Difference not disability – using the voice of the dyslexic academic to challenge the stereotypes of dyslexia in higher education.

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Contents

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(*Haras - Sarah when I eventually learnt to spell my name the right way round)

Abstract

Difference not disability – using the voice of the dyslexic academic to challenge the stereotyping of dyslexia within higher education.

This thesis focuses on the voice of those working in academia who are dyslexic to consider the impact of the label of dyslexia in higher education. It considers the impact and influence of lecturer identity upon the discourse around dyslexia in higher education. It seeks to challenge the idea that institutional culture surrounding dyslexia might be at odds with the experience of dyslexic educators.

Critical in nature, it questions the restrictions and rigidity of approaches to learning within higher education. Using group workshops and collective memory research (Davis and Gannon, 2008), a series of free-flowing conversational were recorded to capture spoken words and experiences summarised. The discussions included life stories and narratives that revealed traumatic classroom memories. Using this collective voice, the research seeks to challenge the commonly used deficit model of dyslexia in higher education institutions.

The workshop discussions were prompted by using words and phrases from an analysis of website and student facing literature within Canterbury Christ Church University. Following the workshops, the recordings were transcribed, and key themes were identified and highlighted using a reflexive thematic approach. The recordings were then edited in consultation with the participants into a final podcast which is submitted as an audio artifact alongside the written submissions.

The discussions that developed challenge the perceived stereotypes and negative connotations around dyslexia within academic life at university. The work seeks to consider how educational institutions might use the voice of the disabled and 'unheard' to challenge the stigma often associated by the label. It is proposed that the study could in turn be used to drive organisational change from within higher education institutions.

Throughout the period in which the research was conducted (2021 – 2023) there has been a societal shift towards the use of the term 'neurodivergent'. to include those diagnosed with dyslexia and other conditions that affect aspects of learning. Some of the participants in the workshops had received such diagnoses.

Introduction

This submission for a Doctorate in Education comes as a direct result of my own life story and positionality, my social and personal values, and views, as a dyslexic academic. It seeks to address the research question:

> How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

This will be considered through the secondary questions:

> Does the dyslexic label lead to a culture of disability and 'deficit' within universities?

> How and why do we measure the success of dyslexic students in universities?

An overview of the chapters and areas included in the thesis are as follows:

Chapter 1: The philosophical approach to the research

The first chapter considers the philosophical approach behind the research as a 'dyslexic academic'. The phrase or label 'dyslexic academic' would appear to be somewhat contradictory, when one considers the stereotypical definition of an academic as "someone who is clever and enjoys studying" (Cambridge Dictionary) versus that of a dyslexic "a common learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling" (www.nhs.uk). My own life story is the inspiration for the research. Late to academia as a career and late to a diagnosis of dyslexia, I was neither 'an academic' nor as far as I knew 'a dyslexic' until my mid-40s. My own lived experience both as a mature student and as a lecturer working within Canterbury Christ Church University in the Southeast of England directly links into this research. Thus, the methods and the research philosophy position me at the centre of the research as an ethnographical study using biography (West, 2014) alongside others as a co-constructed autoethnography (Ellis, 2007). I am therefore not just the researcher in this thesis I am a participant. My life story, memories and experiences are told alongside that of my fellow participants.

There is an ethical consideration for research of this nature, both in terms of my own subjectivity and in terms of working with my participants who are reliving memories which are at times very sensitive. There were times when this sensitivity required me to halt to role of academic or researcher and simply be a sympathetic friend or colleague. The research considers how our own learning and life experience frames our identity and how this intersects with our role as teachers and academics. In turn it has allowed

us to challenge what might be considered as the cultural 'norm' within our higher education institution – Canterbury Christ Church University.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The second chapter is the narrative literature review, which considers the main themes which influence this research. Firstly, the framing of disability, hidden disabilities and dyslexia. This is considered through the critical lens of both critical disability theory and the social model of disability and how this frames curriculum within universities. The literature also considers the social construction of disability and reflects on research that considers labelling and the identification and medicalisation of dyslexia versus the idea of it being a socially constructed condition. The second area of the literature considers the current running, organisation, and funding of higher education. Here the literature considers how the marketisation and commodification of universities has led to a monetarisation of student, the support, the way the allowance is allocated and the influence of numerous stakeholders. This area also considers the impact of the measurement of student success and the metrics by which universities are tracked. The final area of the literature considers the identity of the teacher and the teacher's lived experience and how this influences the classroom. This links to how it might be used as a philosophical basis for the repositioning of dyslexia. This in turn will allow the research to consider how academics might help support students' personal and academic growth through development of their own self advocacy and coping strategies by reframing dyslexia in higher education.

Chapter 3: Methods and methodological approach

This is a qualitative study adopting an inductive approach whereby I sought to derive theory from the data which was generated from the research methods. The methods used to generate the data were a review of institutional literature to find words linked to dyslexia. These were then used as prompts for recorded discussion groups featuring 5 dyslexic lecturers at a British university. The participants are all academics working within Canterbury Christ Church University who have a diagnosis of or self-identify as being dyslexic.

During the discussion sessions, the research participants responded to a set of open-ended, semi-structured questions and data was generated through a continually reflexive process of discussion. The sessions were recorded, and an artefact created in the form of a podcast. In line with the reflexive approach, the choice of medium for the artefact changed from a video format to a podcast, when it became apparent that some participants were uncomfortable with being filmed. There was a degree of autobiographical inscription (LeMenager and Hebdige, 2013) in the whole thesis due to my own dyslexic status and those of my children.

The methodological approach links closely to the philosophical framework of social constructivism to consider how we see others. Using a methodological approach of participatory action research in an aim of 'equalising or transposing researcher-participant relationships' (Aldridge 2016) and through this to drive change and action. To consider the discourse and language around the label of dyslexia we need to look at the words used to define and describe it. To reconsider how we frame the words, and the discourse of language used when we discuss dyslexia, and then to reflect on the institutional language in a group or collective discussion with those that identify as being dyslexic. Therefore, the approach is to use reflexive thematic analysis to review the words, language and phrases used to describe dyslexia. To then take these words as a framework or a key word prompt for group discussion in collective memory workshops.

The use of collective memory-based workshops is inspired by the work of feminist-based research groups in Australia (Davies and Gannon 2006). This idea is based on the need to hear the personal stories in a communal way, so we see patterns and similarities to counteract what might be seen as an isolated voice. The idea of supplementing an autobiographical ethnography with a collective discussion was based on a desire to build a supportive network through a collaborative approach. The participatory nature of the collective workshops places the researcher within the space as a participant rather than as an observer. Group or collective discussion considers subjective emotional elements in a way that we can see a pattern of behaviours rather than a singular voice. It answers the criticisms of many that any research that considers disability needs to include the voice of the unheard or the oppressed (Betts. 2022, Collinson, 2022).

Chapter 4: The data

It would seem hypocritical for this thesis to challenge how we value success in higher education based solely on written text. Therefore, the data is in part presented orally as a podcast as a way of sharing the insight and hearing the voice of those affected. The use of audio recording as a method allows the wordless and more subtle comments to be gathered. The data from the workshops has the additional benefit of allowing the researcher to be a full participant. I wanted to take part fully in the discussions rather than being concerned with collating data during the conversations. This is not without risk, both to the researcher and the participants who are laying 'bare' their personal memories and challenges to both their peers and within the organisation in which they work. The potential impact upon their professional identity (Lee 2018) and academic presence is something that must be considered and managed in a supportive, empathic way. What the recording does uncover is how we are storytellers, how we use the spoken word and the narrative to 'paint a picture'. The use of film would also have showed how our body language, manner, and demeanour changes as we retreat into stories from our childhood where we first experienced the trauma of being 'different' too our peers. However, it became

obvious after the second workshop that for some of the participants being filmed was uncomfortable, they struggled with seeing themselves on screen, and they found this distracting. Therefore, the decision was made to move towards the use of a podcast rather than a film as the output or artefact which would present the research findings. Whilst I am choosing not to submit the final work as a film, I have reviewed the footage from the first two workshops, I am still able to review the body language and impact of the discussions on those taking part. The hope is that the final podcast can be communicated in a more long-lasting manner, perhaps as a staff development tool, to be shared in an accessible way to allow us to continue to challenge so the research is truly critical.

