in this decision. If inappropriately addressed, having the label of dyslexia is of little use at all, indeed it can be negative. The diagnosis needs to be explained with care to the parents, educators and to the child, with an emphasis on the positive attributes.

Schools need to enable children with dyslexia to have a positive sense of self. Facilitating self-esteem in children and young adults has become part of the norm and I would seek to refine this common-place practice as a process to build the confidence of marginalised groups within the conventional classroom setting. This avoids excluding or withdrawing groups of children such as those with learning difficulties, thus making them feel less 'othered'. This indirect approach would benefit all children and help classrooms to become more inclusive and empathetic environments.

Finally, self-disclosure in employment should be encouraged. However, if an individual fears a negative response, they are less likely to disclose and will be unable to gain appropriate support. The anticipation of loss over gain when disclosing is a risk that individuals with dyslexia feel they need to balance (Brunswick, 2012). However, once the adult with dyslexia has accepted their learning and working difference and understands it can bring positive characteristics, they are more likely to disclose. Employers need to be more open to differing ways of working and learning and the work force needs to be more understanding and open to diversity. The label of 'disabled' needs to be discussed. The participants in this research had strong views on how they were identified and felt to be considered disabled was inappropriate. Disclosure is also tied up with identity, and it is interesting that Yeowell, et al., (2015) recommend that NHS application forms should be reviewed to encourage applicants who have dyslexia to disclose their working and learning difference, but do not identify as disabled. I feel this is a positive way forward. In order to facilitate support, employers need to know that an applicant for a job or an employee has dyslexia and that any negative traits are balanced by positive attributes.

6.5 Further research

This investigation adds to the still small body of research focusing on the life-stories of adults with dyslexia. There is still much to be learned from listening to those of us who know we have a learning difference and experience difficulties and differences first hand. This study has acknowledged the correlation between a diagnosis of dyslexia and an increase in the complexities of navigating education and employment. Furthermore, this thesis supports Tamboer et al. (2016) position that dyslexia is a much more complicated condition than many might imagine, even those of us that have it. This study has also demonstrated that by listening to adults with dyslexia a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of transitioning through childhood and early adulthood can be understood and that using their hindsight strategies can be developed for educators, parents and carers to support children and young adults to achieve their best lives.

I suggest the following areas for further research:

The literature search identified gaps in research relating to the comparisons between childhood and the adult experiences of dyslexia and this was confirmed by my own research. Investigating the differences between how adults and children internalise and externalise their behaviour when coping with a learning difference would lead to a greater understanding of how patterns of behaviour change and why, and to understand why certain behaviours stay with us through to adulthood.

The link between parental support, specifically mothers, and childhood success has shone out from this research. I am particularly interested in the relationship between the parent with dyslexia and the child with dyslexia. I feel this can be a uniquely empathetic relationship that guides and supports the child in a distinctive way. It would be useful for future research to include families, and in particular parents of children or adults with dyslexia to give a greater understanding of family dynamics. This could be used to aid and support newly diagnosed children and young adults and give appropriate family support.

Children hold very little genuine power and their voice is often silent. It would be useful to understand how they experience disclosure of their dyslexia. In addition to this an analysis of the adult experiences of disclosure would be worthwhile and add a useful body of knowledge to our understanding of how life with dyslexia is lived.

A systematic investigation of literature pertaining to adult experiences of dyslexia highlighted very little positive regard to the condition. However, my research and personal experience suggests that having dyslexia can be advantageous in certain fields such as technical and creative spheres. Dyslexia should not be necessarily associated with negative feelings of self-worth and further research could ascertain the balance of experience and feeling.

This study has helped to identify the disparity between families and individuals with educational knowledge and financial resources. I suggest longitudinal research of socioeconomic and home literacy factors to be carried out. An explicit examination using qualitative and quantitative research would be a valuable to bring understanding of the impact resources have on children and adults with dyslexia.

Although there is a very limited amount of research about dyslexia by researchers with dyslexia, this study has emphasised the advantages of auto/biographical investigation. It should give courage to current and potential researchers with learning differences or those wishing to undertake research that has a focus on life story.

6.6 Contribution to knowledge and transferability

Contributions to the field are offered from two perspectives; the method and the subject. Auto/biographical research is gaining in popularity with told life-stories an increasingly prevalent way of capturing remembered experiences in time. This reflective and reflexive approach rejects the conventions of separating self-other/public-private and allows for the researcher to have a greater self-awareness and more genuine and open collaboration with participants. However, to embark on this method, the researcher has to allow themselves to become vulnerable, with the knower becoming an intimate part of the known (Belenky, et al., 1986). Unlike the biographical contributors, the 'auto' cannot hide. Carried with this are complex ethical and moral considerations.

This thesis delivers responses to the research questions set out in Chapter 1. In doing so it has also provided further enquiries and, with gained knowledge, additional questions. Several studies (Nalavany and Carawan, 2011 and Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars, 2000) conclude with suggestions that there is a need for further research into the experiences, lives and needs of adults with dyslexia. This thesis adds to knowledge in this area and brings a richness from the detailed personal narrative of my participants. Viewing my participants through a micro-lens, despite fundamental differences in their backgrounds, similarities of themes, concerns and experiences emerge during the guided conversations. Near identical comments were made in some cases. This would suggest that many of the concerns raised are relevant across a range of settings. The use of my reflections intertwined with the academic writing offer an insight into process of thesis writing. Although this type of writing can be seen in some theses, in particular those of a sociological and qualitative nature, I am writing as participant and as researcher, and as someone with dyslexia. Where I write without correction I expose my vulnerability by giving the reader a true understanding of what it is like to be a researcher who also happens to have dyslexia.

6.7 Reflection – My learning autobiography

Eight years ago I enrolled on a Master's course. It was part time and over three years. I absolutely relished the tutorials, the lectures and the writing. I met people who inspired and tested my views. The Master's challenged me; intellectually and logistically. I could have felt stupid as a result of my dyslexia and internalised this self-stigma (Williams 2015), however, I never felt out of place with my peers.

The Master's was a means to an end. I couldn't register on the Doctorate until I had a Master's. On the day the Master's officially ended I was interviewed for the Doctorate.. I still didn't know the result of my Master's although I assume Lynn did.

Studying for the Doctorate has pushed me, at times, to my intellectual limit. I wanted it to do that, I didn't want it to be easy. What I wasn't expecting was how I differed, as a learner and in my confidence to my Ed. D. peers. I was in a mixed ability class and I was the special needs kid at the bottom of the class. The one that didn't understand, who couldn't read the big words and didn't know what it all meant. But no one knew. I wasn't going to tell them. How could I disclose? I didn't know what the consequences would be. One of my coping mechanisms is to persevere (Goldberg et al., 2013). I don't give up and I think I'm going to make it, to achieve my Doctorate.

This thesis has allowed me to develop the writer in myself. I have not been a silent author (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1996) nor have I been passive in my contributions. My active voice and my life story are woven throughout this thesis. This work has been very personal, revealing, as women tend to 'a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanations and understanding' (Jelinek, 1980, p,15). Like many others who have embarked on achieving the highest academic qualification, my experience has been filled with contradictions, pressures (Chapman Hoult, 2009a) and at times intense confusion and self-doubt. However, as the number of undergraduate students with dyslexia grow, so the number of successful Master's students, Doctorate and Ph.D. students will increase.

I am satisfied and honoured to add to the body of people who experience difficulties in education and who also achieve academic success.

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Appendix 1 – Creating my own font

YourFonts
ADD A PERSONAL TOUCH TO YOUR COMPUTER

template
www.yourfonts.com
Page 1 of 2

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
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Appendix 2 Literature search

Library Search: dyslexia

	Total Results	Academic journals	Reports	Magazines	Books	Publishers	Publications	Content provider
Dyslexia	41 227	37 138	1 970	1 681	32	50	49	44
Dyslexia adults	7 135	6 850	360	138	7	50	49	31
Dyslexia disclosure	156	143	11	7	0	41	47*	21
Dyslexia anxiety	415	380	32	18	0	50	50	21
Dyslexia mothers	432	384	25	18	1	50	50	22
Dyslexia employment	308	231	20	40	1	51	50	23
Dyslexia genetics	2 825	2 714	75	80	0	48	49	256

*19 of these nursing, medical focus. 2 Scandinavian. 4 European.

Google Scholar

	Total results
Dyslexia	284 000
Dyslexia adults	97 700
Dyslexia disclosure	12 200
Dyslexia anxiety	39 200
Dyslexia mothers	33 300
Dyslexia employment	28 900
Dyslexia genetics	24 800

Comparison of key literature

Title	Author	Country of origin	Date of publication	Auto/bio	Notes
An auto/biographical investigation exploring the life-stories of adults with dyslexia.	Speers, J.	England	2020	Yes	Narrative analysis of 6 adults diagnosed at various stages of life. One researcher who has dyslexia. Guided conversation – no questions. No bias regarding positive or negative experiences from the onset of meeting. Qualitative research.
Emotional experience with dyslexia and self-esteem: the protective role of perceived family support in late adulthood.	Carawan, L.W., Nalavany, B. A., and Jenkins, C.	USA	2014/2015	No	Web based survey designed for adults with self-reported dyslexia. Quantitative. Several researchers. Focus on later adulthood.
Adults with Dyslexia, an Invisible Disability: The Mediational Role of Concealment on Perceived Family Support and Self-Esteem	Nalavany. B. L., Carawan, L. W. and Sauber, S.	USA	2013	No	Cross sectional web based study designed for adults with dyslexia. Specifically designed to identify the experiences that facilitate or hinder living a successful and satisfying life
Student Perspectives Adult Dyslexia and the 'conundrum of failure'	Tanner, K.	Australia	2009	No	Looks at failure from the onset. 3 year qualitative study. Participants taken from course designed for adults with dyslexia. Focussed discussions and individual profiles of experiences during adulthood.

					Initial questions relate to disclosure. Thematic analysis of 5 sub-types of disclosure identified in literature.
Dyslexia and the Life Course	McNaulty, M.	USA	2003	No	Narrative analysis of 12 adults who were diagnosed as children. Used a checklist of questions/themes. Life story – created by researcher from transcripts. 1998 start of study. No consideration of positive aspects of dyslexia. Several researchers.
Predictors of success in individuals with learning difficulties: a qualitative analysis of a 20 year longitudinal study.	Goldberg, R. J., Higgins, E. L., Raskind, M. H. and Herman, K. L.	USA	2003	No	Qualitative, ethnographic interview designed to elicit responses. Specific questions. Several researchers. Longitudinal – 20 year period.
Five Describing Factors of Dyslexia Journal of Learning	Tamboer, P., Vorst, H. and Oort, J.	Netherlands	2016	No	Large battery of tests and questionnaires. 446 participants, all psychology students. Quantitative.
The Impact of Learning Disabilities on Adulthood: A Review of the Evidenced-Based Literature for Research and Practice in Adult Education.	Gerber, P.	USA	2012	No	Qualitative and quantitative. Balance of ages. Suggests more research needed with older adults.

Appendix 3 – email notification of results of on-line dyslexia screening.

From: (@canterbury.ac.uk)
Sent: 20 June 2013 03:01
To: Speers, Julie (j.speers642@canterbury.ac.uk)
Subject: Dyslexia Report Funding

Dear Julie

Thank you for completing the dyslexia screening form and for giving us a good picture of your learning style.

You do show some significant signs of Dyslexia / a learning difference. We would suggest that you explore this in more depth by being assessed by an Educational Psychologist. However, dyslexia testing costs between £300 - £350 and sadly the University's Access to Learning Fund (ALF) is now spent and we are not able to offer you money towards the cost of an assessment.

If you are able to fund the test yourself we can provide you with details of educational psychologists. If you keep the receipt you will be able to apply for SOME of the money towards the test when the ALF opens again in September.

There are other resources which you should utilise in the meantime, e.g. Study Skills, please see the attached document. We can also enrol you on the CLIC Learn for Students with Specific Learning Differences if you wish - please let us know.

Kind Regards

Z

Disability Adviser (Dyslexia and Neuro-diversity) Student Support & Guidance,

AHG59 Canterbury Christ Church University Augustine House, North Holmes Road
Canterbury
CT1 1QU
Direct Tel Line: 01227 863057
Secretary: 01227 782576

Student Support and Guidance welcomes your feedback (positive as well as negative) to ensure we are meeting student need and to improve our service. If you wish to comment or provide feedback on our services, please email secretary.ssg@canterbury.ac.uk putting 'feedback' in the subject line. Thank you.

Appendix 4 - My reflections

Disclosing to colleagues

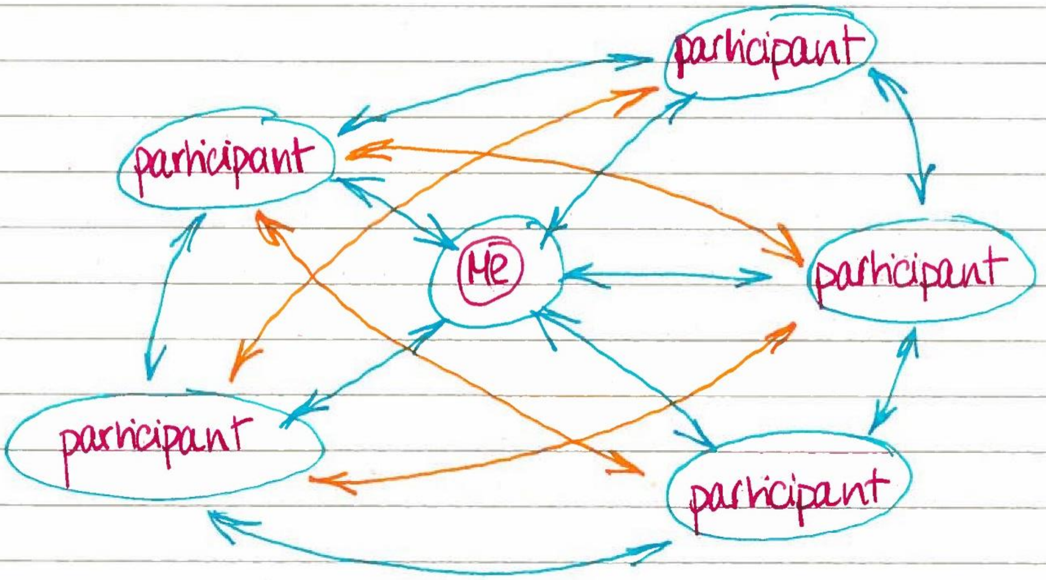
There was no sign of dyslexia at all until – well I don’t think there was – until I was a lot older. There were things that I did or things that I couldn’t do, but I just thought everyone was like that. Or for some tings it was just me. Then I had a conversraion with my niece, becca. She is 15 years younger than me. My older brither’s daughter. She was formally diagnosed with dyslexia at uni. We were chatting about how we use directions and how we read. It was a real reverlation because there was someone else who did things the same as me. We were talking about road signs and road numbers – this was pre-satnav. Isued to and still do, remember the shapes of the road number, like the A303. Its blobs and symmetrical. I wouldn’t remember the sounds of the letters and numbers. And she did that too. There were a whole load of other things that she did that were the same as me, but things that other normal epole didn’t do. I suppose it was that that got me thinking more about dyslexia. I was teaching, so it was spoken about then too. But always to do with reading and my reading was always fine. But I think now it wasn’t. and still isn’t. I cant read long words, so if they are words that I havenet heard before but are made up of lots of sylabulls I get the syllabuls or the letters in the wrong order. But it doesn’t matter when Im reading unless its outloud. Because when Im reading I just remember the shape of the word so I don’t sound out the word. As longa as I don’t read outload oits ok. Otherwose I have to practice. I sued to have ajob doing transition from primary to secondary school. I loved it, but I used to have to read out all the names of the children and we had qiute a few from overseas. I would have to be coached. The Polish names were really hard. I can still remember one was Szynchez, and Cathey who helped me used to get me to think of Szynchez rhykmes with hinges. The I changed it so the form tutors had to read the names out, they didn’t seem to struggle like me. It was embarrassing not to be able to pronounce words, especially epoles names, its insulting to them. Im like it with long numvers too. I can never remember numbers, I always have to write them down. Even when its the number of a book page, like 79, I will go to page 97 instead. Unless I really concentrate. Dates and times I cant do either. I get them mixed up. I have to be really careful about meetings and things or I go at the wrong time. Its ok if Im early, I just look stupid then, but if Im leate that’s really bod.

If its important I have to check and recheck times and dates. I cant book travel tickets easily either. Especially flights, if its more than one flight with connections and time zones. Neil has to check them I have to draw little diagrams, and sytill get him to check. I lie twenty four hour clock rather than tweleva dn I cant read a digital clock. I have to convert the numbers into sounds an dinto a shape of the analogue clockm face in my head. Sometimes I have to invigilate exams. I had to do the special needs kids last term. Some of them get 50 extra time, some of them get 25 percent extra time and they had different tests to do too. It was anighmare. I had to draw lots of little clocks I was sure i\ was going to get it worong, + would have been so unfair on the children.

There asre some tings Im goo at though. Better than average people. Like patterns, I can see patters in things, not just design and colours aloythough that helps, but in words and numbers. So I was good at sorting children into teacing classes and form groups, I could see to put certin children togthere or others apart and when doing stetting for ability, I could do that easily too. I sued to analyse all the CATS resulst. I loved that. I could see if children might be EAl or dyslexic just by looking ate the results. It all patterns. I think that is why I lkike analysising quantative data and sorting into graphs and charts and stuff. I like finding the patters. When I did the dyslexia diagnoses test the man said I wa sin the top 1 persncet of epole with accuracy and spedd when it came to pattern making and recognition. Its ahfrd work sometimes, I never know if its bets toe tell anyone or not. Sometimes I jusyt feel like an idiot, but you jstt have to get on woth it.

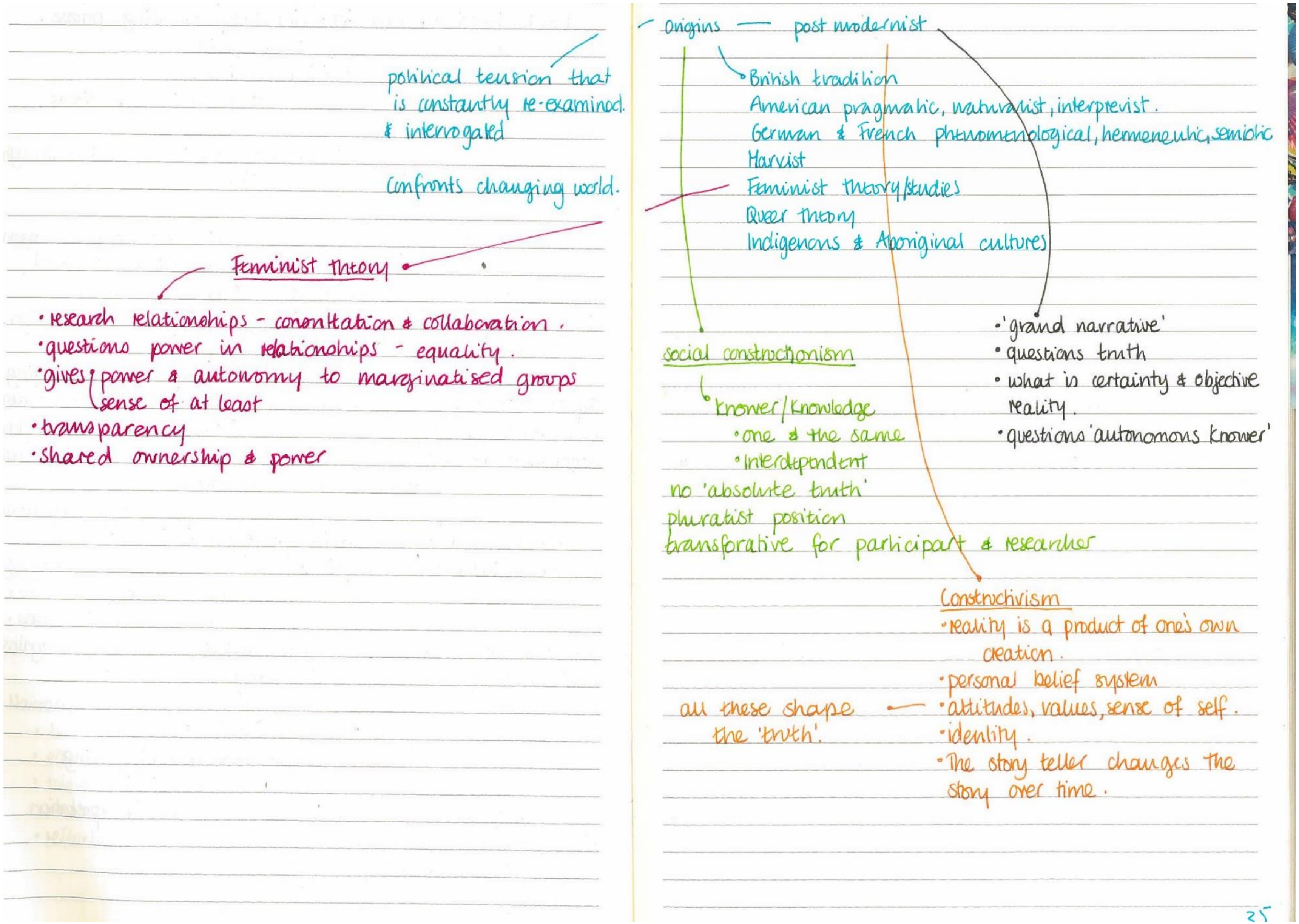
Appendix 5 - Showing the co-relationships between researcher and participant.

auto/bio dialogical interaction. Silent conversations.



How the stories transverse the research.
Although this is not a group activity, as the research progresses
it becomes more of a group dialogue. Even if the event
is not authorised by the other participants.

Appendix 6 - Analysing possible theories.



political tension that
is constantly re-examined.
& interrogated

Confronts changing world.

Feminist theory

- research relationships - consultation & collaboration.
- questions power in relationships - equality.
- gives { power & autonomy to marginalised groups
  sense of at least
- transparency
- shared ownership & power

Origins — post modernist

- British tradition
  American pragmatic, naturalist, interpretivist.
  German & French phenomenological, hermeneutic, semiotic
  Marxist
  Feminist theory/studies
  Queer theory
  Indigenous & Aboriginal cultures

- 'grand narrative'
- questions truth
- what is certainty & objective reality.
- questions 'autonomous knower'

social constructionism

- knower/knowledge
  - one & the same
  - interdependent

no 'absolute truth'
pluralist position
transforative for participant & researcher

Constructivism

- reality is a product of one's own creation.
- personal belief system
- attitudes, values, sense of self.
- identity.
- The story teller changes the story over time.

all these shape the 'truth'.