Chapter 5: The analysis

The use of a podcast as a research tool has allowed me to carefully review, reframe and reconsider the language used by my peers. Reviewing the transcription of the podcasts using reflexive thematic analysis, I have coded the words that are used to discuss the feelings and emotions. Using reflective thematic analysis to consider the words spoken across the workshops I have been able to pull out the themes. The final version of the podcast is edited to reflect the emergent themes:

1 Deficit model, to feel or be handicapped or disabled and the impact on our personal and professional identity.
2 Coping strategies and techniques that build useful life skills and the confidence to develop self-advocacy (different from reasonable adjustments).
3 Labels and stereotypes – how many of the effects of dyslexia are misunderstood (including the groups own misunderstandings).
4 How we use the positives of dyslexic such as empathy and creative thinking to shape our own teaching practice.

It is these themes that my fellow participants are now using to develop and expand the critical approach of driving change and repositioning across the institution. Listening to the podcast will allow you to hear the words spoken and how we have interpreted the discussions throughout the process.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The concluding chapter considers what we can learn from the research and how the resultant themes might be used to drive for repositioning dyslexia within higher education. It also considers what I have learnt from the process and how both myself and my participants have changed throughout the process.

What might I have done differently were I to start this work again now? This discussion includes a reflection on the methods used, the demographics of my participants, the changes and challenges faced

as part of the process. More importantly, how will this work now be used and what are the next steps in this area? Through the sharing of the practice both within Canterbury Christ Church University and in other organisations, I hope that perceptions of dyslexia will change.

Chapter 1 The philosophical approach to the research

In this first chapter of the thesis, I am seeking to give an overview of the philosophical approach to the research as well as giving some background behind the desire to conduct the work. In effect it allows me to tell my story and how this is interwoven with the research and the desire to drive change within universities.

The last decade has led me down the path to a new career as a lecturer in Media, Communications and Public Relations which in turn led to a diagnosis of dyslexia in my 40s, a journey that has at times been uphill and has most definitely been emotional! Being given the 'label' of dyslexia has had a negative impact on my self-esteem adding to the imposter syndrome I felt as a new academic, the belief that my role as an academic is not deserved nor that I should be in this career. For many academics, the value of academia is judged on written literacy and the ability to produce journal articles, conference papers and book chapters. This measurement of excellence seems at odds therefore with the traditional definition of dyslexia – a weakness in literacy. Yet if we consider the word dyslexia etymologically it means a difficulty with words rather than literacy. As part of the journey over the last five years of completing this work I have started to reconsider how I managed a career in advertising and marketing for over 20 years, what coping strategies I developed and whether these kinds of strategies might be useful for undergraduates. The potential repositioning of the strengths of dyslexia leads me to question why the emphasis is on a learning difference being a 'deficit' or 'weakness' rather than any positivity around the difference. This idea has been explored in detail before including the framing of the word lexism as the discrimination against those with a literacy issue (Collinson, 2022). For those of us who are labelled as being dyslexic, neurodivergent, impaired, or disabled we are judged by what we can't do rather than what we can do. Many who advocate for inclusivity argue that the positives outweigh the negatives. Within the dyslexia advocacy movement charities such as Made by Dyslexia and The British Dyslexia Association talk about the 'gift of dyslexia', positioning dyslexia as being sometimes being a strength rather that a weakness. A different way of thinking and doing that has some benefits – framed in a positive rather than a deficit way.

Some dyslexic advocates say that some dyslexics are gifted, some with 'big picture' thinking, story tellers, problem solvers and creatives. This challenges what some might consider to be 'proper academic' writing, but I want to tell a story to build an account as part of the desire to challenge academic writing in the way that many using ethnography do. This research then seeks to consider how traditional literacy skills are judged and admired and why higher education is still predominantly focused upon using the written word. The research considers how the experience of dyslexic academics might reframe the narrative and drive cultural change within higher education institutions. I am framing the work from a theoretical concept of the social model of disability – that disability is caused by the

way society is organised rather than the impairment or difference itself (Finkelstein, 1980, Shakespeare, 2013).

The work was founded on the basis that our professional identity is constructed through social, environmental, and situational influences. Therefore, I would argue that teachers or lecturers cannot leave their identity, perceptions, or stereotypes outside the classroom door. This thesis questions how my own life story affects my identity as a teacher and how this influences my own position as a learning and teaching 'professional'. And how in turn does this impact upon my students' experience? The idea of student identity and the resultant influence is considered and framed as a "fund of knowledge" (Moll and Greenberg, 1990). The idea they explore is that a 'fund of knowledge' challenges the deficit idea and seeks to reconsider students as having different skills based on their home (social) environment and knowledge rather than inferior skills. This is an idea that is expanded further in the literature review linked to the role of teacher or lecturer identity. As a dyslexic academic my own experience challenges the deficit model of learning and the power dynamic between those considered to be 'academic' and those with literacy 'issues'. Through a lens of a social model of disability as a dyslexic I am not deficit with literacy challenges but the learning, teaching and assessment structure within the majority of higher education institutions which are disabling.

Through my own self disclosure about my dyslexia and my desire to challenge barriers to learning I have developed a community of supportive peers with similar life stories to my own. These peers are academics who have come into higher education later in life with their own life experiences and skills all of whom are diagnosed (or self-diagnose) as being dyslexic. This is my tribe and as such it was, they who have shaped my methodological approach of participatory action research. The common stance between us is that we seek to develop courses and modules that support and build self-advocacy for our students, in addition to the need to celebrate differences and inclusivity. We are happy to share our life stories so we can both sympathise and empathise with students. By sharing our stories, we are challenging the traditional negative stereotyping of dyslexia within education.

The discussive workshops established a supportive environment where we could discuss and question how childhood trauma had shaped our adult identities as educators. For me a late diagnosis of dyslexia has led to a revisiting of childhood memories, reliving unhappy or painful experiences and the trauma of education. This approach is seen in the National Health Service Report *Working definition of trauma-informed practice* (www.gov.uk). The definition recommends that we reposition the support from 'What is wrong with the person' to 'What does the person need' therefore empowering the individual to have an input into the support they receive (www.Workingdefinitionoftrauma-informed practice – www.gov.uk). I interpret this as considering the use of inclusive learning, teaching, and assessment in universities rather than individualised learning support plans, to reconsider how the culture, structure and social make up within the university is disabling the student.

This idea or theme of trauma has come up several times throughout the workshops. The unnecessary trauma we hold from our education has framed us and led to self-labelling ourselves. We are the "*daydreamers*" (Participant T) or are stupid or inferior to our peers because of time spent "*in the remedial group*" (Participant W). This experience has in turn led me to reconsider the value we place on higher education and how a degree is now judged or measured by 'outcome'. The need to measure the success of both the degree and the undergraduate themself means that many universities have developed student support systems based, I believe, on the premise that higher education is about gaining good academic grades, therefore it is the individual that needs supporting (using a medicalised model of dyslexia) rather than changing the environment (the social model of disability). This is of course amplified by, some argue, the current commodification of education and the idea that students are educated for the purpose of greater financial gain (graduate outcomes) and that degrees should offer 'value for money' as students now 'pay' for them. This rhetoric is enforced by the previous Conservative government (2010 to 2014) and many of the British tabloid newspapers. Now that most students graduate with a large debt there is more pressure on universities to demonstrate a return on investment for the student.

My identity as a dyslexic academic is further triangulated by being a student. As a student and newly diagnosed dyslexic I have undertaken the journey to apply for Disability Student Allowance (DSA) and to see through my own experience the support students are offered. This support appears to be based on a model of learning support and scaffolding rather than self-sufficiency. DSA is used to fund specialist equipment and individualised mentor support in a way that scaffolds the learner whilst at university. Many of the support systems disappear after the student leaves university. All my fellow *#dyslexicacademics* (the tag we use on the platform X formerly known as Twitter) strive to deliver more in their teaching than just literacy skills and link this most closely with the need to not merely survive but to thrive beyond education. We talked for example about the importance of managing deadlines rather than just allowing for extensions for late submissions of work.