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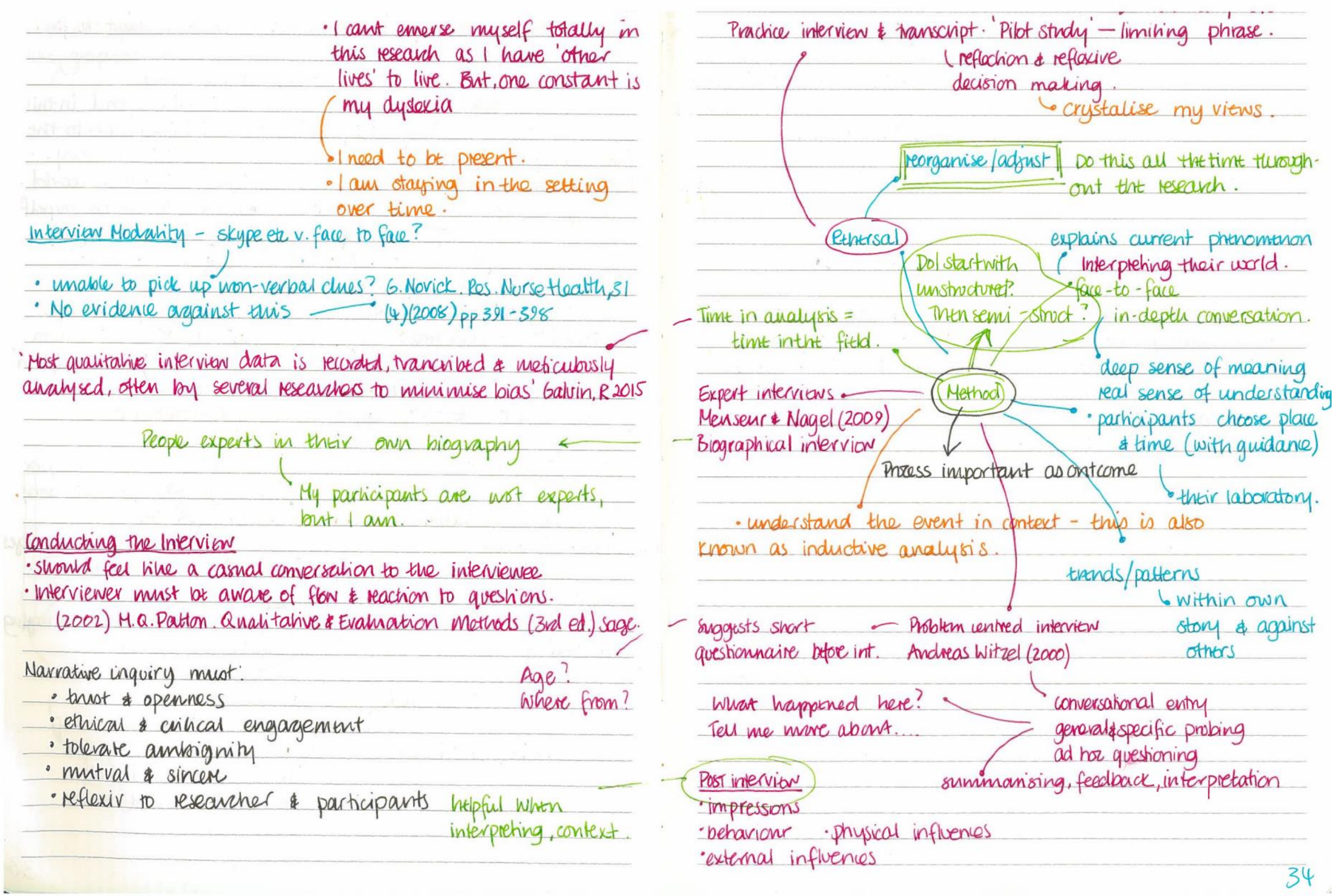
Appendix 7 - Exploring the method



- I cant emerse myself totally in this research as I have 'other lives' to live. But, one constant is my dyslexia
- I need to be present.
- I am staying in the setting over time.

Interview Modality - skype etc v. face to face?

- unable to pick up non-verbal clues? G. Novick. Res. Nurse Health, 31 (4)(2008) pp 391-398
- No evidence against this

'Most qualitative interview data is recorded, trancribed & meticulously analysed, often by several researchers to minimise bias' Galvin, R 2015

People experts in their own biography

My participants are not experts, but I am.

Conducting the Interview

- should feel like a casual conversation to the interviewee
- Interviewer must be aware of flow & reaction to questions.

(2002) M.Q. Patton. Qualitative & Evaluation Methods (3rd ed.) Sage.

Narrative inquiry must:

- trust & openness
- ethical & critical engagement
- tolerate ambiguity
- mutual & sincere
- reflexiv to researcher & participants

helpful when interpreting, context.

Age?
Where from?

Practice interview & transcript. 'Pilot study' — limiting phrase.

reflection & reflexive decision making.

crystalise my views.

reorganise/adjust

Do this all the time throughout the research.

Rehersal

Method

Do I start with unstructured? Then semi-struct?

explains current phenomenon

Interpreting their world.

face-to-face

in-depth conversation.

deep sense of meaning

real sense of understanding

- participants choose place & time (with guidance)

their laboratory.

Time in analysis = time in the field.

Expert interviews

Menseur & Nagel (2009)

Biographical interview

Process important as outcome

- understand the event in context - this is also known as inductive analysis.

trends/patterns

within own story & against others

Suggests short questionnaire before int.

Problem centred interview

Andreas Witzel (2000)

conversational entry

general & specific probing

ad hoc questioning

summarising, feedback, interpretation

What happened here?

Tell me more about...

Post interview

- impressions
- behaviour
- physical influences
- external influences

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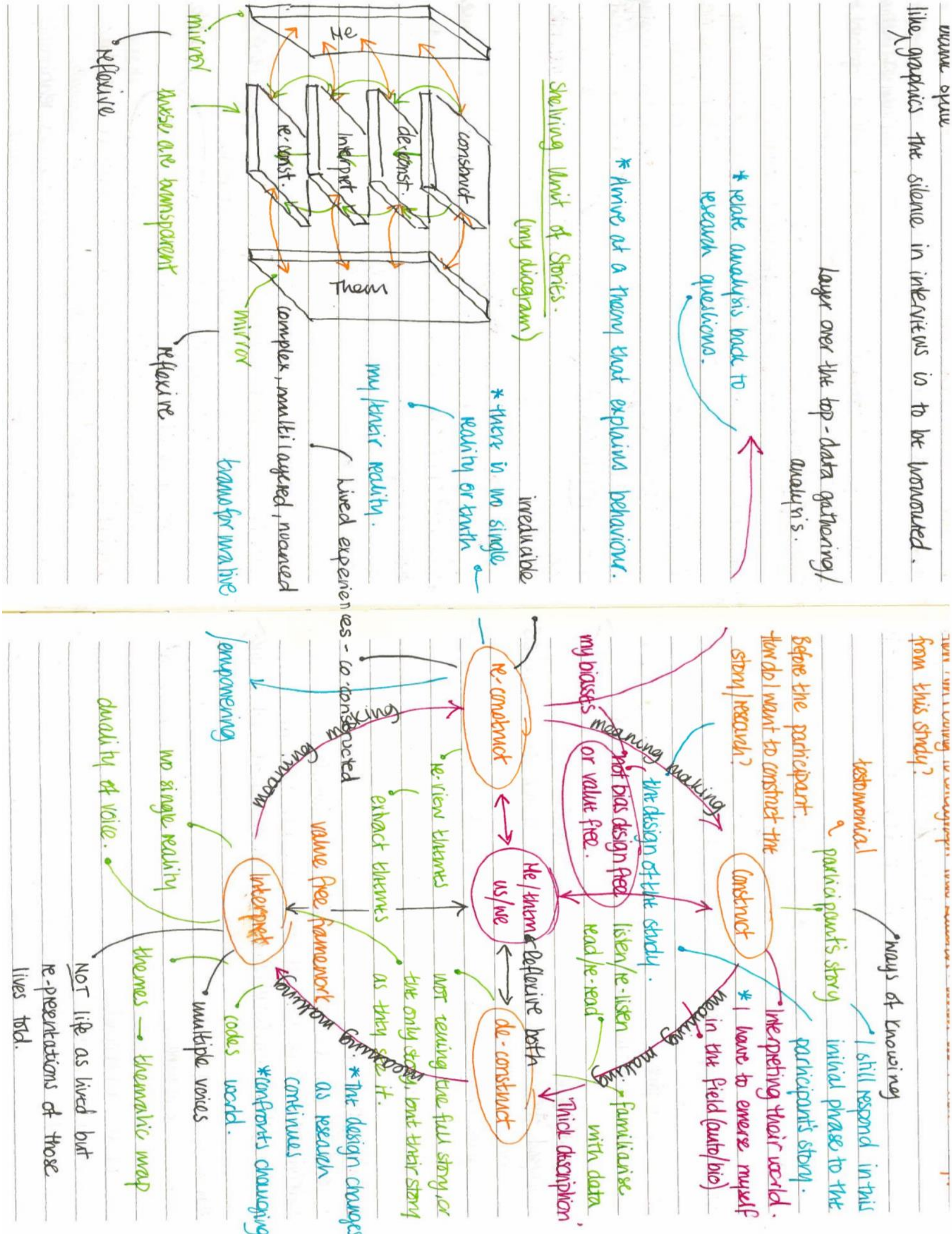
Appendix 8 - How am I going to choreograph the work? What do I want to find out from this study.



Appendix 9 - Why am I doing qualitative research?

Appendix 10 Adaptation of Creswell's strategies to validate my research

Strategy	**Explanation**	**How I have used the strategy**
Triangulation	Themes were established from several participants' views.	I entered the research without having a hypothesis regarding the themes that would emerge from the conversations. Triangulation developed as the conversations proceeded and more themes emerged.
Member checking	The participants reviewed part of the transcripts such as critical themes.	As part of the research process, the participants were offered a hard copy of the transcribed conversation. Unlike Creswell, I did not filter out critical themes but offered the full transcript. The participants were also aware they had the conversation available as an electronic file should they wish to hear this.
Rich, thick data.	Rich, thick descriptions were used to explore experiences and themes.	In the data analysis I used thick descriptions to help convey experiences, meaning and critical events. There was a dilemma here with ensuring confidentiality of the participants so their consent was sought prior to inclusion of the thick data sections.
Clarification of bias.	Explained bias as part of the method and research process.	My position as a researcher and as participant was fully explained in the thesis. My aim was to be reflective and reflexive throughout the process as part of an honest and open narrative. Comments from my own interpretation were made and identified as such.
Presentation of negative information	The life stories of the participants did not necessarily coalesce.	Although Creswell (2004) describes discrepant information as 'negative' I do not consider any of the data collected as positive or negative; it is all data and useful as way of explaining experiences. Since I did not start this research with a hypothesis,

		data that did not coalesce is not seen as negative.
Prolonged time in the field	The researcher should spend extended time in the environment that is researched.	As this is auto/biographical research, I could argue that I have spent all my life in the field. As a veteran teacher I have prolonged experience of working with children and young people with dyslexia. I have many close relatives who also have diagnoses of dyslexia and I understand how it impacts on their education, personal and work life.
Peer de-briefer	Use a person who reads and questions the research.	To bring a different opinion, I have a ‘critical friend’ who reads through and discusses my work with me. This person does not have experience of working in an educational setting, does not have dyslexia and is not a researcher. I also have two doctoral supervisors who review my work regularly.
External auditor	Someone not familiar with the researcher or the research.	External examiners as part of the doctoral process.

Appendix 11 - Summary of my participants' life stories

At this stage in the thesis, I felt it was timely to introduce the participants, in order for them to become less theoretical, and to be understood as genuine people. As I gained a greater understanding of the lives of Samuel, Jonathan, Amanda, Karen, Georgia and Selena, so I wanted the reader to appreciate and value these individuals and the stories they tell. I also used this section to re-introduce myself as a participant, giving objectivity to my contribution, which aids the reader's understanding of my position and also helped me to see myself in comparison to the other participants. When undertaking biographical research the researcher has to value and, in a sense, come to love the participants through their stories. Auto/biographical research has an extra element. Without intention, the participants have entered my consciousness and helped me to understand myself through their stories. These layers of experience are no longer separate, they have become a collective auto/biography. My participants are undeniably a purposive group and for this I do not express regret or seek to apologise. Such a small study cannot give a generalised and representative voice and it is important in understanding this research and for pursuit of future research, more of which will be written about in the Conclusion. However, it is worth surmising that by extrapolating broad themes from the particularities of experience a clearer understanding of the narrative of children and adults with dyslexia can be deduced. This is auto/biographical work and the participants reflect my life. As Gwernan-Jones (2010) claims, my identity is reflected in the identity of the participants making a bond easier to develop, and enabling a richer communication of experience to develop from the conversations. Whilst all research is biased as it is located in time and circumstances (Ezzy, 2002), here it adds depth and credibility to the narrative bringing an explanation to the frame and enlightening past experiences.

Samuel

Samuel is a 35-year-old, married British white male and a father of two children. Samuel offered to be the focus of my pilot interview and was highly useful in giving me insights into his life. I interviewed him at his home-office. He is a successful teacher of a technical subject and has a number of up-and-coming hobby businesses outside of education. Although Samuel was not formally diagnosed with dyslexia until attending university, he remembers disliking reading as early as primary school. As an adult, Samuel wants to read more as he enjoys learning, but finds concentrating and retaining written information difficult. Samuel also noted that when in secondary education he misunderstood written and verbal instructions which lead to embarrassment. It was a lecturer, marking Samuel's essays that first suggested a formal diagnosis of dyslexia may be useful. This allowed Samuel to obtain hardware to help assist his studies.

I worked closely with Samuel and we have often discussed the frustrations of having dyslexia whilst working as teachers in a state secondary school with a focus on examination results and quantitative date. However, there were many times when we found our experiences highly amusing, dealing with situations with supportive humour.

Georgia

Georgia is a 35-year-old white British female who has a partner and two children. Georgia is a relative and was happy to take part in my research and I interviewed her at her home. From an early age Georgia recalls feeling less intelligent than her peers, but was unaware of her dyslexia. She explained that from a young age she deliberately disconnected from her education and was viewed by her teachers as disruptive and not very bright. Georgia was never given any additional educational support during her schooling, hiding the embarrassment of failure with disengagement. During her time at college, Georgia pursued a variety of courses, but didn't settle until she went into the health care services. Working as a health worker, Georgia wanted to progress further and train to become a psychiatric nurse but felt her literacy skills would prevent this. However, she pursued this and it was during this time at university that she started to understand her learning difficulties were due to dyslexia. Although Georgia obtained a formal diagnosis, she was reluctant to seek help or disclose to others and this remains so. In psychiatric nursing, Georgia has found her niche and although she struggles at times with the written aspects of nursing, she has developed strategies and has the support of close colleagues.

Jonathan

Jonathan is a 46-year-old structural engineer, he has a partner and two children. He is white-British. Jonathan replied to an email I sent out at his place of employment asking specifically for male participants and I interviewed him at his home. With the support and perseverance of his mother, Jonathan was diagnosed with dyslexia when he was at primary school. He attended a dyslexia support centre for a number of years from the age of seven and here they taught him strategies for learning and dealing with his dyslexia. Jonathan completed external examinations during a cross over phase in education and has a mixture of ‘O’ Levels, CSE’s, GCSE’s and ‘A’ levels. Success in these examinations earned him a place studying for an engineering degree at university. Jonathan explains how he enjoyed the anonymity of having dyslexia at university, doing well in examinations and assignments and not telling his tutors or fellow students of his learning difference. Jonathan is sanguine about his dyslexia and fells that it has not prevented him from achieving in his chosen industry where mathematical and problem solving skills take priority over literacy skills. However, Jonathan pointed out that he does feel he has a reduced short term working memory and compromised spelling skills which lead him to gain support from close colleagues at times. Jonathan stated that he feels lucky having had positive career progression in an industry which he enjoys and in which he thrives.

Selena

Selena is in her mid-forties, a white-British mother of two and married. Selena replied to a blanket email I sent out to the parents of the children I teach explaining my research and asking for participants. I interviewed Selena at her home. Selena has had and still has a number of successful and varied jobs and describes herself as an interior designer. Like Jonathan, Selena's diagnosis came as the result of a diligent and persevering mother. Selena enjoyed a very happy, comfortable childhood and describes how she spent much of this time with her older sibling and their cousins as a close-knit family unit with abundant extended family support. Selena recounted early childhood memories of being ambidextrous and having no concept of right and left. Selena attended independent schools and feels that she was given more attention here than she would have received in state education. As a child she also attended a local dyslexia support centre twice a week for a number of years which she feels developed her learning skills and self-esteem. On leaving school, Selena pursued a career in spatial design where the lecturers welcomed applicants with dyslexia. Selena feels fortunate to have found her niche very early in adult life and considers her dyslexia an advantage.

Karen

A 32-year-old mother of two children, Karen is a married white-British woman. Karen replied to a blanket email I sent out asking for participants and I interviewed her at her office at work at her request. Karen found reading and spelling particularly difficult when she was at primary school, stating that she was not taught phonetics and felt this teaching method contributed to her learning difficulties. However, learning became more problematic at secondary school when Karen was expected to revise and memorise for examinations and tests. Considered low ability, Karen was placed in the bottom sets where she struggled to learn. It was at college that she was formally diagnosed with dyslexia and given extra support to help her obtain a GCSE in English. Due to various setbacks, Karen disengaged from education and went into paid employment. Here she realised she enjoyed working with numbers and this lead to accountancy. During the past three years Karen has studied part time to complete accountancy examinations and is justly satisfied with her success. During employment Karen has been reluctant to disclose her dyslexia to her colleagues, apart from a small number of very close and supportive women who help her with tasks such as letter writing. Karen spoke about how helping her children to read phonetically has led to an improvement and enjoyment of her own reading skills.

Amanda

A married white-British mother of two, Amanda is in her mid-forties and describes herself as an MSc student, holiday let owner and a charity worker. Amanda replied to a blanket email I sent out asking for participants and I interviewed her at her home. Amanda learned to sight read at a very early age and feels this method of reading could have exacerbated her understanding of phonics and given rise to her difficulty in pronouncing complex words. It was this that ultimately led to her diagnosis of dyslexia. Amanda went onto achieve success at school which led her to gain a place at a prestigious university to read theology. During tutorials she would have to read out essays that included Greek words. Unable to do this successfully, Amanda's lecturer suggested she investigate a diagnosis for dyslexia. This proved positive. On reflection she did identify times in her early learning that indicated some learning differences. For example, she has no sense of rhythm or pace, has difficulty learning foreign languages and shuns reading unfamiliar and multisyllabic words aloud. Amanda had a successful career in the media industry where she became head of marketing in a large corporation. Here she found report writing, designing and delivering presentations suited her skills and personality. She never concealed her dyslexia and never found it a hindrance to her career progression. As a mother of two, Amanda is aware dyslexia is hereditary and one of her children had learning difficulties which mirror some elements of dyslexia.

Julie

I am a 55-year-old white-British married mother. I am a teacher of design technology and worked in the state sector for thirty years before moving to teach in an independent preparatory school. In the state sector I was a senior leader for seventeen years. I have been a part time post-graduate student for the past eight years, completing a Master's degree before starting a Doctorate in Education.

Although I suspected I had dyslexia, largely due to its prevalence in my family, I was not formally diagnosed until 2017. I have mixed feelings about this diagnosis and I am still understanding what it means to me. It would have been difficult to detect my dyslexia when I was at school because I was an able child, learning to read more rapidly than my peers and skipping a year when I moved from primary to secondary school. I was the first in my family to attend university where I completed a teaching degree. Although there have been times when I have found some aspects of my job difficult due to my learning differences, I have strategies to overcome them. It was not until studying for a Doctorate that I really became aware of my difficulties.

Appendix 12 – the Transcripts.

Samuel

SS	Ok
J	Hence it could be half an hour, or it could be two hours, depending on how bored you get…
SS	Or how hungry you get….
J	Yes, how hungry you get. So hopefully that's recording and Ill go back and I will transcribe it all, word, for word….
SS	Yeah, yeah…
J	...and then you can either have an electronic copy or a paper copy and just look through it
SS	And see
J	Yes, these people who are dyslexic might not want to read two hours
SS	No, no – I was there
J	So basically I would just like you to tell me your experiences of growing up and living with dyslexia, as much or as little as you like…
SS	Ok, what I can remember, ok that sound fine. Obviously I was dyslexic when I got diagnosed when I was at university I was probably about 18 or 19. That's when it was formally diagnosed and I started to potentially get help for my education through the means of Dictaphones and packages and those sort of things.
J	Yes
SS	Before that, my lecturer, Jane, mentioned that she thought I could be dyslexic through how I talk and by my written assessments. She spotted and acknowledged possible issues I had. She didn't offer any help but suggested I get checked out and doing something to find out. Again that was when we was handing in a big essay that we had to hand in and that was at the end of the year
J	Yes
SS	So it was too late then and nothing really happened. Um. There was a couple of things that when I was in school, in secondary school that I can think of off the top of my head that really stood out in understanding what dyslexic was and in me understanding how it affected the lessons. I was in an English lesson and had to copy something down that was on the board. So I copied something down I later found out it was rules of how a paragraph should be laid out and in this paragraph it said how to have a gap at the beginning and how to have a structure and everything I just copied it out as shapes in my portfolio, in my booklet. It wasn't until it was Jonathaned and the teacher said you have written all this out about paragraphs but you haven't understood the paragraph you have written about and understood. Is that because, I don't know is that and excuse? Is that because I'm dyslexic and saw shapes as something that was broken down into shapes and kind of copied those down instead of understanding what was been said and applying that knowledge to the thing I was doing
J	Yes, yes.

SS	So you know there was those type of things. At primary school and at secondary school I absolutely hated reading and I found it difficult and my Mum, and I'd get really frustrated with trying to read the primary school books and I think that later put me off doing lots of reading um but it was just I couldn't explain, I couldn't explain the letters were moving or anything else that other people that or that or that is seen as dyslexic is being being dyslexic is, it was just really difficult to read. Having different coloured glasses or having, that wasn't an option just really, really, really difficult and I'd get so frustrated and anxious and then uptight and then I can't be bothered grr, grr,gr r, grr. An then you are being forced time and time again and then I dunno you take on yourself there is something wrong, why can't I do this and then give up and nah, forget about it, just do what you need to do to say it's been done without going above and beyond.
J	J. Um, yes. So you are talking about when you were at school and being frustrated, does that still happen or is it just when you were little.
SS	S. Umm, I think well, I still get very frustrated with things but now it's like there's mechanisms, not things I've been told , but things as growing up that you learn isn't there? I try and avoid sending emails, like whole school emails, or whole staff emails, um because What I write it doesn't make sense because the way in which I think things how they come out it's just not coherent in what they the sense that they make. It might take me ten minutes to write and email but then it might take me an hour to go through to read it and to does that actually make sense have I used the right grammar, have I used the right terminologies, have I written it in the right tense um, is it the right tone, um and all the things and it's just like it, it, makes you quite anxious and is this right, is this. People are going to judge me on this written word that I have wrote because it's so…potentially backward (laughs) and you see other people d,d,d,d,d,d, *(meaning typing quickly)* ok that's great then they send it. Is that because they don't care or that mines just so rubbish and theirs is good because they aren't dyslexic, I don't know *(laughs)*
J	J. Yes, yes.
SS	S. Or am I just being lazy is it literally everyone has that and everyone thinks that and goes and kind of maybe they are just quicker at processing and adjust it as they are thinking it and typing it but they am just typing down what they am thinking and it does come out in the way that it is supposed to be read.
J	J. Yes, that makes sense
SS	S. *Laughing*. It makes as much sense as my emails. *Laughing*
J	J. So when you are at work then, you know you are talking about things you do at work and you're not sure if other people see things the same are there things at work that make you think…

SS	S. writing on the board. I try to do as little writing on the board as possible and make my writing so its kind of scruffy so they cant make out what the word is rather than how the word is spelt. Um, and the other day I did something that is quite unusual a year seven class was doing a lesson and I wrote straight onto the computer and um, which is all go and well, theres a spell checker and everything but it was on the actual whiteboard, on the powerpoint sorry. So as I was actually doing it its just everyone, not everuone, that's overexageration, but a lot of the things I was putting up I was having to right click because the red squiggle was underneath. Do you mean this? Yes, and changing it. And this was with a year 7 class and is that… you look like an idiot in front of year sevens because you cant spell a word that is a technological word and is accociated with the subject and its just like ugggg, maybe I shouldn't be here typing on the computer, maybe I should just like be writing and smudging things so it looks right. Then, off you go, yeah, then things like that I get where, yes. *(Laughing)*
J	J. so do you think the children, do you think they might, do you? What do you think they think?
SS	S. Um, there all different aren't they? Some of them think that's ok, hes only human, um others think whats he doing being a teacher? Theyre all different like adults effectively. I think at a comp they are more understanding than at a grammar school. At a grammar school there are a lot more expectation that Im better than them so any chink in your armour they kind of love and giggly, not giggly but or the way in which you say something or the word that you useif its not quite right but is very similar you know what you are trying to say but the word you have actualluy said isn't the word that you should have said and again its like he said that and its not the right word. And its not just in school I think if im talking to someone, maybe its just a nerve thing if im comfortable with them it doesn't matter they you know I let it pass and they understand and let it pass. But, maybe its just an insecurity thing. I don't know. On like at an interview, I get really twitchy and panicky um again with any official documents I try to get someone to go through it. Whether its applying for a job I get Georgiato read through what I wrote to make sure. She completely rewrites what I write because its easier that way. Um, I can remember with my dissertation I got Georgiaand my auntie to go through and tweek things change them amend them….
J	J. Yes
SS	S. You know. Make sense…..*(Pause)*
J	J. How does that make you feel?
SS	S. (Laughs) Special. (Laughs) Yeah. Just a little bit pathetic I suppose, a little bit that I cant do these things myself um but, you know theres other tings I can do which is (laughs) just as well, so take with one give with the other, you know.
J	J. Yes

SS	S. Yes, yes. Its weird, um again there are things that you think about your personality and sometimes you just let them be and then other times you think about is it because this label I've got that I'm like that um I don't like talking to strangers. Again is it just a confidence thing or is it that I'm worried what Im going to say and how it makes me look or sound in front of other people and quite often I think that there are lots of interesting things about me and if someone can be bothered then they can find that out about me a as person and if they want to talk to me or talk to me about themselves, then, they don't want to talk to me, then you know, so be it.
J	J. Yes.
SS	S. That's sad. (Laughs) Sad when you say it out loud, when its in your head its ok. But Yeah, but again is it the confidence of verbalising thoughts being about being able to communicate in a way that could be linked to being dyslexic. I don't know.
J	J. Yes, yes. When you were diagnosed then, you said when you were eighteen.
SS	S. Yes, when I was eighteen. I think it was in the second year
J	J. So, so, how did that make you feel?
SS	S. Pause. A bit of a relief I suppose. It can be labelled. Its not just me being lazy its not just me being…that … the support that was given, they almost throw money at you. There we go, that's solved now, off you go, and there's kind of the Dictaphone, which I've not actually used, which was for taking down notes in lectures, I've not actually used. The computer I obviously use, but mainly for Ebay and stuff like that um, I think Ive still got it actually. And then they said about the paper, should have the other paper. And maybe?
J	J. What paper? You said the other paper?
SS	S. Um, the overlay.
J	J. Oh, yes, yes.
SS	S. Um and well, I didn't do that. It's a hassle it's a choice. Having it brings attention sometimes which I didn't want. I kind of preferred to get on with everyone else um. Id quite often have it if I'm reading one of my issues is I quite often go along a sentence and skip lines um I go along a sentence and either skip um the words are moving, but I skip lines, could be something that everybody has. Or I go along a sentence and a word comes along and it sparks something off in my mind I then go off on a tangent in my mind thinking about this and a whole story comes up – my story – a scenario or something that triggers a thought process that goes off and I'm still reading but I'm not actually taking in what I'm reading because I'm thinking about that word that's gone off and everything that I've done, everything that I've read completely pointless
J	J. Yes.
SS	S. And then I have to get back in to where I was or where I came from and its, um, just makes things difficult.
J	J. So it sound as though you've kind of got sort of coping strategies and methods
SS	S. Yes, yes, I try not to read (laughs)

SS	Although the things is I want to read, I've got books and I've started reading them and, and I want to better myself by reading them. I want to do that, you know, I've read a couple of books recently um but I want that because, its, you know, knowledge, its learning, its different things, but it has to be – I can't have others things going on. I can't have the phone on, like most other people, I can't have the TV or radio on um I can't have any of those other distractions it has to be almost designated time where I have nothing else that I have to worry about or do to be able to read and understand because you know as soon as I've got something, like I said a word, then it sparks something else off or that word and something on a radio the music would come together and that would go off – fuck head – (laughs) uggggh. But yes, I have strategies, I try not to read (laughs) if I can help it.
J	J. (Laughs) so is that you only strategy? Or are there other things?
SS	S. Well, no obviously, it sounds really simple, but following the line with my finger the sentence as I'm going across, but again when you do that you look as though you are about seven don't you doing this with your book. You do though don't you, you know right time right place that's fine, but um, having emails, I try, well, if it's a really long email it's not going to be read, but if it's short, sharp bullet pointed then that's good. I'd try and print it off so I had a hard copy because I find it difficult when there is reading to do if there's lots of it, it feels like, um. If I'm Jonathaning, again it's a big thing as a teacher, Jonathaning, essays are massive written things. Again at a grammar school it's all about the quant, quantity of what's written so my strategies would be Jonathan the designing, Jonathan the making and Jonathan the summaries because the summaries are always a descriptor of what they have learned on the page. So everything they've written on the page I completely ignore and go through the summary, because at the end of the day moderators are going to read that, that's what they are looking at and that shows that they have understood the page. I go through that. Occasionally I would glimpse through a couple of things ur, design specifications is one. They are going to have the sizes so if they've got specific sizes, if you know, its just strategies of what to look out for and highlighting points to the student so it looks like you read everything yes. This is going to be anonymous on this? (laughing)
J	J. (Laughing) it is anonymous, your fine, just where you live, what's your name, all of that. No it's all anonymised. It will be south of England, that's all.
SS	S. (Laughing) it doesn't really matter, part of me feels this is completely fine. (Laughing)
J	J. No-one will read it *(laughing)* I'll have to edit that bit out. No or you just get a colleague to teach all the theory. (Laughing)
SS	S. (Laughing)

Amanda

J	You tend to forget this [the iPad] is here. I don’t know if you are interviewing for your research?
A	Yes, my course is all on line with Roehampton. The interviews are on the phone because its on line. Some of the interviews are in south Africa and my tutor is in Missouri at the moment.
J	Oh, how interesting. So really, as I say, its not really an interview. I haven't got set questions to ask you, but tell me as much or as little as you want about your experiences.
A	So, its quite interesting in the fact that I didn’t get a diagnoses until I was at university. I was in my xxxx at the time. And although the issues were there, but not obviously there if that makes sense. My Mum was a teacher and she was xxxx. We lived in the middle of no where because Dad was in the RAF so she was very xxxxx. So I learned to read early.
J	Was this in this country?
	Yes, in this country. In Cirencester. So I learned to read early. I was reading by three. Three to four. But I learned through sight is I never grew up as an issue because I never had a problem reading as such because I read though sight so learned words. I learned words through flash cards I learned...um I had.... looking back you can see I had examples of I clearly did have issues so...I was very fast and I'd get ahead of myself and I was reading..... words. I have a very clear memory at 11 or 12 and getting a book. It was called xxxxx and I thought it was a ghost story but it was about a ballet dancer and a school because it was called 'Sprite' and I miss read 'spirit' and I have a clear memory.....Um. I also have no sense of rhythm, at all, and that's one of the kind of language thing, rhythm, pace and things like that. I cant clap in time...um and I'm not great at foreign languages. I can remember vocab. I was ok at Latin because it was very vocab and....but my French. I found it really really hard, but I didn't know why I found it hard. Because I should have...I was in the top set for everything but just struggled with it and I'm particularly bad at .....'cause I was talking to Ollie about this...I'm terrible at pronouncing new words. I can....if I look....the reason it came to light, I went to university and did theology and had to do Greek. And I was on flash card s for Greek. But I was doing early modern doctrine and the set up is that you go and have tutorials and early modern doctrine...no it wasn't, no it wasn't, anyway, it was all the philosophical Greek terms and you're meant to learn all these Greek words. So two sessions, two tutorials and I'd read out my essay and on the third session the tutor said to me the first two I thought it was a student gaff to see if how you could manipulate these words, cause Greek is pronounced incredibly phonetically and I was mutilating them, absolutely mutilating them so he spent the first two sessions thinking this was some kind of gag and it must have been a joke between them and then he realised by the third one he realised I genuinely couldn't say it. And he would say 'it's so-and-so' 'oh, ok' and the next time I'd say it wrong again and he said 'I really think you need to go and get it checked out'. So I went home and said it to Mum and she said 'oh, yes I've always thought you were dyslexic but there was no point in getting you labelled up at that point. I think it was slightly different as well when you were labelled up you were really labelled up and actually I was quite bright enough it wasn't really impacting on

	me so, yeah, I had a diagnoses at that point and....so it has fundamentally changed how it affected me today. If I'd known I think looking back at Ollie's experience knowing what the issues are mean you can tackle it and we know where things go wrong so there was a point where Mrs Taylor don't thing she was there when you started.
J	No, I don’t know the name.
A	She was a support teacher. We went he was struggling with something, maybe it was maths it was graphs and symmetry just couldn’t do it, it makes sense. She thought he had an eye issue. So we went and got him checked out and it was visual stuff its not an eye issue its processing. Its also visual memory and where that fits. So, it would have helped me? Yeah. I still cant pronounce things round here what that lane is down the side, Down-mon-den I um, things like, I cant pronounce it, that yoghurty thing, quark? qurk? I can never remember what way round it is. My friend thinks its absolutely hysterical. Unless....any new words I don't get it in the right order.
J	Yes.
A	And I so that's I. So very basic is classic malapropos in saying, no malapropos is changing words I don't do that I just can't say it properly. If its not obviously. Put the intonations in the wrong place so that impacts on….When the boys were babies and I was doing words with them I'd have to phone my Mum up 'what's the one is if 'o' or 'u' because I couldn't remember them I had to teach myself how to do phonics because I wasn't taught phonics and if I had have been taught phonics early on it might have made a difference. Um, and my Mum is a huge advocate of phonics oddly enough. I think she found I picked up words very quickly so just stuck with the words.
J	So I can work that out, how old are you?
A	I am 43.
J	Ok I'll have a look at what was going on at that time.
A	So that would have been early '70's. Um, my Mum was a primary school teacher and a SENCO. I'm trying to think of phonics was. I can't do grammar to save my life. I don’t remember been taught grammar. Um, and the syntax doesn’t make that much sense so that's another reason why I found foreign languages tricky because I didn't really understand the different tenses the and how its put together. If I look at how the boys are taught now they are been taught a proper grammatical way where as they are. But I also find that its but it doesn't really impact me in that my background is so I spent twenty years in Jonathaneting writing reports writing presentations um and actually I get really good Jonathans in academic writing because its similar to report writing because I've kind of compensated and I don't really think about it as a big problem. I read a lot but there are certain things where I need help. My brain works in a slightly different. So I'll often, um, flick from things quite quickly or move between things very quickly. Ahh, when I write a presentation, sometimes the structure wouldn't follow the same structure as other people as I wouldn't automatically move from one thing to another. I know other people do this but I'm more different from others.
J	Mmm, mmm.

A	the structure….but I think I have come to compensate by very much going ok this is the order when I'm writing this is a very clear order I'm doing my research study in so I will…..so the paper I'm about to write I have already written what the bits what the headings...
J	Ummm.
A	So I've gone what's my structure, what's my steam of consciousness so I go with that. I'm very happy reading out loud words I know. Anything with a Greek word is hideous.
J	[Laughing]
A	People go 'can you read at a wedding' and I'm going 'please don't let it have Colossians in it because I can barely say it or Phil….Philippians because you know, and then I get a mental block on it. So yes, what I don't really find it…I worked at the BBC for quite a long time. there became an obsession with having a senior manager for diversity and the needed senior managers with disabilities so they said put yourself down as having a disability with dyslexia. So I was the senior manager in my group with a disability, but...technically you can have a disability if you want one but it doesn't feel like a disability, I don't feel it has impacted on my life hugely....um....and I don't remember being....limited when I was younger.
J	Ummm.
A	Looking back I probably found things harder than umm…. But not, that is, people tend not to believe it 'cause I went to Oxford [university] and um it doesn't mean I can't do these things. For some people obviously it does but mine is the…what do you call it... the phonological...I can't do phonics. God, I hated when my children were doing anything to do with phonics and I think listening to all those bloomin' tapes when they were babies singing them songs I was learning with them.
J	Yes, interesting. So you, you were talking about you were at university when you were diagnosed. How did that make you feel then?
A	Um, I don't think, to be honest, I don't think, it sound quite, to be honest [sigh] I think if you have already got decent A Levels and got yourself into Oxford I don't think I'm badly shaken up by dyslexia. It didn't necessarily make me…um…I've had a hard time ir...I think it just explained a few things.
J	Yes.
A	Um, explained why my Greek was bloomin' awful. I think it just explained a few things rather than…I don't really recall having it done [the test], must have been in my second year. I don't really recall it impacted me any more. I remember thinking about it more at work writing reports people were commenting on it and thinking is that because I'm doing things slightly differently...the fact I...you know....when the boys started....why is this that? and umm....or is that because I wasn't taught it...I don't know.
J	Yes.
A	That I find syntax tricky.
J	Its trying to tease out what….
A	Yes….I just use Grammerly and the like um. [Laughs] I genuinely don't remember learning grammar. And I remember really struggling with it and with French. I didn't with Latin because I think GCSE [interruption when son came in the room]….Um so what was I thinking...um....so whether I um....

J	So how you felt when you were diagnosed.
A	I don't really remember been particularly bothered I think I remember thinking they be a bit more sympathetic about my Greek or lack of Greek. Um, so no, I don’t remember been that bothered.
J	Yes.
A	So it was diagnosed. As I got older it's surprising how many people are, not necessarily people who you'd expect. Um, and I think our first thoughts with Ollie were he's dyslexic because it was the reading he was finding very difficult. That's when it became obvious.
J	Yes.
A	He's [Ollie] always been incredibly articulate, he's really articulate. He should be there but actually its much more complex than that. Trouble with reading it's not dyslexia its something more complex than that and it could so easily have been classed as that. he was struggling with geometry and stuff like that. Its not it's more complex than that. We kind of thought it might be along those lines and mines just very classic phonics based juts don't get phonics. I'm a lot better at it.
J	So it's kind of what you are hearing?
A	yes, so when I was very little they thought I was deaf because I talk very loudly apparently. Well, I wasn't so there was nothing there. Um, I and, because we lived in the middle of no where and hung out with, um, I was very close with my Mum at that point I was the middle of no where, um, apparently she thought I spoke beautifully but no one understood me because we had our own language, particularly baby language when your making it all up, so whether that had something to do with it but it didn't seem to. At school, um, I don't really remember, um, and maybe the very fact that I learned in words meant that it was hidden and not picked out.
J	So explain a bit more to me about how you learned to read.
A	I believe I learned with flash cards.
J	Oh, ok.
A	So I learned to sight read. So I learned 'I' means me, right means this, the classic 'A for apple' which I think was very common in those days, rather than phonics itself and because I was able to pick up it up, I just learned, but I mean you don’t know what's what you are doing but that's what word I could work how to put them together. So when there is a new word I couldn't work out how to put them together and my spellings never been great. But my spelling, its when its new words and I don't, I read very, very fast and I will miss words out when I'm writing as well, so I'm kind of ahead. and I know everyone does it but I think I do it more, I will make assumptions of what I have read and I will miss things out, because assume what words are going to be. I really, so I really don't like descriptive writing particularly, so I remember, I like plots, I mean, I did English A Level so its not...D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, and in The Rainbow Ursula gets pregnant and I couldn't work out how she gets pregnant because it was all about horses and things like that so 'she's pregnant, I've missed that' because it was descriptive writing I thought I'd just flick through it, just language like that I don't find particularly interesting, the poetry bit in Tolkien, not interested. I know...I don't enjoy that language particularly and I wonder whether I get the meaning. I like the meaning not interested in the guff around it.

J	So it's more functional?
A	Yes.
J	OK…
A	But I do read a lot, but I tend to read….but you know bad writing, you can have a great plot but clunky writing is really painful, so its not that, but, really, literary writing doesn’t do it for me really.
J	So what sort of things do you choose to read?
A	Oh, I like crimes, um, thrillers, I like psychological thrillers, I like a fair amount of non-fiction. Well, its not non-fiction. Also, and you’ve probably found when you are doing this you spend so much time writing, reading for work you kind of want to read things that aren't too tough, so quite a lot of murders actually, I'm slightly worried about that amount I'm reading at the moment.
J	[Laughing]
A	Crimes and all that. I want decent characters in there but its kind of… language for me is quite functional and quite utilitarian.
J	Ok, and what would you avoid?
A	[Pause] what would I avoid….Um, my brother keeps giving me these really intellectual books, about not necessarily literary things but more um, really pseudo things about time and you know, I just, I like there to be a point to where you are going rather than an intellectual discussion. And I've really noticed that in the reading I'm doing, that when someone has written something well and clear - its a classic - its really, really good. What I hate is when people are being pseudo and superficial for the sake of it and putting long words in that don't actually add any value. Um, so what else would I avoid? So not wild about poetry, I'm, um, anything, I'm not wild about serious, serious hard literature, where it is all descriptive stuff. I mean some books, some books I did for A Level I absolutely love, but not the Lawrence's all that metaphorical kind of language. It just kind of slightly goes over my head. I'm not prepared to put the time in to get it out.
J	Yes.
A	And I don’t enjoy the play of language for the sake of the cleaver play of language. Um, which is possibly because language has always been quite functional in learning so maybe I never did those kind of games, it just doesn’t work in that way.
J	No. So you were talking about when you were at the BBC and you were their disabled apparently…
A	My boss went 'you know you are dyslexic, we can put that down as a disability'. And I went 'oh, ok, that’s fine'. 'You sure your ok with that?' It doesn’t really bother me, I thought it was a bit farcical, but hey ho.
J	Its an interesting way of looking at it, so you, you…
A	They were getting quite desperate at that point.
J	So you told them at some point.

A	Oh, its never been something that I have been particularly bothered by because I don’t think anyone would ever say that impacts your work or anything. I think it would be a very different thing if I felt it was a world where…if it was dyscalculia and you were an accountant, or you were judged on it and I don't think its anything anyone would judge you on it. Most people go 'Oh god I don't believe that because you went to Oxford, or because you did that, you know, I felt confident enough with my education with my academic ability to not see it as an issue. I used to have a friend who would say I can see sometimes that...and stuff like that, but it didn't particularly bother me, everyone tells a story in a different way. When you are writing presentation, you have different ways of doing and actually I always, and most people would quite like the way I was doing it because I have learned it, you know, I've learned the skills in doing it they are automatically there. No I've never really had a problem with it mainly because, I don't think I've ever felt stigmatised because of it. or I've been confident enough in what I can do, it would never impact in what I want to do.
J	Yes, yes.
A	Now would I ever say it in interview, If I was in interview for a job? I would if I had to, in my early twenties, it would just not even occur to me that it was important enough to. I don’t think, its never felt, I've never felt like its held me back in a way that but actually if you went back through my educational career you could probably pinpoint time where it has, in languages or in certain - you could probably look at it and say 'ok, you've probably got a bit of a learning difficulty there. It would help if you did this, this and this. But that's kind of hindsight retrospectively, with the experience of seeing something. But I never really felt it was a problem and I don't think anyone like my teachers, I'm not sure, would have twigged. Partly because by the time I got to senior school it really want a problem. You know I was doing fine. My French teacher was ....if id have thought about it um, potentially the Latin guy, and my tutor why was pained by me mangling these words. Totally pained. Still traumatised, poor man.
J	[Laughing] So you talk about your children as well as your experiences, um, educating them if you like, so can you tell me more about that?
A	Well, I think that its quite interesting when you then start teaching them something that you found hard but didn’t really recognise then because they always learn phonics nowadays, completely learn phonics, so that’s probably the moment it became most obvious. That I had a problem when I was doing phonics with Ollie and the DVDs were playing and he had - it was a bus where you had to press the button for the sound so I'd press the so-and-so I cant remember what it was, and it was then I'd realise actually I can't remember what the phonics sound, the 'U' is, the so-and-so, because I only knew it as 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D'. And I have to say I found that really hard and French, and when you had to do an oral and you had to spell something, and I could never remember the French sounds for letters cause they're slightly different, I just couldn't remember them and it never occurred to me that is probably why because in English it didn't mean much to me. So I, and that's when it became obvious, I really, really didn't get phonics. I pretty much taught myself phonics, I haven't had to do it with Dexter, he's pretty much reading now, he's past the phonics stage and the building up reading so if you said to me what's this one I'd

	probably go 'um I don't know', but if its a word I don't know I cant break it down very well. So...
J	So, how do you read complex things then?
A	I think I've pretty much learned them.
J	Do you not come across words you’ve not learned yet?
A	I have since I've done my Master's.
J	Or maybe you are reading something and it's the name of something or somebody?
A	I think I…….[pause to think] I probably don’t read it aloud in my head. I probably, I probably have my own version in my head. Because the vast majority of times you don’t have to read it out. Um, I would probably work very hard to um, avoid having to say it, I'm sure I could have an entire discussion with someone and find a different word to use than the one I was going to use. Even asking someone isn't great because I then forget and get a mental block on it. Which way round, which way round is it? I don't think I come across that many words but it was when I was doing the philosophy bit of my... that had lots of Greek words, I hate Greek words. Yes, and I'm probably butchering them, but its not like I have to say it very often and I'm probably saying it in my head, but if I then wanted to give a talk on it probably wouldn't be able to say I'd probably then have to phone someone up who can say it and get them to say it. But then I do mutilate most of the random road names around here, because the emphasis is in the wrong place. Oh, sorry, or something like that and or not being from round here I don't have them in the right places, so yes there are lots of instances since I've been here that I take. And I have noticed it since I've been here. And it kills some of my friends, 'I can't believe you went to that university and yet you can't say these words.' 'no, you're right I can't' [laughing] but I know what they mean, it's not that many but it's enough for people to go 'Where, where?'. because I cant sound them out properly.
J	No, no.
A	Um which I guess is what I also had with foreign languages. Phonetically based languages, just, um, I don't sound them properly, so yes, yes.
J	Is it a hearing thing?
A	Do I hear the breakdown of the words? Its hard to know because I think I've taught myself some of the words, but, yes. [pause] If you said a word and said spell it and I hadn't learned how to spell it, I'd give myself a fifty fifty chance of spelling it right because I don't think I'd necessarily sound it out properly.
J	And if I did do that and you had a go at spelling a word out, which I'm not going to ask you to do, how would I do it.

A	How would I break it down? So this morning the woman said Ollie [he had done an ed psych assessment in the morning] got did brilliantly on the spelling and spelling he was very weak at five or six [years] did brilliantly in the spelling. Um words that you have never heard. A word 'quin-catch-al' he spelt correctly. I can do 'quin', because I know 'quin-catch-al' ok that's going to be a 'Q' because that would be my guess, because that's how the pattern works. Would I put a 'U' behind it, umm, it might be a foreign one but I would be intellectually trying to work it through, where as if you got Ollie up here he broke it down on phonics where as I'm going I know what 'quin' is that tends to be a 'Q' because that tends to be...so I'd be trying to intellectually break it down from words I know than breaking it down, so if I'm sitting here and have to do it phonetically I'd go 'quin-catch-al' and I find the 't' or is it an 'a' so I don't really pull it apart hearing wise. I would work it out intellectually.
J	Would you visualise it?
A	Am I visualising it? [p] Sort of, I'm seeing here [p] not really, interestingly I seem to be more auditory, I listen to things and take them in, I don't sound things out, no I don't think I'd would do it visually. I might try and write it out, but I'm not sure if I look at it, it would make sense, [p] 'cause often you look at things and it doesn't look right but I don't know why it doesn't look right. Sounding out is the only way of doing it I'd try and work out what I know and from that rather than sounding it out.
J	What about advantages?
A	Advantages? Um, I guess mine is I didn't know I had it as such, so I didn’t have to create advantages for myself, you know I kind of got there with it. But I do think that I do think I think in a slightly different way. I'm very flexible in my thinking I can move from one thing to another very quickly, um, I kind of 'get things' quite quickly and move on. Things I've had from working and comments I've had from people I'm working with [p] I think the problems I've had I compensate for so they aren't really problems and the benefits are you think of things in a different way. Quite butterfly like. I really don't like detail, really, really not interested in detail. Um, and I don't know whether that is something linked to the dyslexia I can do it. I've had to manage big budgets, I can do it. and I can do things, but checking over, proofing. Hate it, hate it, hate it. Um partly because um, I'm trying to think, like when I'm reading I just follow the plot. I find it really I have to make myself proof, make myself proof, go through it, because its not something I enjoy doing or find easy. Um yes, I think just, I think, I can think in quite a creative way and being able to cope with quite a lot of stuff, which I don't know if its to do with it at all but it feels like obviously is being able to move between tings and being able to think about things in slightly different ways. So its never felt like a hinge issue to me, but its felt but it might have done if Id have been diagnosed earlier ...or it might have done if I hadn't had a mother who taught me to read sight. if I'd gone to school at six and then struggled it might be a different prob..different issue. Might have thought it a problem. Because I could read which was probably my biggest issue, and my my writing was ok, my spelling was ok, um, it wasn't, I was never behind. If I hadn't done that then it could have been a real problem.
J	So when you were little did your Mum home school you, or….