This thesis seeks to consider how the collective voice of the *#dyslexicacademic* might help to question and reframe the stereotyping of dyslexia in the higher education setting. To push our institution to reconsider what we really mean by inclusivity and to challenge that barriers that are in place for dyslexic students.

Through challenging what we see as the norms within learning, teaching, and assessment, we can look at difference in a positive rather than a deficit way. This is why this research is important in the field of learning, teaching and pedagogy within universities and links to the increase in awareness as seen by the drive from Advanced HE for compassionate pedagogy (Betts 2022).

I want therefore to consider dyslexia in the broader sense of considering how we challenge the position of privilege within education. As such a true reconsideration of education sees a real focus on inclusive

learning and teaching and the repositioning of the 'other'. This is perhaps best considered in the context of the 'othering' of dyslexic students. This emphasis has been against a backdrop of higher education marketisation (Czerniewicz et al., 2023, Brooks et al., 2021), an environment which is focused on performance metrics measured by student achievement (Williamson, 2019). Students are classified by 'characteristics' such as their social economic background or whether they are recipients of DSA (Office for Students). Dyslexic students are labelled as disabled and 'struggling' (www.gov.uk/disability-student-allowance) and are referred to student support and wellbeing for learning support plans and for access to DSA. Using the medical model for inclusion rather than the social model of disability putting in structures rather than removing barriers. This results in the ongoing stereotyping of dyslexia as being a deficit and a weakness, a stereotype I argue which is at odds with the experience of dyslexic academics who are themselves experienced educators. This research is important as it will challenge the construction of dyslexia in higher institutions and seek to change this. When initially looking at this area, it seemed that existing discussion around dyslexia in universities focuses on supporting the deficit and the learning difficulties. This would seem to be a contrast to the current work in both curriculum development and compassionate pedagogy (Hamilton and Petty, 2023, Betts, 2022) which seeks to celebrate and embrace all learners rather than scaffolding them. This thesis is also written against a backdrop of ongoing research on educator or teacher identity and its influence on learning, teaching, and assessment practices. This thesis will also build insight from both an institutional perspective and individual educators' views to shape the learning and teaching focus. With the desire to focus on individuals' strengths rather than their deficits. The intention is that this doctoral research could help to deconstruct the negative labelling of dyslexia and support a change in the culture within the wider institution itself. Insight into dyslexia in higher education is, one could argue, increasingly important as the number of students studying in higher education institutions with a label of dyslexia has increased dramatically over the last decade (HESA, 2022). With the increase in diagnosis of neurodivergences, the umbrella term, there has also been an increase in the cost of student support in higher education through the Disability Allowance. With the redefinition of dyslexia as a disability under the Disability and Equality Act 2010 there is a fear within universities of legislation and the threat of being seen as discriminatory. Since legislative change in 2014. universities have shared the support for disabled students. (Higher education: student support: changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) (www.gov.uk). There is also. some argue, a current neoliberal ideology that the value of a university education has been lowered and the 'return on investment' from some courses is poor. This has seen ministerial speeches in which the government stress they will 'clamp down on rip off degrees' (Crackdown on rip-off university degrees - www.gov.uk) Therefore, for some universities the support offered is based on threat of student complaint or prosecution rather than as a proactive way of offering support. There are of course some higher education institutions where the support is positioned differently. For example, in the creative arts, there is an assumption that many of their students are more likely to be dyslexic. I base this premise on conversations with both an admissions officer based at a London based dance conservatory and

through seeing that some arts-based institutions such as the University of Arts London offer proactive screening to all students when they start their undergraduate studies (www.arts.ac.uk accessed September 2023).

Many students do not want to gain the label or in some cases can't afford to pay for a diagnosis of dyslexia. This can be seen in some professional areas (for example trainee teachers) and within some cultures. Recent research in Bath Spa University discusses the resistance and challenge of trainee teachers in declaring a hidden disability such as dyslexia or a mental health issue due to the potential impact it will have on their professional standing. There were some concerns within my own work and research that some of my participants might not want their peers to know of their dyslexia and its perceived associated weaknesses. This was discussed when my ethics form was agreed – would colleagues want people in their professional setting to know they were dyslexic? This raises the potential incompatibility between professional versus personal identity in the classroom (Lee, 2018) Indeed, I know of several dyslexic academics who would not wish their peers nor their students to know they were dyslexic. A member of the Senior Management Team 'confessed' that they were dyslexic but did not declare it as they thought it would have had an impact on their career. One could of course argue that there is no need for people to know, in the same way that colleagues might choose not to declare their gender or sexuality. But I would question why this would be seen as something we would want to keep secret when we as teachers want to build trust in an inclusive teaching environment. This is of course only my opinion, and other teachers and lecturers might choose not to share any aspect of their personal circumstances.

If therefore more students at universities have a diagnosis or are being recommended for diagnosis, (HESA, 2022) they are in turn entitled to student support through Disability Student Allowance (DSA). So, one could assume that higher education institutions should understand this learning difference and how best to support these students? Once a student is awarded DSA, they are in fact labelled and categorised as a subset within the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) metrics. This is seen on the Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard (www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis, accessed 19th September 2023). Students in receipt of DSA are now measured as a subset based on their success and the perceived 'effectiveness' of higher education. How well academically a student achieves is part of the key performance indicators of an institute and is one of the measurements of success. In addition, changes to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) by the Office of Students in 2022 (www.officeforstudents.org.uk) now sees higher education providers required to assess literacy skills in all assessments.

The UCU (University and College Union) argue that higher education has been commodified (www.UCU.org.uk - UCU initial comment on higher education white paper accessed September 2023) and they argue that the changes to student funding has led to a marketisation of universities. All students,

one could argue, wish to gain the best academic qualifications and providers have moved towards supporting individual students in this. This is particularly important for those students with a characteristic such as a recognised disability or ethnic background. There is therefore an added push within student support teams to encourage students to gain a diagnosis as this is the only way to unlock potential 'reasonable' adjustments and DSA as part of a student support package. There is a cost attached to a diagnosis both in fiscal terms to pay for the actual assessment and a cost to personal identity and standing. It could of course be argued that students shouldn't need this diagnosis or label to access inclusive teaching. The idea of the commodification of higher education has been explored in depth by Brookfield (2001, 2002), Lawrence and Shaman (2002) and Bunce, Baird and Jones (2017) and this is explored further in the literature review.

My own diagnosis was driven in part by the suggestion that I needed a 'cover sheet' (appendix 3) to allow for my weaknesses in writing and grammar in my Master's study. My supervisor had offered no practical support over the period of study when I struggled with the writing and organisation of the project and a cover sheet at the end of the process was not supportive at all. For some, the elements of inclusivity offered by DSA could be seen as barriers to accessibility and this point is considered further in my review of the literature. I found the process of applying for DSA, understanding the support available and gaining the equipment to be a tortuous process. It involves a four-stage approach during which the student incurs costs and feels, in my opinion, like they are part of a production line. Templated reports and a standardised assessment are used to determine which resources are allocated, while support and advisors are outsourced to several different organisations. Ironically one element we discussed in our workshops was form filling and the difficulty of keeping within the text box. This leads me to consider how many students do not secure a diagnosis because the process is too complicated or expensive.