A	No, no its just we were in the middle of no where. No I went to school and I think I must have gone to playgroup and then we moved to Hampton when I was, so I started reception…I started reception in Hampton. No I wasn’t home schooled. But it was during that period, my brother is three year's younger than me and it was during that I guess from two to four..
J	So you had a lot…
A	Of input and attention. There literally was no one around. No one around so a lot of thought and input from Mum, so I was reading properly when I got to school. If I hadn't have been reading properly you probably would have seen more issues, because that gave me enough of a head start that I could then put strategies in place without realising Id put strategies in place, to cope. I mean, I was reading Heidi at six, Um, I hated it, but yes. hated it. Liked Swallows and amazons, but not Heidi.
J	Umm.
A	I can't think of anymore.
J	That's a lot there. Thirty six minutes worth.
A	[Laughing] And you've got to transcribe it.
J	I'll do it… yes word for word is what takes it a long time. Is there anything else you wanted to add?
A	I cant think of anything particularly. I just think it’s a really interesting debate that if Id been diagnosed earlier would that have different…would that have been a benefit or not a benefit…and I don’t It probably would have helped some of my modern languages, but would it have particular in those times, put me into a group, well, she obviously can't do English A Level, she's dyslexic. I don't know.
J	So it didn’t impact on your ability to write essays? Because it sounds as though your studies are quite essay based.
A	No I don’t think. I did humanities, and I did English, Maths, and History A Levels and then I did Theology as a degree then I went into Jonathaneting. Where most of it is in PowerPoint to be honest rather than writing. Much prefer PowerPoint. Just 'cause its easier, less guff. But it's still telling a story. Um. But writing, not hugely, but I had to write a dissertation at university so I think I just taught myself strategies to get round it. Um, and I had good teaching, so it probably want ever a problem in itself. If I hadn't gone to a school, schools, which had smallish classes, I could easily have floundered, but I did, so I was really lucky. Um, and maybe they just taught round it or taught well, it wasn't a problem. But would I have done if I'd have gone to a big comprehensive, you know thirty-five kids in a class with different abilities, would I have found the ways around the strategies, I don't know. So, no it didn't hugely impact me. So, when Ollie fell off a cliff in Year 1 we realised how easy it is for children to get lost and if Mum hadn't of gone, cause basically his teacher at the time kept saying - I think she thought we were pushy parents who thought their child is cleverer than he is and we just to want to know - 'he's a boy, he's a boy, he'll be fine' but he was on stage four and he's now on stage eight and he can't read it, he can't read it. He's not improved. My Mum said I think you should get him checked out, and the guy went 'no, he's really bright, he just can't do this', and 'yeah, yeah, yeah', we knew that and we actually moved him schools at that point. He went from, so he had the assessment on his sixth birthday and he had a reading and spelling age of four and a half and got the diagnosis early May and we moved him the beginning

	of the next term, so September and he had a reading age of eleven by the end of that term.
J	Ummm.
A	Cause of putting the phonics and support and they, well we don’t need to give him learning support. If he had not had that early support and we could not pay to move him and all those different things, he would have been a frustrated badly behaved bright child who couldn't read and how many children are there lost in the system because of that and that is quite frightening. because he really was struggling with his reading, and it really didn't take, didn't take much to get him, because he was bright enough no one thought he wasn't in the remedial groups. He was slightly lost in that world and that he would have been so badly behaved because he would have been frustrated because he couldn't read and if you cant read you cant do anything.
J	No, no. You can't access the curriculum can you?
A	No, no. So that was that made me start thinking about probably if I hadn't been taught to read I'd probably have more similar issues although mine is more classic dyslexia, his isn't dyslexia. So it would be harder to find out the solution to it. Um, and, it, I just find that quite scary. How many children get lost in the system? Obviously dyslexia I very broad, and its also about your educational experience, all the other bits as well, so you can have exactly the same diagnosis but because you have a different educational system, it makes a very big difference to how it works. So yes, it never really occurred to me that it was going to be a problem for me. I didn't know until I was so much older
J	So many variables. With it, you know as you were pointing out.

Georgia

J	So just tell me as little or as much as you like about your experiences of being dyslexic. Start from when you were a child, or at uni, or at work, its up to you.
G	Um, its difficult without any questions. But I think I wasn't aware of being dyslexic I just thought I wasn't as intelligent as other people. And I think it started from a very young age and I just had no interested in academic work, I deliberately became uninterested because I wasn't very good at it. And I sort of failed myself because it was easier for me to do it than for someone else to do it. I'd just then start playing up in class. It was never recognised and I was never given any support in first, or middle or high school. I don't think it was until going to university and that was only my own knowledge and realising through listening to other people 'oh that sounds like something I've got' that um, that not anyone in education picked up on it. I was just put in the lower classes um, as I said there was no support at school and I became more and more disheartened ended up failing everything you know and I put it down to not being very clever, you know.
G	Um, and as I said it wasn't until later when I got some support that I actually I can get decent grades and I can do this and its not about my level of intelligence but more to do with not being able to understand things and to process information the same way other people do. Mine's always been around sort of spellings and English. Maths I'm fine with, obviously every job or or you know, I sort of hid it for a long time through embarrassment. And I still do now at work you know, and I love the computer really because its my before it was all paper notes, paper for everything at work, and you cant rub your work out in nursing so it was there for everyone to see and people, you know, if they don't have a problem with spelling they find it hilarious when you read out your writing and someone's name is 'Brian' and I've written 'Brain', you know [laughing] you know and I would sort of giggle along with it, but inside you feel mortified, and even now I'm not confident with I still feel embarrassed but its a lot easier to deal with spell check and computers. A lot of people say 'I had no idea' you know but even, you know as well, even at college when I was younger and Mum wanted to support us it was covered up because she would read all of our work and correct it all because I didn't want the embarrassment, yes and she was trying to help us , but she was covering up so it wasn't evident to teachers because my Mum had gone through everything corrected everything, done all the grammar and Id rewritten it. so, although she thought she was helping it was probably just hiding it from people because they didn't actually see. the first bit of work that was produced was hardly readable so anyway.
J	so going back to you were saying going back through school, right from an early age, can you think of anything significant points when you were quite young at first or middle school. Things that happened or things that were significant?

G	I don’t think there was any one thing that sticks out. It wasn’t I had withdrawn myself to the point from education I was just seen as a naughty child at school and um, that’s how I saw myself really I didn’t see it as a….you know I cant actually say there was anything that actually made me. I can remember being continually embarrassed, my biggest dread, and I hated it. We had these classes and teachers would make you read from books and we'd all have to take our turn and Id sit there would be sweating and I would.... And even now when I read to Leo (G's son) I he will correct me sometimes, because he will see things. and I cant break words down and you know and I'd look silly in front of the whole class and then that would make you feel even more...and my way of dealing with it would be to rebel against it, to withdraw and become, you know I couldn't be the clever person so I'm going to be you know the popular girl that was the rebel and that was my sort of front that I put on at school. But, yeah, there was often times where you would have to show your work and you'd hide what was going on then, it became more evident. But then it wasn't picked up when my reading, I look back I couldn't read like other people, it was quite evident but never once was I offered any extra support, it just wasn't recognised. So, but I don't know...
J	So going on, you left school and you went on to college after that?
G	Yes, it was something that was expected from home, you know, and that’s what I felt I should be doing. I had no idea what I wanted to do I did a course that my friend was doing. I started a course in cooking, because it was more manual, doing something I was more comfortable with then I swapped to art and design and I'm not artistic in any was. You know it was just something to do. And I sort of just jumped from one thing to another and I really wanted to be a nurse and I started to but in the back of my mind 'I can never do this job, because how can I do this job because I cant spell'. and how, at the time, I was working in hospitals and Id see bits of people's notes as you do as a care assistant and Id be, people would see me. Id be absolutely mortified, I cant do this job, Id be um, and I think I did my training and getting pregnant with Leo was a bit of an excuse I didn't actually carry on to do the nursing. I didn't have the confidence to carry on. I did the training and I achieved the qualification, but I couldn't do the job, I feel, I just cant do it. and I was pregnant with Leo and it was just an easy way you know, I've got a baby now. And as he got older and also I worked in the same hospital so I became very comfortable with people I worked with, the fact I could work in here, I feel supported these people are my friends that I then felt that I could do this. Because I've always felt I wanted to do it but just couldn't bring myself for people to see I couldn't spell things and for people to see. And with nursing there is so much written work and people see all the doctors see, the consultants see you know, I just think I'm going to be humiliated in a daily basis. I've got to do a handover and write it in front of people. Even now, I cant read my own hand over sometimes, because I've just scribbled it I don't want other people who are sat at the table to see that my spelling is so bad. Sometimes I can read my own words because I'm trying to disguise that I cant actually spell half these things that I am writing down. So even now I struggle with it but I've come to terms with it a lot more and imp well supported. But it blocks me because I sometimes think Ill go and work somewhere else but my confidence even now because I'm comfortable and supported I would feel sort of naked again and going through that whole thing of embarrassment and shame. Um, that stops me

	from moving around a bit so it still holds me back. I don't think Ill ever be comfortable with it....
J	So you were talking about having support, urr, and being comfortable with other people you work with. How do they give you support?
G	I wouldn't say they give me support as such, I'm sure if I asked for it, but I'm one of these people who don't ask for it, I don't ask for special equipment I don't want to be treated any differently you know, I just, but, I'm comfortable saying, everybody knows I'm dyslexic. You know its not, I think I've worked in it for so long now that I've got so used to writing notes in a certain way, its repetitive in what you do. I can churn it out and no ones any the wiser and people often say to me 'your um, written work, its very good its really academic.' And literally its because I've written it that many times. When I started the job every difficult word I printed off, and what you probably shouldn't do, I printed loads of peoples notes off and memorised all the different little sayings that we use in nursing and all the bits that you use repetitively in people's notes and memorised them, so I could churn out what looks like very academic...and I just took the best of everything and I just learned to deal with stuff. And even now they'll say and I've got to write if somebody is having or tying to revoke their section and I have to write a legal document of a nursing report on that patient I am like 'oh my god' because I am totally out of my comfort zone because other stuff. As I said other stuff that is like its got to come from me and that's when Ill often go and find a senior nurse and we'll sit down and go through it together and that's how I'm supported. And there is somebody there you know, my deputy his son is severely autistic, he's got a big understanding, he's got a lot of time, he wont sort of make fun of me or huffing and puffing, he's more happy to do that. Where I remember as a student and we had a community placement and Id done a piece like a history of a patient and it goes in this little building to a social worker and this social worker charged down 'who's done this? have you read this? You've seen the spelling mistakes?' in front of everybody in the office. I've never been so mortified you know and you know, just when you are building your confidence up as a student it completely knocked me back down, I cant do this as a job I don't want to put myself in a situation where I am humiliated, I would rather not do it, that have to go through that. And there is always someone who is going to laugh, you know, there are people at work who when they are reading someone else's notes will go 'have you seen this, how they've spelt that' and I'm thinking I would have spelt it like that and I'm just going 'oh well, you know'. I suspect there are quite a lot of spelling mistakes in mine because the way I read a word if its corrected, often I will pick the wrong one.
J	So like on a spellchecker?

G	Yes, and it only has to be one letter out but because I found it really hard to break down the words, like the sounds of them I will….Leo is doing phonics, I cant get phonics, I cant break words down I cant hear the sound. I don’t you know, the 'O' and the 'W' I just get, I cant. And I struggle with him and his work, because I don't understand how to do the phonics sound, and I've bought him books and its very difficult for me to explain to him when I find it difficult. And Aiden is very good he's, you know, very articulate and very good at English so he helps me. 'How do you explain this because I don't understand myself'. because that's my area of dyslexia of the English language I just can't.... it just doesn't register in my brain, it doesn't matter how many times I write stuff I just cant seem to understand the sounds and the way our language works.
J	Its not the best language to have when you are dyslexic. Internationally it is quite complicated.
G	When I'm writing stuff at work I'm quite comfortable with the people at work with and Ill say 'how do you write this? How do you do this? How do you spell this?' but in other places, I'm sneaking around with a little spell checker in my pocket, so you know. On a daily basis having to do that is quite stressful, having to hide you embarrassment, pretend that everything is you know, every single day is really draining. And the anxiety I used to have all through university when I started a new placement, my level of anxiety to deal with it all over again and settle and it was all based around my dyslexia. It is hard enough settling in to a new sort of ward, but when you are trying to hide this embarrassment and when you are left with felling very open to people and then its picked up on and you have to go through the whole sort of explain and feeling embarrassed. I used to dread it and I cant do that you know I just don't want to put myself through this, so, but I've got my deputy, and she's one of my best mates and she really supported me and encouraged me. She knows that I'm a good nurse, I'm good at what I do, she wanted me to work on her ward, but she doesn't realise what my demons are of sort of around dyslexia, she had no understanding of it. And even now I've never ever been picked up on a piece of my work maybe its more in my head maybe its not as bad as I think, I've built it up to be you know. But to me I'm constantly worrying about it. Less and less, but I don't think it will ever go away. Like with Aiden we will drive around and Ill read signposts Ill always pronounce them wrong and you feel embarrassed but gradually, you know. and its frustrating, we go abroad and Aiden can read all these signs and things and he can read other people's languages I cant break down words, I cant do it. To me its like its impossible, I just ....and its frustrating and to realise other people can do it so easily well its just impossible to me. He will look at words and just read them you know and I just cant do that. so.....
J	So when you went to…it wasn’t college that you were diagnosed, where were you diagnosed?
G	I was properly diagnosed at university, but I had a good idea before I went to university and I think it was sort of…this is going back such a long time, but at college it was recognised because Id been to see people but it wasn’t formally because I hadn't go the forms and diagnoses and that was at university. But I must say I didn't really get any...you've got a sort of extra time, didn't get Jonathaned down on things I got a free lap top, but I can’t say I got any more support other than that. It was just sort of 'yrah, we will throw a few things at you' but I can’t honestly

	say there was much support. But then I don't think I've ever been overly accepting...maybe if I’d seeked out more support there would have been but as I said there was a free lap top and some things you could put on it to help you, but, I suppose it helped me. I'm one of these people that doesn't need extra time in exams if I know it I know it if I don't I don't. I don't sit there for hours on end I have the patience. you know I've got a very short concentration span which is probably to do with my dyslexia you know I get bored vey easily and you know you get people who can sit there for hours in exams but I get there very quickly which is probably my downfall because I'm a little bit xxxxx I don't read questions properly you know, I never read questions properly, I don't read instructions properly, you know, I know I should take more time to do it, but I don't have patience for things I don't have the....I think it would help for me to slow down and take the time a bit but its not in my nature to be like that. so, but there was the support in some respects but think you had to be very severely dyslexic to get one-to-one in class. to me that would be my worst nightmare. I wouldn't accept that type of help.
J	So going back to your Mum helping did your parents think there was something more than….
G	I don’t think they…I don’t think it was something that was very well know when we were young. I think as I've got older and as there is more understanding of it, you were reading more about it and we know More about it I think not so much Dad but more Mum, I think this you know, and then I thoughts 'that's me' when I recognised or elements of it that I've got. But then at the same time I don't really like this 'I'm dyslexic, I'm dyslexic' 'have you got a disability?' I've always put 'no'. I wouldn't think that I don't see it like I've got a disability Id be embarrassed to say id got a disability. I did at work when I applied for the job, I found it very difficult to write that. I don't see myself as having a disability. I don't think its a very pleasant word, I don't know what it conjures up in my mind but I don't like to associate it with me really.
J	Yes.
G	So but I did put it down because Id made it aware and I needed to put it down, so I did. Or 'have you got a leaning disability?'.
J	Or sometimes its worded as 'do you consider yourself disabled?'.
G	Umm, and I just think it sounds horrible. You know I don’t want to see myself like that. Not really, so I will put 'no'. So, and a learning disability, well, no, I know there are all different types, but it sounds so extreme such a horrible label, so I don't want to put myself as that. that what stops me as putting myself as that and getting the help and support because I wont actually put that to be honest because I don't want to actually tick that box.
J	Yes.
J	So yes. So you mentioned before been good at maths.

G	Well, not good but its never been an issue. I can do maths, I can get by with it. I don’t suppose you use it everyday, you are writing all the time aren't you, especially with the job I do, but you know I can sort of…I'm not bad at maths. If you are watching Countdown, I cant do the words at all, but I can sit quite happily and do the maths and I enjoy it. My brain works in that way that I get it. This is why I went and this bit of accountancy. But unfortunately the job at the end is boring to me because I like working with people. I like doing the numbers because I can do them. the actual job at the end its not me at all. Umm, and the obviously then I went back into nursing. so that's where I like to be I like working with people. I like working in a team, but all the jobs that seem to be around that have had quite a large element of written work around them. so people who work with numbers are quite often office based. and they don't interact with each other, unless its over a desk. So that's not actually me, I can do that but but I just find the job so dull.
J	yes.
G	so it’s a difficult one really, so I thought 'Right, I'm going to do something that I can actually do I can achieve something I you know, am comfortable in it. And when I was actually doing it it was 'oh my god, this is so boring. You know no one speaks to each other doing the day. My day working as a nurse we are laughing, chatting, joking, we have such an amazing team and we are constantly just you know, having fun as well as doing our job. its such a social thing. You know, but uh, you don't speak. And because I was so used to chat chat chat that it would irritate people, they didn't want talking, you have to concentrate and you have really when you are crunching numbers you cant chat, chat chat. So no that was quite short lived. I was bored, really bored with that type of work.
J	Did it boost your confidence knowing that you were doing something you were good at?
G	I can't say as it did, I didn’t have much luck with that job. It was a friend of mine that got me the job and her Mum was an absolute monster. And they worked in the accounts office. And I didn’t know this when I went to work. And if you made one mistake she would humiliate you. now because I already lacked confidence it didn't really, even though I was happy with what I was doing, she was so unforgiving that I was even more on edge than any other job that I've been at. So that didn't really help me [laughing]. But when there would creep in an element of paper work as there was going to be in any job, because this boss would absolutely you know make me look so stupid, it was 'oh, I'm back to this again'. No matter what job, there will always be an element of written work. you know. English needed. In accounts you always have to write to people to say you haven't said your payment. You have to say it in a certain academic way. And I would really be struggling with that. And the more I panic the more I just go blank. And the anxiety kicks in and you know, I just cant do it.
J	So you mentioned a lot about your, how about home life and work outside of work. Does it impact on that?

G	Umm, so last night Aiden was going to the shop and he said 'I'll dictate and you write the shopping list'. And I said 'well I can't spell half the words you want me to write and then you cant read them, so I will sit here looking embarrassed so what is the point in that?' I said you may as well write it yourself. But I've just got to the point now where I just, you know, I will do it, but I'm comfortable with Aiden and I'm not embarrassed in front of him, and I think you know, I don't really have to overcome the personal at home. There will be some things I read wrong to friends and stuff and they have a good laugh at me and I'd laugh, but inside I didn't feel like laughing. You feel really quite upset by it. Which just makes you feel very silly. And a bit thick. But as I said I've got good friends and I don't feel like that anymore, the only time it creeps in more is in work, or sometimes, if you are having to fill in forms somewhere and you can feel or if you go to a course and it will say 'how did you find the course' and I will churn the same thing out 'I found it very informative' every time on these forms. With Aiden, if he writes a birthday card it will be lovely, and mine is to and from. But he said 'you write nice ones to me' and I said 'yes, but you can find them on Google'. [laughing]
J	[Laughing]
G	Its not that as though I don’t mean them, its just my brain doesn’t function to write these things down, but yes, yes. I leave card writing to him, because he is very good at putting a few nice bits in. So no, I don’t find it a massive issue now, sort of in home life or anything like that. maybe if I'm reading instructions to do things IKEA things, putting them up, might take me a bit longer. But saying that my brain is very good at putting things together and seeing things in a logical way and making things. And that's actually a strength of mine. You know if I am helping Aiden to do stuff you know I will often spot where it will be going wrong, like curtains and stuff, my brain will actually process stuff shapes and things and putting them in and building and making, but I fail because I read the instructions wrong. But I can correct it often because I can see where its wrong.
J	So there are some advantages?
G	Think so yes, yes. I am quite a practical person….
J	Do you think with Leo as well, you are more aware he might be dyslexic?

G	Um, I spoke to the teacher, but I feel I don’t want to label my child and they don’t see anything. They say things will start creeping in. And he is eight and there is nothing at the moment that we would say. And I don’t see anything but then its still really early. And he is achieving where he should be at school, his reading is where it should be his English is where it should be. Everything is where it should be so I can't say that, but I don't want to over analyse and say 'oh yes, he's put a 'd' instead of a 'b' and all that. you know, I think there is a lot more to dyslexia, than all that. That is a normal thing that kids do when they are learning to read and write. I'm not picking up on it yet. So, I'm quite aware that it can run in families. Especially my family, it seems to be going back quite a bit. and you know so there is a possibility that it could be. As I say I've let the teacher know so she can be a little bit more tuned in. But as far as they are concerned, not at the moment. And his follow-on school which is one of the reasons why I wanted to stay in the area they have three specialist dyslexic teachers there because of that and my friends child goes there and he is dyslexic and she says it is amazing giving support to children who do have need any sort of extra help. I don't know if he is but there is a possibility so it would be a very good school for him to go to. You know, I ve never heard of a dyslexic teacher. Aiden's Mum was a support teacher at university and she was dyslexic.
J	Oh right.
G	So maybe Aiden has more of an understanding of what it means. He is very patient and very good at explaining things to people. He is much better at me I am rubbish at writing and timelines, I am rubbish at doing it. And it was avoidance more than anything else, like assignments it was always last minute. It was avoidance, I always found them so difficult. I don't want to do this it just makes me feel silly and not capable, so leave it to the last minute and then it was 'Mum, Mum' and she was frantically helping me with it and it would be the same thing every time and the same with Becca, my sister, she struggled with it and my Mum helped her. I don't think either of us would have got through university without her help.
J	Mum the TA.
G	Very much so. She was very good.
J	So how do you feel about talking about it?
G	Its just a bit odd….because you hide it and live with it, and you just get on with it, so to talk about it…I don't know what to say. You just hide it, I do anyhow and I don’t want to be one of those 'I'm dyslexic everybody', constantly bring it up or constantly use it as an reason for things, so you know, and I thinks as I said I've just got on with it, always have done really and whatever coping strategies whether it be negative when I was younger which it often was, rebelling and just withdrawing myself it was my way of coping with it.
J	So what were your ways of rebelling?
G	Well, I just became naughty in class. I became this disruptive, naughty child because I wasn’t seen as thick, because it was my choice, I was with drawing myself from it. Because I didn’t want to do it. But wasn’t so much the case of that, it was a way of me not feeling thick, because if I wasn't trying then, that was me doing that, and I was so frightened of trying and failing that it was easier to deliberately fail myself, and I think that was my way, of you know, dealing with it really because I just couldn't bear to work hard and then to fail and to feel so upset over that, it was easier to not bother at all.

J	Ummm.
G	So that’s what I did.
J	Is there anything else you wanted to say?
G	No I don’t think so.
J	That was nearly 40 minutes, thank you.
G	Wow. Goes fast doesn’t it?
J	Doesn’t it? Thank you very much I'll stop it now.
G	
J	
G	So I will write everything down on this A4 piece of paper as my day, so when I forts started it was 'how am I gone to remember all of this?', it was so daunting these things aren't little things its someone's medication this is really important different things, this is you know, so I would carry around little note books and I'd have that many bits of paper flying everywhere and scribbling through things, so now I just get one sheet of A4 paper and even if I'm not the one doing the hand over I take my own notes of what needs to be done that day and I just work through them, ticking them, ticking them. Because I used to go home when I first started and I'd think 'god, oh, god what have I forgotten?' I couldn't switch off and real anxiety all the time because it was you know important things, messages to consultants and different stuff, and I'd be like 'I haven't done that'. So this way I know that its done, it works for me its a coping strategy I suppose. You know, my brain will just not retain that amount of information I just, I just or if it does its a bit scrambled and its you know, not quite what has been asked or its a little bit sort of you know, there's so many thinks going on in the day to remember, I've just constantly got to write it down and I've just learned to do that and realise it's my way at the end of the shift I can go to bed otherwise I'm kind of going over 'have I remembered that have I remembered that?'. If I've ticked everything, then I've done it. So..
J	And has anyone ever told you these coping strategies, you know these people who are there to support and help? Or is it just things you’ve thought of your self?
G	No, just things I've discovered myself. We used to say at university you know, do these big mind maps, but where are you going to do those at work, with all your spider diagrams and all that stuff that’s just not something you are going to sit down, not for me any how and start doing spider diagrams. People would think I was crackers, you know. [laughing] So yes, I think , and I suppose a spider diagram or a list it's a way of remembering, but it looks a little less you know... But then the more I work, the more I realise other people are dyslexic and you don't realise. A girl who has just started has the glasses on they are darkened and she listens to music while she is typing because she cant concentrate on what she is typing unless she's got a background...to me that sounds like I'd never be able...totally different. I couldn't listen to music while I was concentrating. I can't have a lot of noise going on while I am concentrating. I suppose people are different. Different aren't they. But the more you are open the more you chat to people you hear well 'I'm dyslexic too'.
J	Yeah, yeah. Ill stop it again, that was another three and a half minutes.

G	And I know what I'd like to say, but I can't articulate it and end up feeling silly because I can't put it into words, how I actually feel. And often I'll pronounce words wrong or say the wrong words, in the wrong sentence and I'll just feel, and people correct you and you feel a bit silly. Because in my head I know what I'd like to say actually getting it out and putting it down...you know verbally I'm better, but I still struggle when it comes to articulating. And I know these words, I know these big words, and you say to me and I'll understand what they are but I cant find them and find it hard to bring them back into my own sentences. And when I'm writing I read these words all the time, but they don't come naturally in my head. I find it difficult to use more academic terminology and different wording and this is why a lot of my notes are very, very repetitive, you know, the wording I use to make myself sound academic too. So it doesn't naturally flow for me, but its not as though I don't have the vocabulary in my brain I just can't get it out.
J	So what about reading? Do you read much?
G	I read all the time. And this is what is frustrating. People say 'the more you read the better your spelling will be' and not for me. It doesn’t do anything for me, I read every night, I read to Leo all the time, I read my own books, I read at work all the time. It doesn't - maybe it has a little bit yeah, but, no. People say 'but you will be able to spell'. No, my brain doesn't recognise or memorise the words, I write them how I say them and always have done, and I find it very difficult, as I said, to you know, how we use different phonics, you know, get it. And I've gone over it, reading Leo' books on my own, trying to educate myself, read and spell, my brain doesn't function like that.
J	So, when you read, if it is a big word, how do you process the big, long words?
G	Well often I will break it down, and if I can't read it I will just move on, you know, that’s…. And often I will break it down and I think I know the word but I might not I might have put the wrong word in there, but I will never know I'll use a word that is in context to what I am reading. So to me that's the word.
J	So have you always been a big reader or is it….
G	As I've got older I've read more, but for a long time I've read books. I wouldn't say I read tonnes but, you know. I find it very difficult to…I analyse things a lot in my head, and the only way I can get to sleep is to read a book and go into somebody else's...or I'll lie there analysing what has happened in the day, or if I have written a spelling mistake I'll sit there 'god, I'm so stupid'. And go over and over in my head something that has happened at work that nobody else has paid any attention to, but me, I will have felt quite embarrassed over something that will then cannot switch off at night and be as I said, going over it and over it. So reading is my way of tuning out really. and Face Book. Good old Face Book.
J	Ok, Ill stop it there.

Jonathan

J	I just want you to tell me as much or as little as you want about your experiences of having dyslexia.
JB	Ok, well. I couldn’t really remembered to back when I was diagnosed because it was about the age of seven. Um, so I actually rung my Mum.
J	Oh did you?
S	Because and, I had a conversation with her because I couldn’t remember and I've learned some stuff that I didn't know um about how I was diagnosed because I didn’t remember but actually, it wasn’t the school who diagnosed me it was my Mum and she had a lot of trouble with the school because they basically said 'oh, don't be so silly, that's not a thing'. You know 'some kids just aren't as clever as others'. So just accept it sort of thing. And she didn't um, she got an educational psychologist and basically paid for an assessment and that came back you know, positive for dyslexia. And then I think at that point then the school accepted it and took it on board, but they were sort of fighting all the way. Which I didn't know about at the time, but that's obviously what she has told me just recently. Um, so that was probably about the age of seven, and from then I went to a place in Staines, a Dyslexic Institute twice a week, so I missed whatever it was, two hours of lessons twice a week. Went there for help as it were um, in... And from what I can remember and I don't remember a lot about it um, but it was more, they taught you coping strategies to deal with it. They didn't say 'this is going to cure you', you know. It was teaching coping strategies for dealing with it. Um, yes, so that's the sort of diagnoses part of it. And I always struggled at school with English and reading and spelling and stuff like that, but other stuff I was sort of fine with. And I always, even to this day I struggle with English, and like you say, short term memory. I ask someone something about a word and something and literally thirty seconds later 'what was it again?' and for some reason I just can’t retain just anything, no I can retain information, just if someone says' this is how you spell so-and-so', two minutes later 'what was it again?'. So I think it is...when you mentioned memory it is sort of that....I thought that rings, that is relevant to memory to a certain extent. So I can remembered things from ages ago, but very short term memory I do find very difficult.
J	Mmmm.
JB	Um, so yeah, and so at school I sort of struggled because I was the last year of O Levels.
J	Ok, so how old are you?

JB	46. So I did O Levels and CSE's at school and then went to sixth form and I did GCSE's. Because that was the year they scrapped them. So I couldn’t take O Levels because they didn’t do them, so I did GCSE's for a year then A Levels and after A Levels I went to South Bank [University] and did a degree. So, and at school they sort of for exams you can have extra time in exams for the dyslexia, although that never actually helped me in any way because no matter how much I sit there , it doesn't improve in time. You know, I knew whatever I wanted to say, but getting it down on paper it didn't really help, so although I had more time I never used it I always finished in the time that was allotted. So that want particularly helpful concession to my dyslexia. But that's what they did that's what they thought would help. When I left education and went to work, most places most companies didn't know I had dyslexia really. In my current job they do, but you know, it doesn't really come up. I just try and avoid situations you know, when you go on training courses they say 'you go up to the front and write on the whiteboard'. And that would always fill me with dread and I would do anything to avoid that, just because I am so uncomfortable doing that. Because I would go up there and freeze and can’t even spell the easiest words, so that is something I don't like doing particularly, um, but yes, so that is really about it. So as far as in work and how it affects me I sort of work around it and try to, you know. It’s a lot easier now with you've got a computer on your desk and you do drawings and look things up and it’s quick and easy. If I'm typing something most of it is word processed and there is Spell Checker any way so this is always the biggest problem to me.
J	So you were talking earlier on about going to Stains a couple of times a week and they were teaching you coping strategies. Can you remember what type of thing?
JB	Not really I can't remember much about it. At one point they seemed to be not obsessed, with, but coloured glasses and coloured sheets and looking at words through different colours and um, I can't remember if they came to any conclusions if that was any good or not but they were certain colours if you looked through it was supposed to help with the reading, but I don't ever recall that helping me. But, its ways of remembering, I suppose it's things you should learn in English anyway, certain ways of learning words and difficult words and how to get round the issue of not being able to spell particularly well. Like I say I have a bad memory, I couldn't even remember the time frame of...I know I went there for a while. It was about when I was seven and it was only seven to eleven because I certainly didn't go when I was at secondary school.
J	How did it make you feel about going?
JB	Um, yeah, I mean….I sort of remember I missed RE and history, lessons which didn’t particularly bother me [laughing]. But as a result in junior school I never did history or RE because those subjects I never really you, know, history I would of actually quite enjoyed, but I never did it, I never pursued it so further on either. But you know you were going out of school, everyone knew you were going out of school for 'special help' or whatever it was and yes, you got teased about it at school but, you know...
J	how did that make you feel then?

JB	Umm. I don’t know again I can’t remember but obviously I remember been teased about it, it bothered me a bit but, you know, it didn’t really bother me. It was almost like there is a reason why I can’t spell very well, it doesn’t mean I am necessarily stupid there is just an issue with how my brain is wired that I can’t do certain things. So a lot of it was self-esteem, it was teaching you that just because you have got this it doesn't mean to say you aren't good at maths and you can't do physics, you can’t do other stuff, it just means you aren't good at English basically. So I suppose it helped in a way it made me to feel better about myself with the fact that I couldn't spell things, you know, other people can, wasn't really all bad as it were. So yes, it helped with that quite a bit...
J	So what about at sixth form or maybe at university?
JB	Well at university they didn’t, I never actually told them I was dyslexic I don’t think, no I'm sure I didn’t because Mum reminded me of that the other day. Because it’s a comment I made to her that I'd said to her I quite enjoyed the fact at university no-one knew I was dyslexic so it was almost like I was not 'oh, he's the dyslexic kid' if you see what I mean. And Mum said 'I was trying all this time to push for it and as soon as you went somewhere you didn't know, you preferred it. So she thought 'oh great, we tried to highlight it to the schools to make it easier for you', and actually when it wasn't I actually - I don't remember that, but that is what she said at the time. I preferred it, the fact that no one knew, so no one treated me any differently as it were, and by then you know what you can and can’t do so you don't put yourself in situations where you become an issue. So You avoid it, you know, no one necessarily needed to know, if you see what I mean. My lecturers didn't know, I was getting good Jonathans and doing the work.
J	So what was your degree?
JB	Construction Management. So it was maths and that sort of thing. It wasn’t a lot of…. obviously you had to write essays and that sort of thing, but with word processors, computers and stuff you can kind of deal with it or cope with it as it were. Which is exactly what you can do and learn to cope with it rather than, you know, it doesn't go away so that's all you can do so that is what I did. I don't think it really affected, and again when I did my exams at university I didn't have any special help. Mum said, and I don't remember this, at school I was allowed to take a lap top into the exams to type on rather than write but I don't remember that. Um, but she said that's what they said. I never actually passed English at all the actual O Level or GCSE so I think I did O Level and didn't pass it the GCSE and didn't pass it I think I might even have done it again when I did my A Levels the first year, and didn't pass it.
J	So what was that like, doing it over and over again?
JB	Not getting anywhere. Everyone saying you need English and you need maths and could never pass the English, so you know, it’s not nice not being able to do something, but you know, ultimately the fact I haven't got English hasn’t actually mattered. I managed to get onto a - I didn't get great A Levels either - you know I did ok, I passed and got two and an AS level. And by then I don't remember it been an issue at university at all really.
J	It’s interesting isn't it because now you can’t go anywhere without English and Maths GCSE and it makes you wonder do you really need maths if you don’t go into mathematics and do you really need English if you don’t go where written English is critical.

JB	Yeah, do you need it? I don’t think so. They always say you have to have those but given I've never had English and went to university and go through clearing system. It was like what do you have 'I have 'O' Levels, GCSES, CSES, A levels, AS levels. I've got one of everything, what do you want?' [laughing] It was that change over year so I had all different types of qualifications, so it was enough to get me onto the course I eventually did. Then after that it was straight from that into work and I've been working ever since. I've only worked, I say proper jobs, since university, for three companies. the first one for about eight years, the second one for five years and obviously this one for twelve odd years, something like that.
J	Is that a conscious decision to do that, or is it just how it worked out?
JB	Just how it worked out really I've always been lucky in a way I've enjoyed working at the job so yeah. The first company I worked for I did after eight or nine years, it might have been closer to ten years, I can’t remember, then I sort of, that was my only job. There was one of these recruitment companies that said 'oh we've got this job do you want to...' and they always used to phone up and I'd say 'oh, no, no'. and they phoned me one Friday afternoon when I'd had a bad day and I thought, ok what is it then, And they said and I went for the interview and thought 'that seems quite good' I’ll give that a go'. I changed jobs then and worked for them for five years. It was a massive company, £200 million turnover. And the reason it went under, it was nothing to do, we were a small division of that company and the company went under. At the time I was already thinking about leaving, you can tell things weren't going well for that company generally. And I got a job with the company where I am now. So I've been there about twelve years now. And my boss's from my previous job came to work with us, Ian. Probably about four years ago until he retired, so it was nice working with the same people.
J	Familiar faces…
JB	Yes, familiar faces. [laughing]. And Ironically Craig the MD at Berryrange worked with Ian at the other company too. He sort of knew him as well.
J	So you all have working interrelations.
JB	Yes, and I've known Craig or of Craig before. It’s quite nice. I've always enjoyed my job, I'm not one of those people who is looking for…you know if I am comfortable with the people and I'm enjoying it why change? So I've been fairly static or constant. Maybe that's because I don't like new situations and change. Not that I don't like change at all, but if you go to a new job its like, what are they going to get me to do, ask me to do presentations....
J	Do you think that might be something with being dyslexic?
JB	Possibly because I don’t like you know, I don’t like getting put into situations like that so I will probably try and avoid them. If I'm comfortable with the situation and I know the people around me and I know what I am doing then I'll probably take the easier route and just stay doing that. But I'm lucky in what I've always enjoyed what I'm doing you know, it’s been a good career progression really. I haven't needed to jump around a lot and get different experience because it’s quite a specialised industry the fact that I've stayed in it for a long time probably means I'm more experienced or whatever at what I'm doing so I find it easier so. Yeah, it could be related to it. Who knows what the reason is you know...

J	It’s really difficult to unpick these things and you know, do you need to? So you mentioned at Berryrange they know you are dyslexic, but at other places they haven't…
JB	Yeah, I don't think so, no, they may have done. It wasn't as though, I don't stand up and announce it so, but occasionally, once I get to know people well I'm happy to, because I'm always asking 'how do you spell this, how do you spell that?' and I say 'you know, it's because I'm dyslexic. So I don't know exactly when I mentioned it and it's quite a while with bits and pieces over time. I don't know if Neil knew if I was dyslexic or not.
J	No, no he didn’t.
JB	I wasn't sure if he had picked that up from working with me or [laughing] or something I said or something purely random.
J	No, the email sent out to everyone.
JB	Yeah.
J	Cause I did say to him 'Is there anyone dyslexic where you work' and he was 'no, no, there is no one where we work', so I said 'Um, there might be'. [laughing]
JB	[laughing]
J	They just haven't said. It's like with what I teach, design technology. In a department you usually get at least somebody else who is, where as I suppose if you teach English, there will be no one in the department.
JB	No, not something that would naturally attract dyslexic people.
J	I wouldn’t have thought so, but it might do. So you've got kids as well?
JB	Yes, yes.
J	Have they shown any signs?
JB	I think my youngest one does show signs, yes. Although my wife doesn't at all, she is very 'no, no'. But I think he probably is. My oldest son, no, not at all, but the other one I think he probably is. You know he….
J	How old is he?
JB	He is ten and the oldest one is thirteen. So um, I think possibly the youngest one. And with my siblings, my sister, not at all, but my brother, he was never diagnosed, but I think he…..
J	So is he older than you?
JB	He is eighteen months older than me. So I suspect he is - you know you can tell. He will say it as well, he will say it. But he was never diagnosed.
J	So how come, because there is not a big age gap there? So how come your Mum…
JB	I think because I am worse. He is mildly, yes, there are levels.
J	Yes, like a spectrum.
JB	There are symptoms and signs, but he is not that bad probably, um, so maybe that is why. I don’t know. I think for me maybe that because I was worse that it was more obvious and more of an issue I suppose.
J	And it was just with reading?
JB	Basically spelling and I was always behind on reading. I never enjoyed reading, that was part of it. I never read at all, until well after leaving education and then I found reading and really enjoyed it. But reading it to myself and not reading out loud. Um, because I think when you are reading, you can still read without having to pronounce every word. Do understand?

J	Oh, yes, I get exactly what you mean.
JB	Um, I can enjoy reading, but if I have to read the same thing out loud it would be a lot more difficult for me, but, yes, I never, at school I never read. And that is something I notice with my older son is that he was doing ok and stuff and then he found the love of reading and as soon as he started reading a lot his whole learning, he advanced massively, very quickly and academically in all areas, because of the reading. And that is something I never did because I was petrified of reading, never enjoyed it. Oh, I've got to read. Because I never did it it had an effect.
J	I think the thoughts are if you can't read things like instructions, exam questions and all that sort of thing then if you cant read them and understand them then you can't answer the questions.
JB	Yes, and I think that is what my youngest one struggles with. If I read him the question he will answer it, you know, at the moment he is doing 11+ papers and stuff like that. Cause obviously it's 11+ next year, but I don't think he is going to pass it. But he will be doing a paper and stare at it blankly and I'll read it to him and he will go 'yes, yes' he will seem to, it's not that he doesn't understand it, its just when it is written down on paper and then he has to answer it he seems to struggle. But, if you read it to him, and if you say you have to put this word with this word and you show him then he will say 'oh, yes, I see that'. But you know he probably will get the words, but even now doing like the verbal reasoning with all the different words, when you have all the words and you have to find two and put them together yes, I struggle with that and I'm going 'oh, what is the answer?' [laughing] And I'm looking at the answers like that because I just can't do.
J	What about all the ones with the shapes?
JB	Oh, easy, easy. I could do those all day long. But it's the word ones. I just struggle with the words, but the shapes, non-verbal reasoning, it’s the word ones. For whatever reason with the words, I just can't see it. I just can't pick another word out with it. Just can't do it. So I am helping him and having to look at the answers.
J	So can he do the maths and the shapes?
JB	yes, yes. I can see there are different levels of intelligence. He is not good at maths like Elliott the older one. The older boy, but yes he is ok at maths. Again, I think it is to do with memory because a lot of of maths is about learning the times table isn't it. because once you have got that you've got the basis. And the older one Elliott, from quite a young age you could ask him maths, mental arithmetic and he could do it. But as Isaac can't. Its almost like a memory thing, how it is linked, it's memory as well. And I never learned the times tables I just couldn't. I was good at maths and I could work it out, but having that recall....
J	So that rote learning?
JB	Rote learning, I could never do that. Or revise and stuff, people can just read things and recall it back I could never. I did find that difficult. It might be completely unrelated that I have a bad memory, who knows. It might not be to do with the dyslexia.
J	Its very difficult to tease out.
JB	Yes, what is caused by one thing and what is caused by something else. We are made up of so many different elements, yes.

J	Yes, really interesting, thank you for that. There are a few tings that you have said that make links with what other people have said.
JB	I do think memory is linked, but I don’t know. But I do think its linked a lot of times to this. Very short term recall and stuff I do find very difficult.
J	Do you have strategies for that?
JB	Um, ask other people [laughing]. Its quite good in the office because there are lots of job numbers and I've got two people sitting either side of me and both are really good at, like its 'what's the number for that job?' and its who can get it first, because they will say the number and I will write it down.
J	So they can just remember the number?
JB	Yes, yes. It's a letter and four numbers, and sometimes it's a job we haven't done for a year and they will go boom and remember it. And I find that amazing.
J	Wow, I didn’t know people could do that. So are there any things you are better at because you have dyslexia?
JB	Um, [pause] no, um, [pause]. Um. I don’t know if it is as a result, its hard to tell, so I don’t know whether I am better at problem solving and stuff like that as a result or not, maybe I'm just good at that, so, that sort of thing. And maths I've never found difficult. No nothing stands out in particular that I think because of it I'm really good at that. Not really. No. Umm. [Pause] No. it's complicated, what you are made up of, your parents, and other things going back into your family tree. Who knows where it comes from and what it is. Definitely in the family, because my Mum is also slightly dyslexic as well, but was obviously never diagnosed. Because going back to when I was at school, it is a lot more common now and they are geared up for kids with special needs and stuff like that and back then, as I said, it was almost like a struggle getting them to actually admit I wasn't just thick. And that's all they wanted to put it down to.
J	Did it impact on your behaviour at all.
JB	Yes, because you are always in the bottom set with all the naughty kids as it were. It was all streamed so I was always in the lower sets for like English and then for maths I was in the higher sets, so it was different. So I don't think so really. I did used to mess around at school a lot, bit so did a lot of other people. It might not be related to being dyslexic. I don't think, but, if you struggle with something, you are less interested and you mess around with it. I suppose, but yes, I don't remember really enjoying school, I always found it quite difficult. I did it, but I didn't really enjoy it.
J	Oh, 35 minutes, that will take me about 5 hours. Is there anything else you wanted to add.
JB	I wasn’t sure what you wanted.
J	Exactly what you have done.
JB	Since school it hasn’t really been, you know, its always been there, but not a major part of my life. I don’t think it's really held me back since I left school. Or left education should I say, in work because I've learned ways to cope with it. Not hide it, but get round it so it doesn't cause me an issue. Um, and you know, most of the time it doesn't you just avoid doing stuff that highlights, like standing up in front of people and using a white board or something like that. I'll just, and it has happened and I'll just say 'no' I'm not doing it and then they go onto someone else. I will just not put myself in that position. I just know it would be a disaster.

J	How do you feel about talking about it?
JB	I don't mind talking about it, cause I don't see it as a weakness or something like that. It’s a condition I've got and I live with it and deal with it. I don't mind people knowing um, I do find some people go 'oh, dyslexia, oh yes'. It’s a major issue, but to me its not, it's who I've always been so its not an issue. I don't mind people knowing or talking about it.
J	Great, thank you very much.

Selena

J	I will type it all up word for word, with all the 'umms' as well. And you can go through it but there is no pressure to as they can be quite lengthy. Um and then just, if you are happy with it I can include all of it or part of it in the thesis.
S	Ok.
J	So really, its just you just tell me of your experiences of being dyslexic.
S	well, I've always known I was dyslexic, pretty much. I went to a girls' public day school trust called Bromley High, and luckily I was in kindergarten and the teacher had been on a lecture that summer and and it was fresh in her mind. And I was been ambidextrous I think, so when they put me at the easel to paint I was using both hands and then in dance classes and things I went the opposite way round from the other kids and had no sense of my left and right, and then this teacher kind of pulled my Mum aside and very early on in kindergarten was assessed so really lucky and also to be in the private system that they could accommodate me in those days um, but yes. So my Mum worked very hard to get me the extra tuition all the time and in English and maths particularly, um, and never too much expectation of me I don't think. But my Dad was definitely 'I'm not paying for private education when you go to senior school'. He wanted me to go to the local comprehensive state school. A said 'I'll be mullered' I'm not going there because I already had some kids teasing me and saying 'she's spastic' cause I think dyslexic had an 'ic' on the end, and there was definitely a bot of that. And also Mum taking me out of school to have other classes, the kids kind of thought why is that then, 'why is her Mummy turning up all the time?' I have to say my Mum worked really hard and I'm the only one in my family that went on to further education, my brother didn't, he went to Sevenoaks so but I went into art, as a field, and um, spatial design. And when I went for the interview there at KIAD [Kent Institute of Art and Design] up at Fort Pitt they said 'What is your name, how old are you have you got dyslexia?' and I said 'Yes', and then 'you've got a place'.
J	Wow.
S	They very much said 'dyslexics can think in three dimensions' the lecturers in art seemed to kind of understand that, um, I feel like I've been a very fortunate dyslexic in a way, because they caught me so early it hasn’t really had any repercussions later in life, it hasn't held me back, I wasn't having to wonder what was going on I always had a category, not a category, but, I always knew I was dyslexic. my husband when we first met, he cannot understand all the piles I make and I think that is part of dyslexic people do that, they kind of organise in certain ways. And its 'please don't touch that pile I know what's going on in it' but I've got twenty piles and he knows now. When we were first married he used to try and tidy them all up but now he knows that's my way of sorting things out.
J	Very three dimensional.
S	Very three dimensional. That’s my calendar [showing me her calendar on A3 card] I have to block things off lots of colour going on, if I put it in an iPad or something digitally, it bend my brain. It just. If I can see it like this in blocks and then I know what's happening, that's my way of doing things.
J	Yes.