1.1 Placing my positionality at the centre of the work.

The reason for this thesis is to drive change and that the critical nature of the work means that the success of the work could eventually be measured through seeing structural, personal and ultimately organisational change. The collective nature of the methodological approach means that I have established a group of like-minded individuals who have similar life stories and histories as myself. Through the work I have examined the concept of working collectively and I have discovered that we want to drive change in different ways. Whilst some of my participants are now driving their own critical path, supported, and even energised by our discussions, other participants want to challenge the system and the hierarchy in a more anarchistic way. As well as reflecting on our identity as dyslexics we have also reflected on our role as educators and teachers. Through the unity and collective

discussion, we now feel more empowered to be open and honest with our colleagues and students about our own journeys. The autobiographical and ethnographical nature of the research means that my critical positioning is as an insider, someone who is researching from a perspective of being a participant rather than an observer or just a researcher. Yet I feel like an outsider when I consider my position within academia. I regularly introduce myself as 'Not a real academic'; this is after working in a university for a decade! Yet what is a real academic? And who decides what qualities or attributes an academic should have? These are the questions this work seeks to challenge and offer some potential answers.

1.2 Terminology and the Models of Neurodiversity and Disability.

Using the social model of dyslexia as a disability (Riddick, 2011, Collinson, 2021) allows me to frame and define key elements in a way that links to this model – this is, in turn, often different or contradictory to the definitions used through a medicalised or charitable model of disability.

Disabled/Disability

You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. But what do we mean by 'substantial' and 'long-term' is it more than minor or trivial, e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed 'long-term' means 12 months or more, e.g. a breathing condition that develops because of a lung infection. Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 (www.gov.uk)

Neurodiverse/Neurodiversity

The term 'Neurodiversity' was first devised in 1998 by Judy Singer, sociologist, and an autistic person who wrote that autistic people were a category similar to class/gender/race. Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of neurocognitive and/or sensory functioning amongst humans. A neurodiverse person differs from that associated with the "neurotypical" population (also known as the "predominant neurotype") (Chown, 2021). Chown goes on to contextualise "neurodiversity" by considering what is meant by "neurotypical." Chown cites Perszyk (2012) who defines "neurotypical" as: "being a medically and psychologically healthy individual demonstrating a normative pattern of neurodevelopment."

Neurodivergent

Neurodivergent describes individuals whose selective neurocognitive functions/ neurodevelopmental differences fall outside prevalent societal norms. They do not necessarily have a neurodevelopmental disorder (Shah, Boilson, Rutherford et al, 2022. Therefore, people who are diagnosed with dyslexia would be neurodivergent.

Othered

The idea that normative practices and assumptions discriminate against someone. In the context of dyslexia, it is the assumptions and practices around literacy that discriminate against dyslexics. This idea is expanded further through the framing of this as lexism. (Collinson, 2022).

1.3 Social constructivism and labelling

Using the critical lens of critical disability theory to consider disability as a social construct, this thesis seeks to consider how the label of dyslexia is 'formed' in higher education institutions. Considering the definition through the idea of social constructivism, that there is no reality or truth, and people's experience is shaped by the social context or environment (classroom) and the impact of interactions and teachings. This was discussed by Vygotsky (Kozulin, 2003) in the concept of the zone of proximal development; what students can achieve versus what they achieve through support and scaffolding. The idea of social discourse and the social structure between experience and the relationship with power, in the case of a child their relationship between the classroom environment and the power of the teacher or educator (Hirtle, 1996, Hay, 2015, Berger and Luckman 2023) versus the social construction of power (Dreher, 2016).

It examines how the definitions, perceptions and institutional stereotyping of dyslexia are framed around a deficit principle – a weakness rather than a difference. The thesis reflects on how the positioning of dyslexia as a disability through medical techniques such as diagnosing and labelling shapes the learners' experience and positions them as being different from the 'norm'. The pathologizing of dyslexia in England could be traced back to the Warnock report in 1978 and the resulting educational legislation which developed the idea of special educational needs and statementing in schools. Aligning this from an 'othering' perspective (Collinson, 2022), the research studies the labelling of students with dyslexia and reviews how learning support or interventions constructed on a basis of academic weakness shape how knowledge is understood. The research seeks to consider how human development is socially constructed through individual labelling and the comparison against

others. It seeks to reflect on how a collective approach through a consideration of hearing the voice of the 'suppressed' might help challenge this labelling. Using participatory action research using the life stories of academics who are dyslexic as a collective, we aim to consider how the use of a socially constructed discussion around what is normal might seek to smash perceptions and stereotyping. This approach also supports the idea that we can work together as supportive peers in challenging what might be considered as the norm. This is done through the consideration of both memories of education as a child and those of our adulthood as educators. The research seeks to consider whether a phenomenological approach using collective insight will allow the researcher to challenge how knowledge is constructed and understood, to question the value of labelling dyslexia as a weakness. By using critical theory lenses the research seeks to gain insight to help drive change in higher education to consider the tension between individualism and the need to label versus the impact of growth through group interactions. The value of working as a group, a collective for the greater good of many rather than relying on individualised scaffolded support and learning. The idea of life stories and experiences to question and challenge the current normative approach which sits with the critical ethnographical area. I do of course appreciate that there are other academics who may not say or remember the things in the same way, nor choose to share their experiences.

1.4 The research context – individualism and labelling

The current ideological position of higher education appears to be at a crossroads, with a split over the role of universities, as evidenced by the recent industrial action by Universities and College Union (UCU) within the UK. The government continues to push the rhetoric of graduate outcomes and value of education (www.officeforstudents.gov) whilst those working as academics may want to ensure that criticality and value of expression is maintained. Is the value of higher education based on the societal benefit developed for the greater good of the collective or on value placed on the personal gain of the individual?? This philosophy is based on individual gain, with Brookfield (2001, 2002) arguing that universities are being forced to marketize and be measured in a commodified way. The success of university teaching is now measured through outcomes or key performance indicators linked to the 'results' of the individual student, as seen in the award of an institutional grade of Gold, Silver or Bronze in the Teaching Excellent Framework (TEF). This then brings into question the support for disabled students and who has the 'responsibility' for developing the right environment for those students with learning differences such as dyslexia. Much of the current literature which considers the dyslexic student in higher education focuses on the deficit model of dyslexia as a cognitive or learning weakness hence the need to label and medicalise the term. Dyslexic students are offered 'learning support plans' that offer 'reasonable adjustments' to support these 'learning difficulties. This kind of language clearly enforces the medicalisation of the difference - like the crutches given to the cripple in a Dickensian novel.

If as Collinson (2018, 2020, 2023) suggests, dyslexia is a social construction then for some the view of dyslexia is relative to the education setting in which is it positioned. How do we bring the researchers voice into the interpretation as an insider working from within rather than interviewing from outside? The hope is that the way the workshop is based around a collective biography means there is no power dynamic and the 'researcher' and the 'respondent' roles change. How does the collective view of different individuals get heard against the backdrop of the wider culture of the university? This leads us to consider how this identity links to the socially relativist interpretation as part of a set of cultural beliefs. For the relativist we need to consider the construction of the identity through the value systems and language in which the experience of the dyslexic student becomes seen as normal and the ethics of the narrative behind the language becomes normative. Therefore, the student who is labelled as disabled starts to consider themselves to be disabled, impaired or at fault. For a student (or educator) diagnosed later in life, perhaps during their time at university, the narrative of the label and the need to medicalise the deficit would appear to conflict with their identity, and our own learning journey and what we learn from our peers, this project seeks to consider the impact of a late diagnosis of dyslexia. For those who have already completed their compulsory education this late diagnosis could result in a reframing of childhood memories and the part of our identity that is linked to education. These themes are discussed and explored in all the workshops and discussion.

The increase in diagnosing and labelling it could be argued is driven by the current neoliberalist climate in which the philosophy of individualism is emphasised even more. Cameron and Billington (2017) argue that this enforces the need to offer and support students through scaffolding methods, thus the official diagnosis and label is the only way an individual student can access the support that it is perceived they 'need' to achieve. Within many institutions the students are encouraged to get a diagnosis so they can access Disability Student Allowance (DSA) which can only be spent on technology specified by the government as being appropriate rather than allowing students to have the freedom to develop and design their own support strategies. All smart phones have embedded Artificial Intelligence tools which allow for dictation and Microsoft Windows accessibility tools are now available on all PCs, so the specialist IT software supplied through the DSA is both redundant and more complicated to access. A fundamental consideration of this work is the assumption that the written word is more highly respected or regarded within academic research and as such the final work is presented in part as a podcast.