S	So, its not always the most efficient and a bit old school, and not very efficient, but it works for me.
J	So it is efficient then.
S	Yes, I remember watching a programme about one of the girls that is an actress on East Enders and she has to use colour, a highlighter for learning her script and things like that. So, yeah, yeah. Funny, so then we've realised later in life my Granny was dyslexic and she was very much the dunce at school. She probably finished school when she was twelve, um, but when she used to write, people used to hand it to me, little notes and messages, because I could read it, it was all phonetic. She would get the spellings off the back of coffee jars and things, because she didn't know how to spell things. Um, and my brother is dyslexic as well, but neither of may parents. My father is a very bright man, got himself into full scholarship into WXXXX School. Tis parents didn't even know, it was a teacher put him forward for it. My Granny only found out when she had to start dealing with the uniform. So he was a very bright man. His mother I think was dyslexic. Um, she would have been treated very differently. in those days it really was the dunce cap. and put in the corner of the classroom.
J	Yes, or word blind.
S	Yes, I haven't heard that phrase for a while. Where as for me, I was coming through when I got extra time for my GCSE's. And for GCSE's I was the first year, and that suited me, so I think I have fallen in the lucky phase of things. You know, and computers coming along and spell checks and I don't have to worry.
J	Really interesting.
S	Yes. But I find myself on text and things not use the word 'diary' because I'm using the word 'dairy' there's definitely things I veer away from because I cant think of how to spell it, so its mainly in English with me, because some people are mathematically dyslexic, where as mine is definitely more English and spellings. But then again I speak French and I'm not afraid of language. So, you know...
J	So going back to when you were at school, um, and your experiences there you were saying you felt some of the children were teasing you, what sort of thing were they doing?
S	It wasn’t constant teasing, but they all went off one day to sit the 11+ and I was the only one that stay behind and they would all go 'it's because she is spastic', definitely when I moved to my secondary school which was a girls' boarding school, there was definitely one girl who was definitely quite pernicious and um, kept saying 'its because you're spastic. but I think that was partly because they were full boarders and I was, they had parents in other countries and there was me with my Mum turning up twice a week to drive me to tuition lessons in Sevenoaks so there was probably there was an element of jealousy that my Mum was available. You know, so it wasn't the dyslexia so much in that instance and I don't think I have ever felt, umm, I don't know, I don't think my Dad when I was younger fully understood dyslexia and he definitely, well that's it, she's not going to do very well in school and let's not bother and actually I was the one that did the best. So ok, there was always an element of trying to please him, but I think I might have been like that anyway, not so much interested in dyslexia.
J	yes, sometimes its difficult to unravel what belongs where.
S	Yes, I'm not going to start to psychoanalyse. [Laughing]

J	I'm not either, don’t worry.
S	Things always took me longer, definitely. History essays always took me a long time. Um, but I think I always thought there was support there from the academic side. Um, in the kind of getting extra time and the schools I went to did give me extra tuition. Um, and my secondary school, we did prep at school. Stayed till six, and so I would often go to another extra lesson um, yes. I think It was more that kids didn't like I was getting more attention and special dispensation other than actually be dyslexic. never had anyone say you are thick or anything like that. I think it was, still at the time it was 'what's dyslexia then'. Where as you don't get that now. Kids are much more, well 'he writes with his left hand and he's dyslexic', 'You've got blue eyes', and I think there is a more deeper understanding now, there is more. then there was just one category, now there are more breakdowns of it so..
J	There is definitely more awareness, there is still more work to be done. As with lots of things in education. And it moves forward as more becomes known.
S	Yes. Its made me as a Mum..my husband's quite bright. He can do Maths and things quite quickly, but he's quite 'well, the kids will be fine because I'm fine'. But I'm more well when we go to parents' evenings I'm a bit more weary and a bit more, kind of making the teachers aware and I'm probably beyond that point with Olivia now, but with Henry, I just always say, but my husband is the other day, bombastic, more confident I suppose, um, that I feel I take the other road and say 'well, I'm dyslexic so watch the children, look out for it. because I do understand it's hereditary. My brother's boys have got it. But they've come out with A*s in their GCSE's so again because they knew early. But then again with George and Alfie, they didn't want to kind of commit until they were seven or eight in Year 3 or Year 4 and I thought that was too late. I don't know what the current thinking.
J	Um, I don’t know, I think a lot of it is to do with how parent's feel when the children are that age. Do they want an early diagnoses. I think sometimes the thought is you cant really diagnose until they start reading. And that is actually wrong, you can do it on physical behaviour when they are quite small. but a lot of the time the SENCO's in school wont know this, its only when you get to much more specialist level that people are aware because the SENCO's are dealing with all sorts they are not specialists in any one particular field. So going back a little bit to your Dad as well, how did that impact on you, if you're Mum was very supportive......
S	In the end I said I wasn’t going to a state school, partly because we had a nice house and smart cars and I'd get the kicked out of me anyway and um, I said 'no you are going to pay for an education for me and I'm going to go to that school'. And luckily my cousin was there already and the rest of the family is getting it all, so you know, I'm going to have it. Um, and I think once we'd got to that point he was more educated I think about dyslexia because my Mum had taken me to all these different things and it had been explained and by then he was staring to go 'oh, I think my Mum is' and seeing it wasn't not, an illness, but just something that could be dealt with. You know you just put the practical's in place, then that can negate it , so then it turned out my brother was dyslexic. they didn't get him ill he was fourteen fifteen, um, I think because he spent so much time playing rugby nobody noticed. His academic work was like..... So by then it had become a family trait I think and Um, then it was never spoken about again. Yes. he turned around I think and yes, changed. And then when I was the one that went off to art school and did further

	educational and stuff and had more of a career path than my brother had, then I think he was proud of me.
J	Oh, that’s good.
S	Yes. So I think he, neither of my cousins…so I grew up, my Mum is an identical twin and we all grew up next door to each other and the two husbands were in business. So there were us four kids really and um. So whoever they thought of us it was all four of us, so when I say I was the only one that went to further education I mean out the four of us, so there was a lot of support in the family because there were four parents if you know what I mean. If my Mum couldn't do tea, my aunt was doing tea and granny was babysitting one whole group of us.
J	Sounds lovely.
S	Yes, it was good fun, we are all really close and good friends. And there was a lot of support in that way I think. I haven't really asked my Mum. I should say to my Mum 'my god you put some work in with me. She would drive me to Sevenoaks's before the M25 and she would drive me down Pole Hill and I remember sitting behind big lorries and that sign 'vehicle' with the silent 'h' in it just used to sit there with all my little cards practicing my sounds eating my packed lunch. And this bloody word 'vehicle' what's that 'h' doing in there? I just don't get it [laughing]. So it would almost frustrate me before we got to the class. but I think I was very lucky and in those times the technique - say I stared going at five years old to extra tuition. It wasn't just tuition in subjects it was always kind of picture cards....
J	And how to learn as well?
S	Yes, yes. And I remember when I was first taught a plan to do essays with the cloud bubbles out - a spider chart kind of things and I thought 'yes! That makes sense. Yes I can use that'. That’s giving it some thought. Not erratic thought but disjointed thought some form, but I would be nervous. I remember the first time I had to write a little essay about a bird or something. And my parents sat at the kitchen table with me and they were 'just put something on the paper' and it was almost if I started it it was a leap, jumping off really knowing.
J	So how old would you have been there?
S	I was still at Bromley High so nine ten years old. Definitely remember that, night after night for about a week they kept trying to get me to put even 'A - bird -sat -' or something. And then they'd go to me what kind of bird? And in my head I was thinking a robin, but to get me, it was almost...I did have a fear of committing because writing was definitely the thing I was most nervous of because it would so openly show what I wasn't good at. Do you know what I mean?
J	Yes, yes.
S	Not just the spelling, but, I think once I got past that I was alright. It wasn’t 'till about GCSEs where you could do the coursework and you weren't having to rush that I got more confident about writing more long pieces, but definitely prior to that I always had the shortest homework [laughing]. Every one else would do two pages I would do one page. and I think I would get myself tied up in knots about it um, you know just because it would literally just show.....it was the physical evidence it wasn't just what was going on in my head it was the physical evidence. of the things people could say 'Oh yeah but we could see that because of that'.
J	Its interesting as well that we are going back to exams rather than coursework. I don’t know how that is going to impact on children who are coming through now.

S	Yes, writing. Will they in all of these years learned ways of posing the questions, teaching how to read the questions and everything….
J	You hope so, and they can have scribes and extra time and that sort of thing. And you mentioned when you went to KIAD and that sounds positive. How did that pan out?
S	Yes, I always kind of wanted to do interior design and I didn’t want to go to Chelsea Harbour velvet hair band, slim, pony, which it was at the time. Laura Ashley dresses and if you were doing interior design you had to be 'terribly, terribly' and I wasn't that kind of person. And I wasn't interested, I mean I love soft furnishings and everything, but I just wasn't interested in just that element. So I found spatial design was more architectural, it teaches you how big a stair case should be and what rise and treads, natural depth, should be for those and how much space you need before you push a chair back in a restaurant before you crash into the next table and I found that kind of jigsaw of all of that being design which is free but there being some rules, I think I really liked. And I think again there wasn't such formal industry, people kind of ended up working for interior design firms and you know it's not like being an accountant where there are rules and certificates and ways of doing things. It's loose things, so I enjoyed all of that. And when I got there I'd already spent summer studying at the Victoria and Albert [Museum] studying the history of interior design summer course there for three months. So when I got there I already felt equipped with a lot of education about style and about architecture and designers. I already had a sense of who William Morris was and loved going to museums and seeing things visually I think.... I love the Victoria and Albert Museum, when you get those big plaster columns, and other people can see that. They will take a plaster cast of some drama that someone sees so much detail in the work someone else has done. So I think it was a great time for me. I went to Bournemouth Art School first for two years and at the time I was nineteen twenty and lots of the kids were still sixteen because it was a BTEC.
J	Was that kind of a Foundation Course?
S	Yes, and so I ended up driving back up to London most weekends, cause everyone was younger and still living with their parents and stuff. That’s why I came back to KIAD. And by then there was a new degree but I'd already done two years and I didn't want to do another four years, um, and that degree really would have been perfect. And also there I found I was starting to get work experience and um, I'd had lots of Saturday jobs in my career but, um, I started to get proper work experience in design firms in London. So the whole kind of confidence grew and that's where I should be and what I should be doing. Love all that, loved all that, so.
J	So did you have to do any essays and things like that?
S	Yes, big dissertation for that. Can't remember what I did. I know I did one on um, definitely one of the Tate, not the original Tate, the extension on the Tate.
J	Oh, the Sainsbury's extension?
S	Yes, Sainsbury's Wing. I cant remember who the architect was.
J	No I cant either.

S	So yes, it suited me and then wasn’t thinking I was dyslexic, I didn’t feel it was holding me back or I was just going for it really. You Know, so I'm not really worried about it. Apart from the kids, if they’ve got dyslexia. So that’s lucky really I think. But now when I hear people and they are dyslexic, they are in completely different industries. I wouldn't have thought it wouldn't be suitable for dyslexics, but um, so. [Laughing]
J	So like writing PhD thesis [laughing]
S	Yes, so when did you find out? Did you find out later?
J	Oh, about six months ago.
S	No! No! [laughing]
J	Yes.
S	Gosh.
J	Well, like yourself the family is - well, we never play Scrabble. Not in agreement anyway. Ur, so my Dad was pretty much illiterate and we think it is from his side of the family. There is a a lot of it so if you have a family photograph its kind of well, she is and he is and he is and she is. And so the cut of is about 45 50ish. Below that they are all properly diagnosed.
S	Are you good at detail?
J	I think I probably am, but better at seeing the bigger picture. Certainly with educational things when I've been in leadership roles, people, some people will be very narrow with their view and I will be saying 'well, have you approached it this way…' and they will be looking at me and its a tumble weed moment and you want to say, reverse the thoughts, and that child is doing that because of this rather than because of what you think is the most obvious thing so there are definite advantages and a few disadvantages to, but it depends on how you construct your life. so if you seek out to do big essays you will probably struggle a little bit, but then if you do things that are more suited, so spatial awareness, then, reverse parking and all that stuff.
S	I've found my brother and I have come to love reading, like we wouldn’t have picked up a book out of pleasure, but, from the age of say 18 we are quite avid readers. And he and I will always buddy up on Trivial Pursuit because we've go so many facts. Someone said once you are like a wine bottle, you have plenty of capacity for memory but the neck is narrow and its how the messages are coming in and out. Sometimes we are struggling with that. It doesn't mean you cant retain lots of information. So he and I are demons at Trivial Pursuit because I've got all the art he loves history and war so we often know all these funny little facts. And we can quite often be quite particular, so we will say 'oh we know that fact because we watched it on the BBC2 programme and we were all on Boxing Day at so-and-so's house and then they cant argue with that. And also I find, just jumping a little. I'm amazing at directions, so Jonathan calls me Madame TomTom. You can put me down anywhere in the world and I can find my way home. So I've been places and been there once and we will go back five years later and he knows 'Ill know the way. Cause Ill remember it so the blue petrol station and the red phone box rather than, if someone says turn left on the fourth turning Ill kind of go? but if you say to me the red phone box the blue petrol station the big field Ill know yep, got it, I've got a sense of t a feel of it that I've got it right as well, so its one of my strong points.
J	So you sound as though you are quite positive about it.

S	Um, definitely, yeah, yeah. I cant, it's not hindered me in any way at all. And because I've found the right industries and didn't know I was finding the right industry until I was in it. It wasn't a conscious decision to go into spatial design it wasn't until I was in it that people started commenting. And its not until you are an adult when you start questioning what doe this dyslexia mean to me. Before I was just a kid thinking 'I'm not playing out with my friends', my Mum's taking me to classes but it got interesting. there are things in the newspapers, so for me there is probably a subconscious point where there is more information and more understanding but probably it wasn't it was probably me becoming an adult and informing myself a bit more.
J	So what does it mean to you then?
S	Nothing really…….no, I haven't thought about that. I think maybe I think people aren't, you were saying you have that tumble weed moment when you can see other ways of doing it and other ways of seeing it I have more certainty in myself. So if Jonathan says 'right we have to do this, this and this today' and he'll go so I'm going there first and Ill say but that's really stupid and you are going to waste so much time 'do this this and this'. I'll be much more certain I think because I know I've got a different way of thinking about it.
J	Umm.
S	My route of thought is different and often he'll just go 'oh, yes, your right, that'll save half an hour' and I'll, not stand my ground that makes me sound like a stroppy, stamp footing person but I'm just more certain I think.
J	Mum.
S	And, yeah, don't doubt myself I think. Probably a good thing.
J	Great! So is there anything that your husband does to support you do you think? To balance your abilities out that maybe you don't do because you are dyslexic?
S	Umm, I think there are, so its doing paperwork and all that kind of rubbish, and that's the kind of things I put to the back. He knows that if I say I'm going in my study and I'm doing my paper work, he knows, he will support me in the way of 'leave me alone' because he knows for me to, I'll clear all the pernickety jobs like ironing, anything and leave that till the last. So if I'm in there doing it he knows that's the point I'm actually cracking on with it, those will be the days he will make the dinner or pick the kids up from school because he knows for me to have got myself into that zone of tacking pass paper, I think that is something I am bad at I hate paperwork and getting something wrong. I do doubt myself in that um, so like doing my accounts or doing my tax returns they are things that frighten me so he'll ...so he does support me in that sense or take jobs away from me. Urrr, he knows I might dread.....
J	Such as?

S	Definitely tax returns. He does take that one away though. Um, [laughing]. So, ur, if I've got things that have to be legal or urr, thorough. So Ive got a couple of apartments I let and urr, all that kind of paperwork, so I'll go I need this, this document and this document to be signed and he's very patient at double checking I've got it all right and told I've signed in the right place or partly because I get my he'd in that 'oh, cant do it' and then I panic and do it and he'll always give me as much time I need to check it and double check me he wont say 'oh, just get on with it', he knows. And often with the kids, when there is big piles of information to disseminate what we need we'll both read it. Like all the school prospectuses and things deciding where to send the kids next or filling in the forms for the kid's new school. Things that really, really count is where I get my knickers in a twist [laughing] and he will, I'll read it, he reads it very very thoroughly and we'll have a chat about it, and yeah, he doesn't kind of say 'uh, why didn't you read it?' he'll say 'what did you get from it?', 'what did you understand?'. So he talks to me like that which is great. And, so, like we are going on holiday or a trip, he will book all the tickets. I mean I'm perfectly capable but he knows sometimes if I'm too busy, if I've got too many other bits going on that to be thorough on that its best, so yeah, that way, then other ways he's like 'we've got a dyslexic with us, we know exactly where to go'. You know, he sees the benefits too I think. Yea, it works, well.
J	Yeah, a balance. Yeah, my husband does all the flights. I live in fear of turning up at the airport….I will turn up a day early rather than a day late. But then, you know you've got time zones, and things.
S	Yeas, like if its lots of loops of trips, yeah, and he will be, I don't know what your husband is like, he will be very thorough…
J	He's an engineer.
S	So it's a very mathematical brain.
J	Yeah.
S	I think that's quite a creative industry isn't it?
J	I think so, I think there's a lot of creativity in it.
S	Yeah.
J	Do you find, so now when you are at work is there anything other than you tax returns [laughing] that, I'm sure that is because you are dyslexic not just because they are horrible to do…
S	They should give me 25% extra time [laughing]. God if only!
J	You just have 25% extra time not to do them.
S	Yeah, that's, quite, I'd still put it off. So I'm my interior design work I would do, so I do do all the soft furnishings and all that, but if I do a work ticket for say a set of curtains where you've got to write down all the measurements, so I'd measure it all work out how much fabric I need work out the pattern repeat of the fabric so, you know, you can't just put two pieces of fabric next to each other you've got to bring the pattern in line, so I can work all that out. But again, I think that's because it's visual I kind of have a picture of the curtains get made in my head, and Um so I'm thinking through it visually in my minds eye as I'm doing the paper work and I can say well I have not written down that piece of information I havened written down how that bit of return on the pelmet board is or things like that so, I can do all that, I can almost guestimate on paper I can just see it its kind of, yeah, that patterns that

	big and that wall is that long and we will need about 14 rolls. And I did it for the whole drawing room the other day and went 14 rolls and the guys went the decorators went 16, so Umm pretty close. So in terms of estimating and costs for people its funny how that can work.
J	Yeah.
S	So it doesn't impinge on that at all.
J	No its great. So have you noticed anything with your children? You know when you go to parents' evenings?
S	Well Olivia just astounds me, she is delightful and um, bright as a button and….she gets herself a bit tied up and we've had to kind of teach her to loosen up and sometimes, just get the homework down rather than worrying, but I think that might be just girls anyway. But definitely when she was years two and three that was something they would say to us at parents' evening, she wasn't getting as much work done because she would just get herself so uptight about it, but that just might be her character. Henry, I can see I don't know if it's because he's a boy and just cant be bothered with something's but he's got a few things where I think, ummm, I'm going to keep my eye on you, um, he will delegate as best he can get anyone there are some twins in his year, he is forever ordering them, 'Holly did that and Ellie did that' so its beautifully coloured in. So he is a great delegator, and I'm worried about him reading. He's not really bothered and his hand writing is quite messy, it should be more mature by now. But then my Mum bought him a book this weekend and he's suddenly gone big book, reading a big book and putting away all the baby books. Just gone, so maybe this is his time. so I'm not panicking about him but there are stuff. If either of them are to be, its him. Um, but not so, not big dyslexic, just a few things where he is given the tools to work with really. So I don't think they are. Funny isn't it? [pause] So with me I definitely remember ballet class, they all went careering off round that way and I went the other way. Neither of them are like that, they are both good at sport, physically capable so, yeah, no I think they are all right funnily enough. Yeah, but how about your kids? Have you seen it in your kids?
J	I've got one son, yes, he was diagnosed, well when he was at primary school they said he is dyspraxic. And I'm like, no, no, he's dyslexic. So we had a bit tussle, but I was doing, I was standing in at the school I was teaching in as SENCO while someone was on maternity leave so I knew exactly what to do. what the process was, and this was state school. And, oh, he's dyslexic. So and I mean, he is doing product design so he is very visual, and um, I know, horrible handwriting, but he's found his niche. So he will be ok. As long as tax returns...I suppose they will always be a burden.
S	Yeah, so they are something you dread anyway.

J	Like you say it’s the precise form filling and stuff. There are other things that just amaze me about him and I wonder if that is because he could see the bigger picture, he is having to take his previous employer to court, the High Court, because they haven't paid him. And the way he is thinking all these things through and he is really well organised and he is only 22 and this started last year. I don't think I could have done that, I don't think I could do that now, I'd loose all the paperwork or something. So its interesting in how it presents with different people. I don't know if you know about the genetics of it and they have identified about 15 genes that it is linked too. Now say with me its genes 5, 6, and 7 and you its 1, 2 and 10 and 12 the way it presents is going to be very different. You are talking about directions, I'm shockingly bad at directions, but I think that's partly, I used to be pretty good but, if someone says go right here, I'm lost, if someone draws me a picture I'm ok. And you are talking about red letter box and blue door.
S	Yes, yes.
J	That helps, but my dyslexia doesn’t help me with directions at all. And that’s fascinating and I do think its very different from different people.
S	Yes, I didn't know about the genes, and I don’t know the difference between dyslexia and dyspraxia.
J	Its unfortunate they have been given similar names, because I think that’s why people get confused with them, but dyspraxia is coordination. So its very different, so you cant catch balls, you cant walk in a straight line, you know gymnastics, fine motor skills, its a completely different.
S	That’s reminded me when I was little Mum was advised to get me into dance classes to help my co-ordination and now I think things like using my knife and fork really did persist at doing it properly, but it was all at the same time as the and been ambidextrous with paint brushes, it was all part of that package, but in those days they were thinking dyslexia is all about coordination.
J	That’s unfair to rule those things out, because when children are very small it shows with co-ordination so I can see where that was from. But to me my son is definitely dyslexic and thrown in with being left handed.
S	Which is often the thing.
J	Um, I've not come across that.
S	I do remember that as I thing.
J	Ill have to look at that.
S	I could always write with two hands, and the teachers looked at that and thought get her going on her right hand.
J	I'm right handed. Ill have to talk to your Mum.
S	She'd be quite happy to, she'll have much better recollection. Because I was just going into a centre in Sevenoaks, definitely, all these tests where you get these shapes on the blocks and all that they would have been telling my Mum what that was all for, what was the point of that, she would remember that where as I was eight years old just doing what I was told. And spot cards, have you seen those, when you have a picture on a card and its all different coloured spots and you have to see the picture.
J	Oh, yes, I know.
S	You have to see the picture, and IQ tests.