This has led to the construction of a student (or staff) identity linked to one where a difference is personal and a problem. An environment in which we commodify difference means we have seen the change in the narrative of discourse around a learning difference within the higher education setting. There is some discussion on whether the increase in diagnosis of dyslexia is due to better diagnosis or because of the moves to increase mobility of students into higher education following the Dering Report in 1997. With, I would argue, the increased commodification of higher education, the 'value' of the

investment in student fees is measured on personal gain and student 'achievement'. The need to segment and support the individual student has been further exaggerated by the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which measures student outcomes as a key performance indicator (KPI). The TEF links the measurement of teaching 'excellence' to graduate achievement through measurement of graduate destinations (type of job) and degree classification. One of the metrics for the TEF is the success or achievement of students who are 'awarded' DSA and as such one could argue that it is in institutions' interests to ensure that students are labelled so their success can be measured and attributed. If we label dyslexia as a disability, then Barnes and Merecer (2016) argue we can only understand the disability if we gain insight at an individual level by gaining a broader analysis of societal powers and the resultant social inequalities. Therefore, a research methodology that uses an interpretative approach needs to gain an insider view to consider the social relationships and the sense of identity of the dyslexic student.

For the researcher to really extrapolate the subtleties of the hidden meanings behind the life stories we need to do more than analyse the data, we need to interpret what the stories say. Therefore, the research philosophy for this kind of collective narrative could be based on an interpretative phenomenology. A research philosophy that is interested in how we interpret others; their actions, behaviours and intentions positioned within the world around them. Yet amongst some education researchers and policy makers there is the belief that research based on life stories or experiences based on a personal, individual experience is too subjective and emotional. So, for the student, the educator or one labelled as dyslexic within higher education institutions, the label is one of an individual deficit, or a disability based on a learning weakness. This positions the individual as being at fault who needs to be supported or 'fixed' rather than the surrounding society or environment that is disabling. Without gaining the personal life stories in a supportive understanding environment it means that only the negative connotations of a learning difference are highlighted with no emphasis on any positive traits. This is contrary to the current movement by some stakeholders such as charities like the British Dyslexic Society and Made in Dyslexia who advocate to show dyslexia in a positive light. The drive is to position dyslexia as a difference rather than a disability as "virtue or talent" (Marazzi, 2011) or as a "gift" (Davis and Braun, 2011). This leads to the cultural interpretation of the label of dyslexia as a disability based on a deficit model. In an environment where academic knowledge and literacy is power, where success and achievement are often measured on the ability to develop good academic writing, 'struggles with literacy' could be seen as the fault of the individual. Therefore, within universities the lived experience of being labelled as dyslexic from the perspective as a 'disablement' will affect the identity and social construction of the learner, or in my case as an educator. For some the imposter syndrome or guilt attached to this label will be strong. Only within a supportive safe environment might those feelings be explored, and the layers of identity be revealed to allow us to see the positive traits. From this might we be able to develop a paradigm of cultural understanding without the need to label in a derogative way.

It could be argued that education allows a community of learners to build on both the "public understanding" and their individual story to allow them to draw in knowledge in a way of "trying to make sense of the world" (Pring, 2015, p.23). So, the student can only learn and develop their own individual knowledge if they draw on the collective insight. If therefore the student identity is formed through a label of difference and defined from a position of inferiority, they feel excluded or inferior to their peers. If education is the interaction between the "public growth of understanding and a personal one" (Pring, 2015, p.3) a sort of continuum between public and personal background, then the teacher's expertise lies in drawing the two together with all learners being treated equal.

This philosophical approach of emancipation frames the methodological approach of participatory action research and the presentation of the data - a podcast and the collective approach to hearing the voice from within the institution. The narrative literature review considers previous work in this field and establishes the need to develop new insight from a different standpoint, to consider which literature has previously considered the voice of those affected by the label of dyslexia versus those that research this as an outsider.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This thesis considers the impact of lecturer identity upon the discourse around dyslexia in higher education, seeking to challenge the institutional perceptions and stereotypes of dyslexia through the experience of dyslexic educators. The aim is to drive a cultural shift to change the negative narrative surrounding dyslexia. Unconstructive attitudes to dyslexia within higher education can easily be experienced as disabling, even harmful. The literature review therefore considers the research question:

> How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

This will be considered through two subsidiary questions:

> How does the dyslexic label lead to a culture of disability and 'deficit' within universities?

> How and why do we measure the success of dyslexic students in universities?

I have undertaken a narrative review of the literature to consider how dyslexia is positioned within higher education and the effect this has on students with dyslexia in this setting. By using a narrative approach, I build a story which gives an overview of the ensuing discussion. The review includes some historical context and a broad overview which helps to establish the current knowledge in this area. Some of the current literature which considers dyslexia in higher education is focused on the support or scaffolding of students' needs. The need to diagnose and support of dyslexic students in higher education is often driven by the need to measure the success of student outcomes. Some argue (Barnes, 2007) this is due to what some see as the marketisation and commodification of higher education, for example, measuring graduate outcomes based on the type of graduate job secured. It can appear that the label of dyslexia is framed from the basis of a deficit - a disability that needs to be supported. Yet there is an increasing movement within those advocating for a change in the perceptions of dyslexia, to celebrate the difference and to look at the positives of the dyslexic way of thinking. Within universities there are many academics who identify as being dyslexic who have had successful careers and feel that the strengths and positives of dyslexia are neither acknowledged nor promoted within undergraduate courses. This research seeks to consider whether the voice of the dyslexic academic can reshape the perception of dyslexia within a higher education setting.

This thesis seeks to address the stereotyping of dyslexia within higher education and to reframe the perceptions of it within the university setting; the tension between how the individual sees their own dyslexia versus how society and educational institutions label and construct it.

This literature review therefore covers three main areas:

1. The evidence that dyslexia is constructed as a disability and considers how we position those who are disabled within society.
2. Whether the label of dyslexia can lead to a culture of 'deficit' within universities?
3. The role of teachers' (or lecturer) identity and how this could influence learning and teaching in the higher education setting (and therefore the success of dyslexic students).

Which literature has framed this work and why?

I have chosen to use a narrative literature review to establish historical context and build a foundational understanding of the issues considered. The review considers firstly, the construction of the label of disability, the apparent need to label and diagnose learning differences and different definitions of dyslexia from a social and medical perspective. The research pulls literature from different areas including critical disability theory. It considers literature that discusses reasonable adjustments and scaffolding tools versus the use of inclusive learning and teaching. This discussion clearly links to the use of reflexive thematic analysis as a research methodology to consider the narrative implied in the language used and how it links to the label of deficiency and the resultant themes. The review seeks to unpick the narrative around this in higher education and considers why there is a need to label or diagnose dyslexic students in universities.

The second theme considers whether the dyslexic label leads to a culture of positioning from a deficit position in an environment which according to some observers is increasingly marginalised (www.madebydyslexia.com). The literature reviewed critiques the use of Disability Student Allowance (DSA) and the use of measurements linked to TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) metrics and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

This final category of review considers aspects of teacher identity and lived experience influences. The literature discussed critically considers the value of the use of biography and life stories in critical disability studies and focuses on the tension between personal experience and subjectivity. It reflects on how we need to capture insight from the insider's view rather than an outside researcher. This area of literature suggests the need to develop a narrative to consider the tension between institutional perceptions and the lived experience of the teacher to bring insider insight into how dyslexia could be perceived differently.

2.1 Dyslexia can be constructed as a disability.

The first area of literature to be considered is that which frames a disability within society. It seeks to raise the issue that when we categorise dyslexia as a disability, we are assuming the learning experience will be interpreted within current societal views on disability. I will discuss the classification of dyslexia and indeed the increased need to both label and classify it within higher education.

Let us first consider the words disabled and disability and how the use and meaning of these words is used both within society and within the education setting. We can consider first how the word 'disability' is defined. The Cambridge English Dictionary states that a disability is - 'an illness, injury, or condition that makes it difficult for someone to do the things that other people do' (The Cambridge English Dictionary, 2021)

This definition or classification is expanded further by the UK government under the Equality Act of 2010, in which it includes both the nature and the longevity of the disability: "You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities" (www.gov.uk, accessed 2021).

Within the act itself there is a list of several conditions and impairments which are covered by the legislation. Dyslexia itself is listed as 'developmental impairment'. "A disability can arise from a wide range of impairments which can be developmental, such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia and dyspraxia" (www.gov.uk, accessed 2021). The UK Rose Report of 2009 which frames much of the discussion and basis for definition by the British Dyslexic Association defines dyslexia as:

> "Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut off points" (Rose, 2009)

Snowling and Hulme (2024) consider furthering this definition by considering each of the classifications further establishing that.

1. Dyslexia is a difficulty in learning to decode/encode print.

2. It is associated with phonological problems.

3. It may occur at different levels of ability.

4. Dyslexia is a dimensional disorder—where we set a cut-off for identification that is to some extent arbitrary.

Catts et al. (2024) suggest that difficulties in oral language, visual processing, processing speed, and procedural learning are risk factors for dyslexics. Snowling and Hulme (2024) believe this links to the challenges dyslexics face with phonological processing rather than being a direct factor of dyslexia.

The use of words and the language surrounding disability as a concept is explored by Bourdieu (1991, 1998), through a reconsideration of the symbolism of language and the power associated with it. Positioning disability from an ableist approach, Jammaers, Zanoni and Williams (2019) consider the use of Bourdieuan theory to consider the positioning of ablism and how the 'rules of the game' affect the organisational field or institutional culture. It is useful in the context of this work to consider how we are structuring the organisational language. How the community jointly 'shape those individuals' ability to accrue economic, social, cultural as well as symbolic capital, as well as up different positions in a particular social space' (Jammaers,, Zanoni and Williams, 2019, p.2) A Bourdieuan approach centred on social practice may allow us to develop a fuller understanding of the mechanisms through which valued forms of capital are unequally distributed within 'an arbitrary social order that privileges certain competences favouring able-bodied over disabled workers, and of disabled workers' own role within such mechanisms' (2019, p2). Therefore, both the NHS and the government definitions of dyslexia might be considered in context of an ableist perspective and reconsider the symbolism of linguistics and language use.

Critical disability theorists for example (Barnes, 1991, 2007; Hosking, 2008, Jones, 1996) argue that these kinds of definitions place 'the blame' or impairment with the individual. From a perception of othering (Devin, 2012) the idea of objectifying a person or a group which ignores the 'complexity and subjectivity of the individual'. We might consider that these definitions are linked to what might be called the 'medicalisation' of disability with the severity and longevity of the impairment being linked to its classification in legislation. This links to the idea of the superiority of one human being over another, the positioning of dyslexia as being a disability is different from those dyslexics seen as differently abled or just different from what we might consider as normal.

In contrast to this idea of dyslexia as being a disablement, the charity *Made by Dyslexia* positions it as a positive attribute. They advocate that dyslexic thinking can be a strength – something to be celebrated. Indeed, the charity has lobbied and been successful in getting LinkedIn (the professional networking platform) to list *dyslexic thinking* as a skill that can be listed under an individual's profile. The charity believe dyslexic thinking is a powerful cognitive approach where the 'dots can be joined' up to allow for bigger picture thinking and for problem solving (www.madebydysleixa.com)

The literature reviewed suggests a tension between the idea of dyslexia being a weakness or a medical condition versus the idea of it being a socially constructed deficit which I would argue is not a weakness but a difference, that it is the environment within university that is disabling.

If we consider that the diagnosis of dyslexia within higher education is increasing, a doubling of figures between 2000 and 2004 (Higher Education Statistics Agency – HESA, 2006) and an ongoing increase of students diagnosed as having a 'hidden disability' (HESA, 2022) then we must also assume more students are requiring 'support' within universities. Following the idea of dyslexia being a disability we could work on the assumption (the definition used by DSA) that dyslexia is a literacy weakness and the 'support' or scaffolding within the education setting is based on the need to support the student in their reading and writing. This uses the premise that success and achievement is based on the level of the academic achievement and that those with a literacy 'problem' must have a difficulty in achieving this. Yet the definition of dyslexia is contested and for many students it is only when entering a university environment that this 'barrier' to learning is identified. Solvang (2007) argues that there are numerous social actors linked to the construction of the label of dyslexia; namely parents, teachers, educational authorities, and organisations representing dyslexics. If one considers labelling from a position of criticality, that when we place dyslexia into a medicalised position that needs 'curing' we are suggesting we look at changing the way the person thinks, behaves, and acts. We then may be seen as being guilty of oppressing people with disabilities (Nalavany et al, 2015, Barnes and Merecer, 2016). In many universities dyslexia is labelled as a disability yet the wider world definition of dyslexia is contested. Definitions of dyslexia differ from different perspectives. Is it a cognitive weakness one where the student struggles with learning to read and write, to process the written word in an efficient way? Or is it defined as a differentiation between intelligence and phonological processing? Snowling and Hulme (2024) clearly position dyslexia as a phonological issue with other issues being linked to comorbidity with other neurodiversities, whereas Catts et al (2024) link these other issues more closely to dyslexia.

A review of literature which focuses on dyslexia in education (Evans, 2013; Riddell et al, 2006) shows that for many researchers' dyslexia is shown as a deficit within higher education and is positioned as a disability, something that many argue needs reasonable adjustments. support, scaffolding, and nurturing. For others (Leveroy, 2013) it is a difference, not a difficulty and to be truly inclusive we can offer assessment that works to the strengths of learning in a holistic way rather than just scaffolding the weaknesses of the written word. If we are to be inclusive in our teaching one could argue that we need to move the value of higher education away from the emphasis on reading and writing to measuring success in different ways and develop assessments to be inclusive for all students. How transferrable are many of the traditional learning and teaching assessments to graduate life. Are we 'othering' (Collinson, 2020) or fixing (Betts, 2020) students rather than empowering them? I would argue that a reliance on the scaffolding techniques does not empower students to develop their own strategies and to be confident in self-advocacy.

How then do we define dyslexia and how is the diagnosis made? Based on dyslexia being a hidden 'disability' how might we classify its effects varying in the impact they have on 'normal day to day activities'? One definition given by the advocacy group the British Dyslexia Association (www.bddyslexia.org.uk) positions dyslexia as a learning difficulty.

> "Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling**.** Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities." (www.bdadyslexia.org.uk accessed 2021)

Whereas the more medicalised definition seen on the NHS website clearly says that rather than dyslexia being seen across a variety of intellectual abilities it does not 'affect' intelligence. Therefore, positioning dyslexia as being a 'problem' rather than a 'difficulty'.

> "Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling. It's a specific learning difficulty, which means it causes problems with certain abilities used for learning, such as reading and writing. Unlike a learning disability, intelligence isn't affected". (www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia accessed 2021)

The NHS definition clearly links dyslexia to distinct difficulties with reading, writing and spelling rather than considering the wider challenges with processing and memory.

For many years, research on dyslexia proceeded on the basis that it was a specific learning difficulty. The term 'specific' here referred to the fact that dyslexic children have difficulties in the domain of reading (and spelling) that are 'out of line' with expectations, given their age. Educational and clinical psychology practice was to look for a discrepancy between expected and actual reading attainment to 'diagnose' dyslexia. However, the failure to find qualitative differences in reading (and the phonological skills that underpin it) between dyslexic children and children with more general learning problems led this kind of 'discrepancy' definition losing credibility. To understand the implications of moving away from a discrepancy-based definition, we begin by reviewing how such a definition was operationalised and the evidence against its validity. (Snowling, Hulme and Nation, 2020).

This area of literature therefore considers that much of the research is based on the idea of scaffolding dyslexia as a weakness within higher education. Much of this literature does not consider the voice of the dyslexic. Having critically reviewed the literature and following a google scholar search there is no research that considers nor consults the voice of dyslexics in higher education nor any literature which considers the disabling nature of the culture within universities.