J	So where you very good at certain tests that they were doing on you and bad at other tests?
S	Yes, I was good at the visual block and I don’t know if they were doing the blocks to teach me or to train me. Because they didn’t seem to happen as often. Definitely I remember having these cards, with all these letter sounds on them A, E, I, O, U, I before E, all that kind of thing with little pictures that you can associate with them and the sound. So that's visual isn't it. Definitely better at visual stuff I think. Yes, Yeah.
J	Very forward thinking Mum.
S	Yes, and I think I don’t know what her thinking was, I don’t know if she was been protective or what.
J	So when your brother got to college, you said he was 14 or 15.
S	Yes, he was at Sevenoaks School which is a good school, but he was doing lots of sport at the time, because he was very good at sport and I think it wasn’t until he was coming up for O levels and my Mum was disappointed at his academic achievements and Um, so it was my Mum that pushed, so Sevenoaks at the time dint have any dyslexic children really because it was so good school, bright school and because this dyslexic centre was in Sevenoaks it was my Mum that really pushed and said to the school 'come on you know what are we going to do about this boy's grades and you know, nothing is changing with him so what we doing to help him, does he need to be given the skill sets that Selena's been given. To learn and to get through these A Levels really.
J	Is he older than you?
S	Yes, he's five years older. So but he ended up, he didn’t do very well at his O Levels, so he re-took, so he did like a three year sixth form in effect. So by the time he got to the third year he'd done enough, didn’t even do his A Levels he'd just had enough and he was one of the biggest lads in the school and he was still there with other kids coming through, you know he looked like a man and there he was still at school. [pause]
J	Umm.
S	We are tying to figure out the switching of the gate, and it is sequencing. And Jonathan said 'I switched that and it did that, but then if I switch that switch in combination with that switch', and I'm just glazing over.
J	see, I'd be able to do that because it sounds like [electronic] logic gates, AND, NAND, OR and that sort of thing and I'm really good at that, and where's that come from?
S	That’s kind of mapping, because Jonathan did that homework with Olivia the other day. The two of theme were off! And Answered that! Like talking a different language, just, it made my, I was just thinking of things flipping and going and I just don’t get it. If I was having to sort the gate out I'd put stickers on it, the red spot does this the green one does that amber does that. But just to talk about it....I've just gone......
J	Have you always been self-employed? Or have you worked for…
S	Yes, I've worked for other business, yes.
J	And have you told them you are dyslexic?

S	Yes, because its always been interior design really. I did once work for a magazine in London and the switchboard and it was a big phone and it just had numbers and you were supposed to memorise the numbers, you know Joe Blogs' desk was number 45 and that sort of thing and it was um, tele sales as well and it was people calling to run an ad. in the magazine as well, so if you lost a call you lost a sale. And I struggled with that, I really did because it was just a very blank phone I think with numbers and that didn't give me a lot of confidence. I was constantly having to say to the girls who is on number 52, you know. That didn't work very well. Yeah, I'm better at practical definitely. but the idea of been on a committee, like people keep saying 'come on'. Friends at schools and I'm 'no, no, no.' Ask me to put 100 chairs out or get the black bins and pick rubbish up, I'll do all of that, I'll be there on time, I'll put all my effort in, but make me commit to something, actually, I don't like.
J	Yeah.
S	I think its been held accountable, that someone might find you out.
J	What are they going to find out?
S	I don't know, but just, yes, that I'm not very good at things or that I have missed something. My husband was talking about proof reading labels and things the other day, he'd done a label. He had worked for Blue Dragon and on the label instead of writing cabbage he'd written lettuce in Karenchee. And his boss found out and he'd handed it all round the office getting it ready for checking, to read it to get any mistakes and it's that kind of thing that makes me look foolish. And I don't really want to look foolish.
J	How do you feel about talking about this?
S	Um, ok, yeah, ok I think. I'm not worried about been dyslexic over all I think it would be these individual things. If someone asked me to write or present - it was ok for my dissertations at college because it was about the subject and how much knowledge that you had about that what your opinion was about that. Your analysis. but if I had to write something...I'm ok at presentations and that sort...standing up and talking doesn't bother me, I'm not sure how I'd be with a PowerPoint where you'd have things written underneath, I think they'd be all pictures with a title.
J	That's how they should be isn't it?
S	Yes. But something that's set in stone, yes, yes. If we write a party invite or something for friends to come I always get Jonathan to do it. Yeah.
J	So did you give this much thought before we met today?
S	I didn't actually. I kind of thought well I'll tell you about all the extra lessons that I'd had and I'd tell you about been good at directions, but I hadn't thought about other things…..
J	It's quite interesting because it brings other things to light doesn't it? And sometimes, its like I'm not sure I want to remember that. You have said some really positive things.
S	Yes, I think I've been lucky. I don't know how that is because we were in the private system and my parents were wealthy enough to pay for all this private tuition. So I was lucky in that sense. I think coming from a strong family, my Mum didn't work she had all the time to help me with this sort of thing um, and I think by the time it stared to count like GCSE's and bits of writing I think I had enough skills and enough tools to deal with it. I think the determination to crack on. It hasn't held you back?

J	[I show her my mind maps, I talk about interviews] Success it what it means to you.
S	there are only so many hours in the day, there is only so much you can achieve, with kids, so I do what I can do with what is in front of me. I've got a little Air B and B going, I've got wine growing, still doing interior design a bit you know, doing property development with my brother.
J	Sounds like a nice life.
S	yes, again it's all things, I don’t do things, I've tried some things and they’ve fallen flat on their face and I don’t know if its to do with dyslexia, not that they fell flat on their face but the way I feel about it is I do what I feel I can get done, and I don't worry about other stuff because that's just life and I actually....whether this just comes in conjunction with growing older and learning life as well, that's a big factor as well. I'll give that a go, it didn't work, I'll rather it be 'oh sod it' than 'what if'. I'd rather life live, but that is as much about living life as about being dyslexic and you have to bring all elements into being dyslexic and that's an ever changing thing as well.
J	That’s really healthy.
S	I've had people say 'that’s wonderful, you can think about things differently and produce something different from everyone else and I look forward to seeing it. I've had enough of that positivity really.
J	Thank you.

Karen

J	J. Basically I would like you to tell me as much or as little as you want about your experiences of being dyslexic. Start where you like, as an adult or as a child, I don't mind. Anything that you can remember.
K	K. Well, I really struggled at primary school, it wasn't really picked up at all at primary school.
J	J. Yes.
K	K. And we, well, what I now later know having children, within the year, we weren't taught phonetics. We were taught A, B, C. I think that must, or it contributed to, that I couldn't then read. I found reading really hard and then spelling, and also, everything back to front. And um, it wasn't until I really experienced it at secondary school and the memory for like GCSEs that kind of thing but didn't really get much help through secondary school wasn't really diagnosed, um. And so I had problems there and when I got into secondary school I remember going to one-to-ones um, so yes, I had that but never got given extra time, um, never really got given a chance in my exams, what if found a big struggle because I wasn't Identified. Well, I was but I wasn't, and I wasn't really aware, I was given extra time, but I think they just thought I was slow, so I would be in the bottom sets at school and what that caused problems with was to do with the children that didn't want to learn. So even though you wanted to learn the teacher could never give you the time because she was dealing with the ones that didn't want to learn because they were so disruptive or, that needed extra help. So I always had everything in my head, but I couldn't put it down on paper, so I enjoyed history, loved history. And I got it all. But when it came to writing the essays and stuff like that I just couldn't, couldn't do it so it want until I went to college and then that's when they proper diagnosed it all.
J	J. So how old were you then?
K	K. Sixteen, that's when they picked it up and said yes, you are dyslexic. And I was getting help to retake my English GCSE because I needed that. Um, they gave me extra help through it and I went quite regularly and someone was helping me. It's really hard to remember, but it was tactics on things as well. I did excellently on all my GCSE coursework because I had time and it was a method I could do, coming into exams, a complete disaster.
J	J. Yes, yes.
K	K. Um, then so yes, I got extra time in college for my exams as well, but that did no good. I didn't really get, I think I'd lost interest on education by then, because I found it quite a struggle and then I went in and did IT which I loved, but it was when we had floppy discs, everything was on floppy discs and I gave it to my extra support tutor, she had lost it, but didn't make out she had lost it, so when it came to hand it in no one knew where it was and obviously I didn't take backups. So then I think I lost all interest there. And then I from there I just did an admin job, I was able to get an admin job. I lied about English on my CV because no-one would….., and I knew then you could have spell checker on your phone on your computer. So you could get slightly around it so I did a sort of admin job and then I've always liked maths. I was in the top sets for maths, that's where I was happiest because it didn't involve words because I can see really easily, give me spelling mistakes, I can't pick them

	out or Identify them um. I've only started really getting to grips with it as my children get older because they've taught me how to read.
J	J. Oh, that's interesting.
K	K. I could read, or I could read what I think is there. But since then because they've learnt phonetics, I can relate and go back with them to learn how to read the big words. I can read the basic words and so yes, the kids have been helping me and then when I went into numbers, when I decided I was going to go down the accountancy route I'd been at another job, for five years, six years and I'd always had a mother figure in my jobs so for here it's Linda. There it was Julie so if I was writing long emails or what I call 'fluffy' because I'm very direct I don't do fluffy. You've asked me a question so here's the answer it's no… I've learned to sort of fluffy but if it's supper fluffy it's, I've always asked them to check everything first. I've always had a good rapport 'how do you spell that? I haven't got a clue how to spell.' Or if on the spell checker it couldn't come up and I haven't got a clue um, I would use Google and try and put it in a different sentence. Try and cause Google's, better than spell checker. You can it's a ridiculous thing.
J	J. I didn't know that.
K	K. I type in Google all the time and also Ill sort of yeah, you can then read what you are thinking because on the spell checker I get confused with all the 'qu' words, like quite, quick, and all of those, queries, and on the spell checker it doesn't give you the definition of what you need so on spell checker and it brings up. And someone's always said use a dictionary. But if you don't who how the word is spelt how can you use a dictionary? And it's always been… I remember actually having little pocket computer spell checker thing. I used to type in a work and it would give you the definition, but then in those, because there wasn't a vast amount of technology with it you still couldn't um, pick the right words out, um, so that's when I went into numbers because it's a lot easier. Only obviously when you are doing the accounts when you have to put in descriptions in you then have to make sure everything is spelt right as well, and then you have to use Google. The programs you use and all that, Sage (accountancy program) don't have a spell checker in them so that I find you do when I went to do my college exams, we do laugh. I was buddies with a polish girls and we used to do spell checks, um spelling tests. And I used to say to my tutor there's no point I'm here to do accountancy course. I don't want to do a spelling test because I know I was rubbish at it. I'd probably get 1 or 2 out of thirty, and the Polish lady next to me Anna, used to be able to do it all the time. She'd be like 'oh, I can't do this' and I'd say 'don't worry you will beat me'. You know it would be the running joke and Amanda, she'd be on the accountancy course as well but she was very good at English but wasn't so good at the maths, we would help each other out. Because the last part of my last exam there was a massive part um, 50% was ethics and you had to write paragraphs after paragraphs on ethics. She stormed that. I just barely, because you had to fluffy. I said I can give you all the facts and but, also, I failed the first one, but so did everyone, that was lucky. Um, but even after a few of my exams, they are not multiple choice questions, but you had the answers, they were multiple choice almost, you had to do a lot of work to get to the answers. But it was the time to read the questions, and also even though I told them I was dyslexic at college during my accountancy they took no notice over it, they wouldn't give me extra time. One of the exams I failed, only by 4% but I was I

	couldn't read the questions. And I said to them I put it down to the reading, but they wouldn't take it into consideration.
J	J. When was this?
K	K. Two years ago, no this year, September to July.
J	J. So it wasn't ten years ago?
K	K. No, so my accounts ones are now. Um, and I'm not sure if that was more with the college o the exams, but I think it's more to do with the college. It just, it was very much these are the slides I've always used this is how….I'm one for visualising and if I don't get it I have to keep going over. Our tutors used to get quite frustrated cause there was a few of us in there, I didn't know if they were dyslexic or anything. You had to visualise, I'm very much have to draw everything out, even in accounts I have to put tables in draw everything out, so yeah, but if I can get away with, um, writing texts. It gets worse when I get drunk, terrible when I get drunk, but my family know what I'm like. Um, my sister-in-law knows how dyslexic I am she will laugh. Or Ben, (Karen's husband) specially when I'm sending a stroppy text to him and all the words get back to front them, because I've sent it he'll just take the piss out of it, but he can joke and take the piss and, I'm very open about it because well, you should see some of the emails. It's the 'my' and the 'by' the wrong way round and spell checkers don't pick up. You know it's 'then' and 'them'. Um , there's little rhymes I've taught myself as I've got older, about or retaught, but I've never got, when they talk the rhymes 'u' before the 'e' except after 'c' I can't even remember the rhyme let alone what it relates to. So you know all of those just go over my head. I can't get them so Um, and, Yes, so and but. My brother is not so dyslexic as me but he suffered quite badly with ADHA or did. And I think my Mum went back to college, I think in her late thirties or forties and I think she was diagnosed with it then.
J	J. With dyslexia?
K	K. Yes, dyslexia. But she always been quite good with…she can 'fluffy' lots of things sometimes, but I don't really talk to them now so I don't really know. I've warned the kid's schools about it being my side because Ben's very good at English and spelling and stuff so were hoping we can – get good from both sides because he's rubbish at maths. We're hoping. But I've notice recently with Oscar, but school haven't picked it up is that his long term memory isn't good. So he will have done long division in September well come to do it six months later and hell like 'I've never done that' and he can't master it and it's not until he's done it for half an hour does it some back. And he's been having extra lessons anyhow to bring on his English and coax him. I want him in to have a head start, both of them as much as they can. And I'm aiming for top sets only for the pure fact that I know like being in the bottom sets I want to help them – it sounds like snobbery but it's not you have this conception that ion the top sets people want to learn rather than the ones you are so distracted around. Um, but he's only been seeing this tutor ten weeks and she specialises in dyslexia and stuff and with him, she is 'no' his reading is behind, not behind, but he'll read what he thinks he sees, not actually looks what there and goes over. But she thinks he's got a dyslexic long term memory so now she's trying to without him knowing brain or try and figure out a programme where he can try and restore information that will sort of be there and not help or be a way to find it quicker rather than be a breakdown or that he has never done it not until he's done.

	J and K. (*Laughing.*)
J	J. Mine would be Weight Watchers.
K	K. (*Laughing)* Yeah. They would have an absolute field day. So you know, yeah, very much. I'd have hated to have been in my working career twenty years ago but also in this society it's also less pressure. It's become more acceptable within roles, but a lot of people still don't have the knowledge to accept it. Um, I just bragg everything and get someone else to write things. *Laughing.*
J	J. So, so going back to you talking about when you were really little and when you were at school what sort of memories have you got there? You were saying, you had to, you know, read in a different way to how your children are learning.
K	K. so we were told like A B C, so when you come to learn a word, um, like with phonetics, you can put the 'ch' sound in but they didn't roll. You were just taught the word, cat, they've learned 'c', 'a', 't' and put it in the robot until they've learned it like 'cat'. We were just said CAT that word says cat, remember that's cat. And they were giving you words rather than learn to stick it all together, um, so the kids, get words that mean nothing, but it helped the sound work through. So say words, that aren't even in the English dictionary but it's just words that sound that's what it's sort to help. And we were never… I'm not sure, I'm not very close to my family, anymore, so obviously I don't really know but I talk to a few people who were in my year, I think we were a sort of experiment for a couple of years and then, people a couple of years above us were like 'no, we were taught the phonics' and the ones below, but a couple in my year were, no, we were there, but because they have older brothers and sisters also if you didn't, if you found learning easy you'd get it anyway. Whereas I didn't. And I think um, specially in primary school and in secondary there was people below me who needed a lot more help. You had the bright ones. I think because I learned to bragg quite easily not brag, I found it very difficult to I think because even then money was tight the money went to the more, the ones that really needed the help. Then the ones, you know, like me who needed the extra help, your coping that's how you are going to get on with it. Going into secondary school, still then, there wasn't help hardly much but it seems then, they taught me rhymes because I'd always get 'birthday' muddled up, 'instead of 'ir' I'd always put 'br' 'Ri' so it's I remember 'I R' so I have my own silly rhymes. Or when it's repetitiveness I suppose I can never spell 'receive' and I always had to spell that in my last job, so I know where it is fast on the key board, and I can do it that way, but if I've misplaced a letter I probably couldn't tell you, I sort of could, but if I was to write it slowly or to hand write it I couldn't spell it. Straight off. Because you know quickly how to do it on the key board, it kind of…
J	J. It's kind of muscle memory.
K	K. Yes, yes. And like obviously you've got because, big elephants and all of that. And it's just trying to adapt ways…you know I can't even really remember, it's just trying to have a word saying until it got really embedded. But there was really never strategies. I did have, what helped with my reading was tinted sheets.
J	J. Okay.
K	K. Um, and my colour is yellow. And I had tinted glasses made for it. And they helped.
J	J. and do you still use those?

K	K. I've put them on a few times, but because there's um, the technology now. I don't read books I read my Kindle. And you can adjust the spacing, you can adjust the wording, background colour, so it's helped me with the technology that way.
J	J. I've got a dyslexia friendly font on my iPad here.
K	K. Do you?
J	J. Yeah, I don't know if it makes any difference, but it seems more relaxing to read. You know your eyes don't seem so kind of stress.
K	K. And also with Kindles if you don't know a word you hit it and it comes up with the explanation. Or I sort of I suppose I speed read as well. Because I don't read every word and never have done, I suppose that's how I make so many mistakes…..problem is I could write and email and reread it through three times, but because I know what I want to say in my head I can't read so I could easily leave a word out but not notice it at all because I've read it, it's there. (16.47) And it's not, sometimes I have to put them in my draft box and then come back to them two days later if I can or I get Linda or Vicki often to…because Vicki knows what I'm like as well so they help. Um, it's all a bit….So yes, it all goes a bit so easy like that because you learn to deal with things.
J	J. Yes, it sounds as though you have lots of coping strategies. When you were getting diagnosed, so when you were in college, how did you feel about that?
K	K. Quite, I'd always knew I'd had it Um, cause my brother
J	J. is he older or younger?
K	K. Older. With his ADHD he got diagnosed a lot quicker. It's severe but not severe. It's not enough to really warrant, but actually if you sort of look it's mainly my writing and my reading. Um. I wasn't really, I don't know, because it was a college, I really can't remember. I felt relieved and when they really wanted to help me I thought, well I've got a chance at passing stuff now, Um because they would help me. But because it was so far down the line it was almost like it wasn't worth it, because your brain is so set in your ways it's really hard to try and reteach yourself because let's say when I went back to college for my accountancy exams, the last three or four years. To start with I went to um to the home school learning and I paid to do it through them but it's self-taught all out of books. Well, I didn't know which notes to take. I ended up copying out a whole page of a book. Well, why am I copying a whole page out of a book, it's there. And I couldn't self-teach. I'm a visual person and I think someone has to tell me stuff and still to learn. So I gave that up very quickly. I did persevere because I was also quite upset. But when I got to college with them teaching me with a tutor it was like 'there's your book' and I was I'm paying you to teach me because I've tried home schooling and I can't do it.
J	J. And did you say that to them?
K	K. Yes, yes, and you know, that's why I'm here. Um I find it yes, I'm very much visual have to see it. See them working it because that's how I remember it I remember when I couldn't readout text books when I was revising. Everything was mind maps pinned to my ceiling but very bright colours, but they went in detail and I never read them. I just pictured them and that's what I did I never actually, it was more the visual of oh yes that was grouped with that, or that sat next to that so that must be the answer. So you never learned it as…all my exams for my accountancy course was never rereading over my text books it was doing as many test papers as I could

	possibly cram in because they all roughly had the same questions so you roughly knew what the answers, then I knew how to get the answers. Or if I wasn't sure, yes, I'd look back but it was repetitive look back. I'd do ten practice papers before the exam it was one straight after another and then it almost got the same format you knew what was going on you knew what the content that they wanted in or the written part I would get the ten exams and read the answers what they wanted. And it didn't sort of go in, but you roughly knew you could flag back and pick snippets up on what you read sort of before so yes, that was, I've never really revised. The problem is I've always tried to and I think also trying to revise for eight, nine subjects all in one go. I don't think I'd be able to pass any exam my GCSEs now. And just because they've taken away coursework and I do feel really sorry for those people. Because I freaked in exams as well, absolutely freaked because of the pressure. Right, there's your pen, there's six pieces of paper you need to fill up. That used to really um, I suppose freak you out. So I do feel really sorry for my two that they might even change. My nephews and nieces are doing there's at the moment but they've got nine subjects to take in two weeks no coursework and they've got to pick out basically what they've learned in two years. It's basically a memory test. And I just think almost, there's a better way over the two years. The first two months is maths get that exam out the way, the next is science, and you know have it as blocks. At my last school they changed the syllabus in the last accountancy modules, what they were going to do first Level two that you did, you did VAT in the first six weeks, then exam, then VAT done. Then you'd have your next module, exam, done. But you had to pass all of them because that's fine because you'd done them all. It stays in there because they all sort of overlap at the same time. But they changed the last module to be in line with the GCSEs even though it's an adult module um, qualification, so you'd have your module still, your five modules and the last exam would be covering all five of them plus a massive spreadsheet exam at the end so not only did you have to do your spread sheets and ethics but it had everything else in it, it's such a big exam. (23.26) And they made it too hard because the pass rate in the whole country was 3%, and its coming up a year now and they are still tweaking the exam they've had ten resits or ten changes. Luckily I passed it on the second go but only by 3% or 4% and all my other exams I'd been passing by 17% 25%.
J	J. So how do you feel about your achievements?

K	K. Oh, my accountancy ones really pleased with, really, really pleased with. Because it really proves you can do something after your failures with GCSEs. I didn’t fail my GCSEs, I’ve got B in maths, and five C’s and D and E‘s which I don’t record. And like E for English, it’s like the important ones. So the sciences I got high grades in because it’s more visual it’s more active learning. Um. Media studies. I had my English teacher as my media studies teacher and she was like ‘you will fail it’ because obviously you are no good at the English so you won’t be good at the media studies. Well media studies, because you are creating a film and having to put it into blocks and really didn’t need a lot of wording um, and a lot of it was coursework as well. So I came away with that as a C um. And then the ones you have to write about, history, English, religious education because there’s no visual I suppose and no practical they were the ones, well, D’s and E’s but it’s there because it’s you have to write the content in I couldn’t do it. Also with my exams with my accountancy, love it. Cause I think I’m doing something I enjoy and it’s not writing it’s not a lot ok, there is in some parts, but, its putting it into practice and its, I find it more interesting and I love problem solving. So if you’ve got missing figures and you have to work backwards try and move figures to different places, that’s what I enjoy as well. Yes, its problem solving practical, because its more practical you can, and its so many different ways. Where with English, it’s just writing whereas yes, the accountancy you do have some writing, you have to write reports and that kind of thing and, explain why one figure has dramatically changed then another but, people don’t want a massive spiel they just want three lines of the facts so I that’s why I suit, or it suits me much better because I don’t have to fluffy it. This is the figure because you’ve been buying too many stuff, this is the figure because there was a crash. You know you don’t have to fluffy anything and even when you look at accountants delivering their reports to Companies House you know there’s that kind of thing. You look in all the financial papers its key points, nothing is ever fluffied and it’s almost its black and white which is so much easier. And its where that does get me into trouble so much cause, a lot of people don’t know me, if they don’t know me, by email or text they could accuse me of been quite abrupt, but if you know me it’s totally different, it’s just because I don’t know how to fluffy, it’s just that’s how it is almost…. Why fluffy? If someone’s for instance, can you order this? All ordered. And then you say ‘oh, lovely day’ and its I have to make myself ‘I hope you’ve had a lovely day, hope your well’ and you almost have to think right, and then…it’s all very much fluffying and I just can’t…that’s your answer or you know, straight down the line and that’s how it is. I think that’s how I. I think my in-laws still think oh, but they know me so much now, that I don’t need to….
J	J. You are obviously not an unfluffy, abrupt person. (Laughing)

K	K. But then the silly thing is I would never normally say what I really think. If I'm in a conflict I always back down. I'm not the one to go even if I think I'm right. Cause I don't like conflict so and sometimes I know what I'm actually really thinking or just boom, I say the total opposite and it will make someone really happy. Even though inside I'm 'that's not right' I'm very much ok, keep the peace cause I don't like confrontation. I don't like sort of stand offs, I just turn into a shaking mess. (Laughing) So yes, I suppose as much as things are black and white and I'm very direct I do keep my mouth shut because the way I say things sometimes could mean the wrong way and not that I mean it the wrong way it just comes out that way. It's almost like I've got a slight autistic tendency if you know what I mean You know you get the ones who, it's almost along those lines, if you think. Both me and my husband used to have quit OCD tendencies as well so yes, Hoovers out every day, the bathroom is cleaned every day so I'm not sure if that's almost all related because I don't know because…..
J	J. People are just a big mishmash of all sorts.
K	K. I know it's very much, well that's how it is.
J	J. So you were saying, you've got your school-Mum, Linda, how about other people in your life who you look to for support? Do you have anyone else?
K	K. Well, yes and no. Unfortunately I fell out with my parents and my brother a few years ago but I have never been close to my Mum anyway. Um, but my sister-in-laws I'm very close to she's quite like a Mum to me. She is sixteen years older so I'll ask her. More or less, I do turn to Ben my husband. Bens really good. Um, but I try yes, I get on with life. I'm very much, this is what life's thrown at me I'll just get on with it. Obviously I try and not write anything out of work and if I have to ill bring stuff in and get Linda or my old manager. For some reason we moved house and we told all our companies wed moved house, changes, water. And I think a year later we got a debt collectors letter saying we hadn't paid a water bill back from, so and I was 'Oh my god, this is not true' and I did get my old manager to help me write all the letters to that. So that helped a lot. Um, bens quite good, but if it's something like that I normally bring it up to Linda or Vicki is quite good now.
J	J. So how about in jobs and things do you tend to tell people or…
K	K. No. and I think that's why I've never really changed jobs. This is my third job.
J	J. And how old are you now?