To take a step back then and consider how and why a theory such as Critical Disability Theory might be useful in terms of an epistemology. Embedded firmly in the field of criticality with its roots from the Frankfurt School of theories, we can look at Foucault's (Ali, 2002) consideration of Critical Disability

Theory. Foucault positioned Critical Disability Theory as an expansion of critical theory, as a way of reconsidering how we view the individual from a position of self-reflection and criticality. Indeed, there is growing philosophy within the area that these learning differences might be a gift rather than an impairment. This is seen through the work of charities such as the *British Dyslexia Association* and *Made by Dyslexia* who seek to empower dyslexics and to raise awareness of positives around thinking differently. This idea then places the perception of disabled students in a very different light arguing that it is the surrounding society, or in this case the classroom or lecture hall, that is disabling rather than the individual's 'impairment' (Hosking, 2008, Liasidou, 2014, Goodley, 2013, 2007, 2000). One could argue than the whole higher education setting needs to reconsider the diagnosing, labelling and measurement of the disabled student and the potential infringement of their identity (Cowen, 2018, Grobecker, 1996). If we consider that dyslexic students might need 20% extra time to complete a timed assessment rather than giving all students, the extra time that might be required and some may finish earlier. This would therefore be more inclusive and mean that 'disabled' students would not need to have 'special exam arrangements', be in a different exam hall or been treated any differently. Therefore, not isolating them, stereotyping them or excluded them. (Hosking, 2008. Godley and Moore, 2000).

Grue (2009) considers that it is the use of medical definitions of disability which lead to the legitimising, institutionalising and segregation of people with a disability. He argues that it is the medical model of disability which leads to the disabling aspects of socioeconomic arrangements. If we take a step back and consider what we mean by disability, we can split the definition between two trains of thought firstly from a socio-political perspective versus a perspective that is based on a medical definition. Grue (2009) argues that if we follow a medical discourse, we cannot help but medically define impairments and use this definition as a justification to form policy documents. This links clearly to the policy behind the use of DSA and the need to have a diagnosis and assessment for disability before support is offered. Grue argues that it is the definition of disability as "an internal impairment" (2009, p.308) that directly links to the treatment of disability. He suggests that the use of social justice discourse can be a model to improve and promote social change, that it is the negotiation between social and medical models and the discussion around terminology that could lead to a better understanding and a 'demystification of disability policy'. As already discussed how do we 'label' or define students with different needs? On the one hand Grue argues that referring to *people with disabilities* versus *disabled people* shows how the use of language can alter perceptions and mindset. The same is true with the phrase 'special needs children' (which makes the special needs the only aspect of the children worth mentioning) as opposed to the similar phrase 'children with special needs" …the former has been used to describe children since the 1980s despite many arguing for the latter. While Riddell et al (2005) consider the support for 'hidden disabilities' versus physical disabilities and the research reveals what Riddell sees as 'easy fixes' and 'quick wins' within universities to 'be seen' to be supporting students in receipt of DSA. The narrative nature of the research which is based on interviews shows insight from individual case studies. The

labelling and categorising of all students as being disabled hides the more obvious needs for specialist adaptations for, say visually or physically impaired students.

When critically reviewing the work of Snowling, Hulmes and Nation (2020) we see a positionality on which dyslexia is seen as a specific problem with reading and spelling that is somehow unexpected and therefore requiring a diagnosis and an explanation, as well as specialist intervention'. They argue at the same time, that the history of dyslexia captures a sense of complexity that there might be 'several "species" of dyslexia' and it reflects a 'family of disabilities. They claim that these tensions play out in perennial discussions surrounding the definition of dyslexia, whether there are different 'subtypes' and questions about whether it even exists. Snowling, Hulmes and Nation (2020) also discuss the other difficulties associated with dyslexia including problems learning new spoken words, poor short-term memory and problems with word retrieval and picture naming. All these challenges are faced by the participants, who are frustrated that this is not understood nor recognised in the workplace. They argue that perception of dyslexia being linked only to literacy issues means that many other issues are misunderstood or not acknowledged.

This idea is expanded further by Hollingworth (2011) who argues that 'cultural diversity and social inequality are often ignored or downplayed in disability services' (p.236). Hollingworth's work focuses on the indigenous people of Australia, and he argues that the northern imperial overview ignores the cultural differences. In Australia the dehumanising attitudes and segregation of indigenous people meant that as late as the 1950s aboriginal students were not educated beyond primary level. Nguyan (2018) explores this same idea through a decolonised lens of critical disability arguing that situating critical disability theory in the context of global development we can reconsider what we mean by being disabled and engage with indigenous ways of knowing about disability experiences. By repositioning disability, one might argue we are thinking and acting globally. Within disability studies the concept of 'colonisation' has been used to represent the medical and professional power exerted over disabled people (Hirsch, 2000). Devlieger reports that 'disability as a category of discourse is foreign to sub-Saharan African thought' (Devliegere 2005, p 693). He suggests we cannot meaningfully separate the racialised subaltern from the disabled subaltern in the process of colonisation. Parekh discusses fluidity of subaltern identities in the Indian context – transgender, intersex, low-caste and disabled people all interact (Parekh, 2007) and argues that there are both solidarities and competitions between marginalised groups. This is a concept that was discussed in the workshops with the underlying feeling that we felt solidarity and empathy for all 'othered' students.

Critical Disability Theory comes from an area of theory which seeks to consider inclusivity, to normalise disability, to normalise difference and to even remove the term disability. Hoskings (2008 p.7):

"Disability being a social construct this is not inevitable but because of an environmental impairment. An interrelation between impairment, individual response to the impairment and social environments. The study of social disadvantage of disabled people, physical, institutional, and attitudinal. Matching the needs of people who do not match social expectation and normalcy".

These themes are considered in many other areas of the literature reviewed. Fuller et al (2009), Kendall (2016), Rickinson (2010), O'Connor & Robinson (1999), Beauchamp-Pryor (2011, 2012), Riddell & Weedon (2005) Wray and Houghton (2018), Collinson (2020) Hamilton and Petty (2023) all consider the impact of society, attribute, and environment on support for disabled and neurodiverse students.

2.2 The labelling of dyslexia as a deficit in universities and how we support it.

Research from Tinklin, Riddell and Wilson (2004) considered the policy and provision for disabled students within higher education to see whether it really is supporting disabled students. Their research includes several layers of methodology; reviewing policy documents and legislation, analysis of official statistics, interviews with 'informants' (those working with disabled students within higher education settings), a survey within eight different institutions and interviews with 50 disabled students. They question whether we widen participation through the social definition of disability or whether students are only disabled by the barriers in their environment. They conclude that for a higher education institution to widen participation there needs effectively and genuinely to be a mainstreaming and a celebration of difference. They argue that for many disabled students individual support means reasonable adjustments and disability support which is not part of the everyday practice. Therefore, disability is seen as a social definition rather than removing barriers leading to inclusivity. They argue that DSA is used as an individual adjustment as a way of supporting 'disability' rather than celebrating difference. The idea of individualised support rather than institutional change is discussed by Wray and Houghton (2018) whose research shows that disability support has been implemented by praxis based on policy construction and influence, managed by a central support team and (Wray and Houghton, 2018, p.13) that 'the DSA system is a barrier to inclusivity'.