K	K. Thirty-two this year. So, after leaving college I went to a company in Cranbrook, they sold holidays. (32.19) And I just did checking invoices that had been charged correctly and I enjoyed that because I can see the numbers and that was absolutely fine. And then I moved to a place in Ticehurst that sold plant pots and I think I was at the Cranbrook one for four years and then I was at Ticehurst, I'm trying to remember, that's right, now, I've been here four, so three. No actually I was at Sun Spot for three years I must have been at Ticehurst for eight, nine years. So I moved to there and I didn't tell anyone and I always find the first few months of a new job very stressful because you don't know who to trust and who you can ask about something in case they then flag you up especially in your probation like what have you done. Luckily the Ticehurst company was a very small company there wasn't actually much writing involved. They manufactured fibreglass plant pots. So putting orders onto Sage and assigning them, sending them out for dispatch there wasn't actually much writing involved because it was codes for products. And it was all written in a catalogue anyway, it was only if there were complaints and stuff. Which I never really got to deal with anyway that was always the office manager. And obviously as my role progressed over five years, four years, it only took me about six months to pin point Julie and she would help me out. It was all initially what you write is what does the company apply to this kind of thing, so you can kind of change it slightly. Um, to ask their opinion. And then when I moved here, um, luckily it was the time before you had to do all the tests, because I've noticed now when we are employing people they have to do a quick exercise on the computer to make sure they are getting the right person. So I think that scares me in case everyone wants you to do skills tests before hand. As long as there's not many words in there, that's fine. So yes, I think that's why I've never really changed jobs because I get comfortable. I enjoy, I always enjoy what I do, and I'm not one for change. Quite set, especially if I get my routines, you know and you feel happy and comfortable and you can understand so, yeah. I've never really moved around. (Laughing)
J	J. That's not really a bad thing?
K	K. No, yeah.
J	J. So what about with your kids. You were saying about your son.
K	K. Yeah, obviously it's always – you never know if it's quite hereditary or not. I think most things…. My Dad's always suffered with a bad back and I've always suffered with a bad back. It's like the osteopath says, 'you're him, you know it's his genes that have made you.' Of course you are going to have something and I do think. So I have kept a closer eye also I do try and trust school. But both of them at the moment they are reading and when you read their stories there is no signs of what I was getting you know all those B's and D's muddled up. You get like Matilda, her spelling isn't quite right.
J	J. That's your daughter?

K	K. Yes. But you can see she is with the sounds, the word is correct. She's not doing what I would do and swop the letters. Like 'lots' and 'lost' I always – when I used to write 'lots of love' I'd always write 'lost of love' because, you just, I never saw it. That I was thinking I was putting whereas Matilda would write something, um, I can't think of an example. But the 'ch' sound might be something else or she has used a 'g' instead of a 'j', so it's not I don't think the dyslexia side I think it's just her sounds not quite…because she is still young and learning, and um, I think the generation she is in have been taught very well. The groundings of sounds to blend to go forward. Um, so but I don't know if that's them, they've been taught well, and it's disguising other things and until they get older it won't really…….I don't know. I do keep a close eye. Every parents evening 'are they all right?' 'Yup, no signs'. (Laughing) Because, and I got help so late on if they do start to show any signs I know the school won't do anything because of funding but there is something that maybe we can do outside of school that would help straight away. So it helps them. Especially now it's such a dog-eat-dog world you just want to give them the best as they can. I don't think jobs are as hard to come by as it used to be so, yeah……
J	J. Is there anything else you wanted to say?
K	K. I don't know if this is helpful.
J	J. Really? It's really interesting.
K	K. I suppose I can't really remember too much because I don't know….
J	J. No, you've said a lot. That's what 30, nearly 40 minutes and there was a bit before when I pressed 'stop'. That's great thank you.
	(Karen stopped talking for interview and we chatted about holidays, then she started talking about reading, so I started the tape up again.)
K	K. ……Harry Potter came out. My Nan read them and Dad took us to see the first film. And I thought I quite like this. So then I started reading the books, or I just started reading the first book when we went to see the film. And from then I'd have the book pre-ordered by the time it came out, then I'd be glued to it for a few days but then still within the Harry Potter books I'd made my own words up because I couldn't read what they were called so they'd be Bob, Jill and Harry or something along those lines, and that's what I've also taught Oscar to do because sometimes when he's got complicated names in his books – just name him 'Bob'. You know it just keeps the flow when you are reading. So after the Harry Potter books I didn't really read anything. Ha, it sounds clichéd, but the Fifty Shades of Grey because everyone was talking about them and you're like 'what is all of this about?' And yes I skipped a lot of the book because I'm not reading that, I want more of a story. Um, so that's what got me back into the love of reading again so I'm old enough to know I can read now and also the words that I can't read, I can skip and still know the story. Um, so yes, that's what got me back reading again. And now I'm terrible I will still read but if I've got a good book I have to be careful because I can be up till two three O'clock in the morning reading, and then…..
J	J. That is someone who loves reading.

K	K. Yes, but then I can go three months without reading. I've just started a book. Doesn't interest me. Or it hasn't got me gripped, yet, so, I put it down. I'll probably pick it up. I'm one of those who can't change I have to know the end so even if I'm skipping three, four pages, I still have to know all ???? you're not interested in the book because I keep putting it down. So Ben's like why don't you change it. No, because I've still got to know the end. Even though….and I'm so tight when it comes to my Kindle and Amazon. I only buy the books for 99p, that's the maxiMum I will go to but also I have to have at least 350 pages in my book. Because anything less than that also, is not worth paying for. (Laughing) So yes, my children aren't really interested in reading. I make them read. They read at school and Oscar sometimes I'll get him to go upstairs to go and read. And also, I've never read to them as kids, because I was too scared to read to them. Because I wasn't confident at reading and this is before they learned to read. We always used to have lots of children's books on the shelves and I used to read to them occasionally, like once or twice a week. But even my friends used to read to their children every night. Never, never done it, I think because my love for books wasn't there still um, I'm not sure. But I said to them they can, it will come to them. I don't want to force them into reading every night. Matilda will come. Like she's got three books on the go at the moment. She will often change. Won't read any for a week, red one night, read another night and she's like into Worst Witch or there's Roald Dahl, trying to get them into Roald Dahl because I quite enjoyed those as kids, but then again I didn't read them it was the class teacher that read them you know, to us. And um, I'm very much I don't want to force them so they don't like not, or, I don't want them to 'huh, we have to read' I want them to love reading because I think that's the only way to like reading.
J	J. Do they see you reading?

K	K. Yes, I’m constantly on my Kindle and stuff. I’ll spend an hour in the bath on the Kindle um, and they do see me reading. And Ben reads. Not all the time, but on holiday were just glued in books. Actually they just did take a few books and read them but I think because they go to school for half seven every morning um, and they either have an after school club or they will come home Oscar has an hours tuition every week and he also has Kumon which he has to do every night which is a maths, mental maths paper and that almost helps him, his memory with his times table. It’s just repetitive times table, adding, long division. Um, but we are very much, once they’ve done that it’s, you’ve had your whole day at school. Both of them the teachers say they give 110% and I just think, I don’t make them do their homework either. I just think they are still too young well, Oscar has his extra stuff, but also our household goes to be quite early. So they are in bed at seven because they get up so early, they’ve got two hours to eat and have a bath and I think sometimes they just need to chill. Their brains just need to switch off um, we have it in their end of year reports and in Parents’ Evening ‘could improve on your homework’ which annoys me that they put it in there because right at the start of every term when I see the teachers and the head teachers I it’s like they are not doing their homework. And also, there homework is go to the library, go for a family walk, create this, you know. It is fun stuff, but if they was given a bit more sheets of paper. Oscar has a lot of outside stuff. He also has his football club, so he has discipline in his football he has extra work ok, Year 6 when it comes to his SATS that are quite important then yes, we will probably get him to sit down and do his homework. But I want them to be kids as well and for them to give the teacher 110% they need to have shut off time, they need, and I think that’s a lot to do with how they act in school and give them full on learning and give them. I must admit I hated coming, because I found it such a struggle to be under so much pressure bombarding you with so much stuff all through school you just want to come home from school and especially, just go to sleep or just chill. You didn’t want to then, so I’m not a one, I’m not a believer in homework. I’m really not. Basically you are asking them to do a twelve hour day. And I just think, like I said if they start messing around or misbehaving in class and not doing their work then she is to send the classwork home. Because you are naughty in class you didn’t get it done, then yes, you can do that. It’s a bit like when I was studying last year we were in lesson for half eight, we had ten minutes to get a cup of tea in the morning we had half an hour for lunch, we went right the way through to five o’clock and we had a ten minute break in the afternoon to get a cup of tea. And you were, it was one day a week and it was boom, boom, boom. And you were given homework, they were actually quite lenient with it um, but it’s like by the time id driven back from Maidstone and there in the morning and dropped the kids off at Ben’s work beforehand. You know by the time I was getting home it was half six and I didn’t want to do anything else and my brain was on overload and then the next day you are in full time work as well. And come the weekends you were studying. And I just felt so much for the kids. No just actually you give them so much, no, brain hurts. (Laughing).
J	J. Okay, right I’ll stop that, thank you.

Appendix 13 – Initial transcript analysis

Table showing main themes and subthemes.

1. Support from family and from others			
From a significant parent	Within education	Within employment	From personal life

2. Experiences in education			
Learning to read	Impact of diagnoses when in education	Support and intervention	Impact on behaviour
Resources	Further and higher education	Extra time and additional support	

3. Experiences in employment			
Finding a niche	Avoiding embarrassment	Disclosure and concealment	Anxiety

4. Coping strategies			
Helping their children to read	Withdrawing	Visual learning and working	Revising and further study

5. Impact of diagnosis			
In early childhood	As a young adult	As an adult	Understanding self

6. Personal identity			
Dyslexia as a disability	Self-esteem	Valuing self	Teasing and bullying
Othering self	Feeling different	Positive attributes	Anxiety

7. Understanding the participants' experiences of disclosure and concealment.			
Anxiety of disclosure and of concealment	Disclosure as a disability	Dyslexic anonymity	Trust anxiety

Appendix 14 – Ethics forms

Education Faculty Research Ethics Review

Application for full review

For Faculty Office use only	
FREC Protocol No:	**Date received:**

*Your application **must** comprise the following documents (please tick the boxes below to indicate that they are attached):*

Application Form	/
Peer Review Form	/
Copies of any documents to be used in the study:	
Participant Information Sheet(s)	/
Consent Form(s)	/
Introductory letter(s)	/
Questionnaire	*n/a*
Focus Group Guidelines	*n/a*

Education Faculty Research Ethics Review

Application for full review

1. PROJECT DETAILS

MAIN RESEARCHER	Julie Speers
E-MAIL	j.speers642@canterbury.ac.uk
POSITION WITHIN CCCU	Ed.D student Doctorate in Education Generic Cohort 4 (2014)
POSITION OUTSIDE CCCU	Teacher of Design Technology
COURSE (students only)	Doctorate in Education Generic Cohort 4 (2014)
DEPARTMENT (staff only)	n/a
PROJECT TITLE	An autobiographical investigation of adults with dyslexia exploring experience of support within employment and education.
TUTOR/SUPERVISOR: NAME	Dr Sue Soan
TUTOR/SUPERVISOR: E-MAIL	sue.soan@canterbury.ac.uk
DURATION OF PROJECT (start & end dates)	May 2017 – May 2019

OTHER RESEARCHERS	None

2. OUTLINE THE ETHICAL ISSUES THAT YOU THINK ARE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT.

- Participants giving personal views about their life experiences which may bring up emotions that they have supressed.
- Participant feeling vulnerable when divulging experiences.

3. GIVE A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT in no more than 100 words. (*Include, for example, sample selection, recruitment procedures, data collection, data analysis and expected outcomes.)* Please ensure that your description will be understood by the lay members of the Committee.

Participants will be self-selected and recruited through word-of-mouth or email. Data will be collected through one-to-one discussion which will be largely participant lead. Once all initial meetings have taken place and transcripts and produced, they will be returned to participants for scrutiny. The researcher will analyse transcripts for patterns and a further meeting will take place with the participants which will allow the researcher to investigate more deeply emerging themes or individual issues. It is expected that the research will disclose how participants' experience provision in education and what supports or hinders progress in employment.

4. How many participants will be recruited?	Approximately 10
5. Will you be recruiting STAFF or STUDENTS from another faculty?	YES **IMPORTANT**: If you intend to recruit participants from another Faculty, this form must be copied to the Dean of the Faculty concerned, and to the Chair of that Faculty's Research Ethics Committee.

6. Will participants include minors, people with learning difficulties or other vulnerable people?	YES Participants will be adults with diagnosed dyslexia. However, although dyslexia is considered a specific learning difficulty it is understood that the participants will be competent and capable individuals.

7. Potential risks for participants:	Please indicate all those that apply.
- Emotional harm/hurt*	YES
- Physical harm/hurt	NO
- Risk of disclosure	YES
- Other (please specify)	
*Please note that this includes any sensitive areas, feelings etc., however mild they may seem.	
8. How are these risks to be addressed?	Prior to consenting to take part in this research any potential participant will have the nature of the research explained to them by the researcher and they will also be given a participant information sheet will give details regarding the requirements of the participant, the procedures and feedback stages. This will allow for continued dialogue between participant and researcher allowing to actively construct meaning to each other's talk' (Silverman, D. 1997). This will support their understanding of each stage of the research and help them to identify any stages where they may feel uncomfortable or at risk of harm. Details of helplines for people with dyslexia will be included in the Participant's Information Form and at the end of each meeting I will remind them of this.

	The researcher will also outline how the participant may feel during the research and that potentially emotions may surface that the participant has not felt before. It is important that the risks do not exceed the importance of the problem (Savin-Baden, M & Howell-Major, C. 2013) and that the research carried out with respect and without deception. As I also have dyslexia it is important that I appreciate feelings and reactions may emerge in me during this research. There will provision put in place for me at CCCU should I need it. I will not disclose to the participant that I have dyslexia as this may be seen as involvement. I will explain that I have a great knowledge of working with people with dyslexia. However, it may be an advantage as I may have a more understanding view of the challenges that the participants may have experienced as part of their education and working life. Informed consent – the researcher will provide information to the participants about the potential risks and benefits of taking part in the study. The researcher will also make clear the rights of the participants so they can make informed decisions about whether to take part or not and that they can leave the research at any point. This is in the Participant Information Sheet and in the Consent/Decent letter.
9. Potential benefits for participants: - Improved services	Please indicate all those that apply. YES – sharing the findings with organisations that support people with dyslexia. Possible publication of research findings. YES

- Improved participant understanding - Opportunities for participants to have their views heard. - Other (please specify)	YES Giving a voice to adults with dyslexia who may otherwise have not had their opinions sought or valued.

10. How, when and by whom will participants be approached? Will they be recruited individually or en bloc?	Participants will be approached through informal discussion and also through email. They will then be recruited individually depending on their suitability to take part in the research. Through informal conversation, e.g. friends and colleagues asking me how my Doctorate is progressing, I have received a number of leads to possible participants and volunteers. Although these individuals may be suitable, I have not yet given these individuals details of the research and will not until the proposal has been passed by the University Board of Ethics. An age limit of in the region of 35 years to 60 years will be put on the participants' eligibility. This is for two reasons, firstly, I want the participants to have had the opportunity to be solidly in adulthood with a number of years out of formal education and in work. I also feel they are more likely to have a wider variety of experiences to share thus adding a richness to their narrative. Furthermore, as I am in this age range, I feel the participants are more likely to feel that I am an equal and have empathy with their experiences rather than someone who is superior. (Freire) This research is very much giving adults with dyslexia a voice.

	The decision of the upper age limit is to ensure the participants are still in employment or, if retired, recently so. As I need the participants to have a formal diagnoses of dyslexia, I would expect, due to the history of recognising and identifying dyslexia, older participants would be less likely to meet the criteria.
11. Are participants likely to feel under pressure to consent / assent to participation?	No
12. How will voluntary informed consent be obtained from individual participants or those with a right to consent for them? - Introductory letter - Phone call - Email - - Other (please specify)	Please indicate all those that apply and add examples in an appendix. YES NO YES – sending emails to possible participants taken from where I work and also at CCCU. Informal discussion.

13. How will permission be sought from those responsible for institutions / organisations hosting the study? - Introductory letter	

- Phone call - Email - Other (please specify)	Please indicate all those that apply and add examples in an appendix. NO NO YES – the ethics form will be copied to the Dean of the Faculty concerned and to the Chair of that Faculty's Research Ethics Committee.
14. How will the privacy and confidentiality of participants be safeguarded? (Please give brief details).	All names will be removed from the data and participants will not meet each other. All data and personal information will be stored securely within Canterbury Christ Church University premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Julie Speers and the supervision team; Dr Sue Soan, Dr. Alan Bainbridge and Dr. Judy Durrant. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).
15. What steps will be taken to comply with the Data Protection Act?	Please indicate all those that apply.
- Safe storage of data	YES – recordings will be kept in a locked safe and data on external drives will be password protected.
- Anonymisation of data	YES – names will be removed and any information that can lead to naming of individuals or of institutions will be removed.

- Destruction of data after 5 years - Other (please specify)	YES – hard copies shredded and electronic data permanently deleted.
16. How will participants be made aware of the results of the study?	The results of this study will be published as a Doctoral Thesis and will be available at Augustine House, Canterbury Christ Church University. It is currently unknown if any other publications will results from this research and participants will be informed of potential publications in the Participant's Information Sheet.
17. What steps will be taken to allow participants to retain control over audio-visual records of them and over their creative products and items of a personal nature?	The researcher will explain that the audio tapes can be copied and given to the participant. The participant will receive an electronic and hard copy of the transcript of the interviews.

18. Give the qualifications and/or experience of the researcher and/or supervisor in this form of research. (Brief answer only)	Bachelor of Education Masters in Leadership and Management of Teaching and Learning Experience at Masters and Ed.D Level of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Supervisor: Dr Sue Soan

19. If you are NOT a member of CCCU academic staff or a registered CCCU postgraduate student, what insurance arrangements are in place to meet liability incurred in the conduct of this research?	n/a

Attach any:

Participant information sheets and letters

Consent forms

Data collection instruments

Peer review comments

DECLARATION

- I certify that the information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I certify that a risk assessment for this study has been carried out in compliance with the University's Health and Safety policy.
- I certify that any required CRB/VBS check has been carried out.
- I undertake to carry out this project under the terms specified in the Canterbury Christ Church University Research Governance Handbook.
- I undertake to inform the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee of any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over the course of the study. I understand that such changes may require a new application for ethics approval.
- I undertake to inform the Research Governance Manager in the Graduate School and Research Office when the proposed study has been completed.
- I am aware of my responsibility to comply with the requirements of the law and appropriate University guidelines relating to the security and confidentiality of participant or other personal data.
- I understand that project records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future and that project records should be kept securely for five years or other specified period.
- I understand that the personal data about me contained in this application will be held by the Research Office and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.

Researcher's Name: Julie Speers

Date 26 June 2017

FOR STUDENT APPLICATION ONLY

I have read the research proposal and application form, and support this submission to the FREC.

Supervisor's Name: Dr Sue Soan

Date:

Ethics Form Appendix

Informed Research – Consent Form

Dear X

This letter is to inform you about a research project I am undertaking and to ask you for your consent to participate in it.

This project is an autobiographical investigation of adults with dyslexia in the workforce and seeks to understand any support and advice they were given when in education compared to support received in employment. As a participant in this research you will be asked to talk about your experiences of support during your education and also during employment as an adult with dyslexia

As a participant in this study you will be asked to:

1. Take part in an initial meeting with me, the researcher. You will be asked to explain your experiences of learning and any support you received during education. You will also be asked about your experiences during employment as an adult. This meeting should take between 1 and 2 hours and will be taped. You will not be asked to write anything.

2. I will write out your responses and comments from this initial meeting and you will be asked to read through the responses and comments written down during the initial meeting. If you feel any changes and corrections need to be made you can do so.

3. Take part in a second meeting with me which will allow you to explain your experiences in more detail. This meeting should take no longer than 1 hour. As before this will be taped and you will not need to write anything.

4. I will write out your responses and comments from this second meeting and you will be asked to read through this. If you feel any changes and corrections need to be made you can do so. If you choose to give your consent, I will be using your responses to analyse and patterns in experiences between the participants. I will also be using the responses to identify experiences of adults with dyslexia and suggest ways in which services and support in education and employment can be improved.

Please return the following slip to me by 31st August 2017 to indicate whether you are prepared to take part. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely,

Julie Speers (j.speers642@canterbury.ac.uk)
Ed. D student Doctorate in Education Generic Cohort 4 (2014)

Consent/decent form

I have read the above outlining the nature of the doctoral research project, and give/do not give my consent to participate. I understand that if there is anything I do not wish to answer or do, or if I feel uncomfortable carrying on with the research, I have the right to withdraw at any point. Any tapes of conversations and hard or electronic transcripts will, at this point be permanently destroyed and no longer kept on record.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Preferred method of contact (email or telephone):

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research Project

An autobiographical investigation of adults with dyslexia exploring experience of support within education and employment.

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University, (CCCU) by Julie Speers.

CCCU contact and location: Telephone: 01227 767700 and post code: CT1 1QU

Background

There has been a lot of research carried out investigating the experiences of children with dyslexia, how they learn and what can make their experiences in education more enjoyable and fruitful. However, research into the experiences of adults with dyslexia is still very sparse. This research aims to give adults with dyslexia a voice to explain their experiences in education and in work.

What will you be required to do?

You will be asked to explain your experiences of learning and any support you received during education. You will also be asked about your experiences during employment as an adult.

To participate in this research you must:

To have had a formal assessment of dyslexia carried out by an Educational Psychologist. This can be have been carried out at any point in your life and be between the ages of about 35 and 60.

Procedures

You will be asked to:

1. Take part in an initial meeting with me, the researcher. This meeting should take between 1 and 2 hours and will be taped. You will not be asked to write anything.
2. I will write out your responses and comments from this initial meeting and you will be asked to read through this. If you feel any changes and corrections need to be made you can do so.
3. Take part in a second meeting with me which will allow you to explain your experiences in more detail. This meeting should take no longer than 1 hour. As before this will be taped and you will not need to write anything.
4. I will write out your responses and comments from this second meeting and you will be asked to read through this. If you feel any changes and corrections need to be made you can do so.

Feedback

The tapes of both meetings will be transcribed and the participants will be sent a copy of their own meeting. Participants will be encouraged to read these transcripts and make corrections if they feel there are any to be made.

Confidentiality

All names will be removed from the data and participants will not meet each other. All data and personal information will be stored securely within Canterbury Christ Church University premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Julie Speers. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed)

Dissemination of results

The results of this study will be published as a Doctoral Thesis and will be available at Augustine House, Canterbury Christ Church University. Telephone: 01227 767700 and post code: CT1 1QU.

It is currently unknown if any other publications will results from this research.

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

Any questions?

Please contact Julie Speers Ed.D student Doctorate in Education Generic Cohort 4 (2014) at j.speers642@canterbury.ac.uk