Another theme that much of the literature considers (Kendall, 2016; Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson, 2005; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012; Collinson, 2018) is the difference felt by some students with a disability. They argue that with a mainstreaming of inclusivity rather than a scaffolding of difference dyslexic students could for example be given a choice of assessments. In this scenario this would mitigate against the need for technology or 1to1 support, therefore meaning disabled students do not need to be treated differently. Tinklin and Hall's (2006) work develops some of the themes further building on the work of Brown et al (1997) which is founded on beliefs that the concept of disability arises from the basis of disability being from a lack of understanding and awareness, with support varying by institution and

within programme teams themselves. Tinklin and Hall's research was based on interviews with institutions, interviews with students and included the researchers observing or shadowing the students to see the day-to-day impact of their 'disability'. A core theme from their work is the 'definition' of disability. Is a disability an obstacle to stop people or is it an impairment, or simply one of the many variations between humans? This leads us to question what should then change. Should we offer adaptions or allowances (DSA) for the 'disabled' student or remove the obstacles to education?? Their research showed that disabled students faced barriers; the environments in which they learn were disabling. Within the 22 institutions they surveyed levels of awareness were variable. Staff who were well informed came from a basis of personal experience. There was a general lack of understanding and awareness, rather than a celebration of difference. Tinklin and Hall argue that higher education institutions used functional solutions rather than environmental change. There was also a lack of understanding amongst non-disabled students, and many disabled students themselves did not want to declare or categorise their 'difference'. Tinklin and Hall (2006, p.193) conclude that "the needs of disabled students are largely seen as 'additional' to the 'norm'. That student support and DSA were being used as a pragmatic approach to ensure disabled students can study at higher education institutions enabling them to pass their degrees. This builds upon the suggestion that with higher education being commoditised disability support is about helping students achieve good grades and we measure their achievement based on degree outcome, in effect these benefits are not shaping their future but are, in my opinion, part of the shaping of the future of the university. Tinklin and Hall conclude that obstacles and barriers should be removed so we 'celebrate and embrace difference'.

Another area of literature which seeks to look at support for disabled students from the perspective of supporting or scaffolding their difficulty rather than inclusivity is the detailed insight from Clark (2007). Clark sites his work from a different perspective, from the angle of the repercussions of not supporting students, positioning support in a reactive rather than proactive position. He stresses that the changes in supporting a diverse student body are due to the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 and the Special Educational and Disability Act of 2001 which means universities are required to adjust or face possible charges of discrimination. He goes as far as to categorise students and give basic insight into the support they can be offered in a 'scaffolder learner' model rather than considering the removal of any barriers to learning or environment. He gives a basic overview of the types of students and appears to give no counterbalance as to why these measures or needs adjustments are required. His work then is based on a standpoint that disabled students should be treated differently, in fact must be treated differently to ensure they are not discriminated against. Therefore, by supporting students individually and measuring student outcomes we are in fact ensuring we 'play' the system rather than truly support students for life after university.

The literature reviewed critically considers the labelling of dyslexic students and the environment in which they are placed within higher education. The tension between the legal requirement to support

and scaffold versus the idea of it being the environment which is disabling and the need to reconsider what we see as normal in the context of a wider global perspective.

If we consider the current economic climate and funding of higher education and the impact and influence of this on higher education and the students. In the current socio-economic and political climate within the United Kingdom (2023) one can see that higher education might be seen as an 'industry'. This then is linked to how students, staff, and the institutions themselves are measured and what is successful. In the context of commodification of higher education, the literature reviewed considers work undertaken by Brookfield (2001, 2002), Lawrence and Shaman (2002) and Bunce, Baird and Jones (2017) which seeks to understand how we value and measure education. Brookfield's (2001) work reviews Habermas and seeks to position critical theory as a response to Marx. Brookfield (2001) clearly positions and frames commodification as.

> 'The process by which a human quality or relationship becomes regarded as a product, good, or commodity to be bought and sold on the open markets' (Broomfield. 2001, p,p.9)

Basing his argument on education being used as a commodity, Brookfield concludes there is an alienation of humanity due to the capitalism of education. Education is therefore replicated as the value to learning being linked to employability, with the measures for higher education success being linked to graduate outcomes. One finding Brookfield discusses is the suggestion that adult education is not transformative due to the way a learner's view of the world is altered or how their criticality is developed but on how their education and skills can be 'exchanged for a higher salary and status' (2001, p.11). Yet for some students they will develop other outcomes and interests which will be life changing which are not factored into the market-based model. Habermas's critical theory is also used by Lawrence and Shraman (2002) as an evaluation tool to measure quality management within universities. Lawrence and Shraman's (2002) work conclude with many of the same themes as Brookfield, that commodification of higher education has changed the shape and purpose of universities. Lawrence and Shraman (2002) argue that Universities have become commodified, with a degradation of university's function within society. They link commodification to a new culture of management which has led to a reordering within universities. Picking up on Brookfield's work (2001, 2002) they conclude that university is now a payoff for an investment, hence courses are becoming more vocational, and the theory of societal development is linked to personal gain rather than critical development.

In their work Bunce, Baird and Jones (2016) explore further the idea of universities being a service or product that can be brought with the 'student as a consumer'. Bunce, Baird and Jones argue that when The Dering Report (2017) identified students as customers, universities became subject to commercial pressures (this links to the theme of the new managerialism mentioned by Lawrence and Shraman). This new area of commercialism is alien to universities seeming to promote a culture of students wanting to 'get a degree' rather than 'be learners'. Building on Brookfield (2001, 2002) and Lawrence

and Shraman (2002) Bunce, Baird and Jones (2016) reiterate that students are more career focused, choosing subjects with clear career paths and higher salaries and explore the learner identity and the impact of commodification on learning and the consumerism values placed upon it.

As this research seeks to consider the stereotyping of dyslexia within higher education and how it is perceived it is perhaps useful to consider the current higher education environment in England. As previously established the 'reclassification' of dyslexia as a disability means that those with a diagnosis are now protected under legislation and in turn 'entitled' to support via DSA. The business of disability (Barnes, 2003) is particularly strong within the area of disability allowance and through my own experience I can testify how complicated the process of gaining support for disabled students is and how many different stakeholders are involved. Therefore, the labelling of dyslexia as a deficit sees it used a measure and a metric for an institution's success.

Once DSA changed in 2015 to a non-means tested benefit accessibility should have been greater, but recent changes in 2018 and the move to it being managed by Student Finance England mean it is in fact framed differently. There proved to be very little literature written that specifically looked at the changes to DSA, but building on the premise that students as consumers are somehow entitled to the funding, a review was undertaken of the 'grey literature' including a government sponsored report which measured the effectiveness of DSA. The narrative around the report is based on the need to evaluate the recent changes to DSA which were positioned as 'the funding model being changed to ensure it represents good value for money'. (Johnson et al, 2019, p.8). The changes claimed to also set along the lines of promoting inclusivity. Now higher education institutions have the responsibility to develop and support 'anticipatory adjustments made at course level, to enable more inclusive learning' (Johnson et al. 2019, p.8) with individual adjustments being made in addition to 1to1 support. This would appear to build upon Tinklin and Hall's 2006 research which reiterates the need for barriers of learning being removed rather than provide individual support. The methodology for the IFF report (Johnson et al, 2019) was wide and consisted of three stages. Firstly, case study visits to eight higher education institutions looking at student support, views on the processes and changes to DSA as well as the move towards inclusive learning. Secondly, an online survey of 1773 disabled students, including both claimants and non-claimants of DSA. Finally in-depth qualitative interviews with 50 students who completed the survey. The report claims a large percentage of students who would be entitled to DSA do not take up the support due to 'costs, delay and lack of clarity' in the system. That the student support department within higher education institutions shape and influence the decision, and there was a large degree of inconsistency between institutions. Student support departments felt that there was now a disconnect with the application as they were now being processed by Student Finance England and the students themselves were now having to deal with several different organisations, which proved more complicated for those who might struggle with organisational skills. The IFF Report builds upon the insight from Beauchamp-Pryor (2012) whose research shows that the DSA review through the Quality

Assurance Group was based on insight from a number of stakeholders with a 'vested interest' so the system was reorganised to favour themselves rather than the students (p.288). The DSA review included consultation with a number of organisations who had a commercial interest in the changes including LEAs and assessment centres, disability officers, Department of Education Officials and a Skills Rep and there was only one NUS rep on the group with no 'end users' consulted. Beauchamp-Pryor conducted a review of the policy documents, interviewed staff and students building case studies and concluded that the student voice had been absent during the consultation. As such the resulting legislative changes to DSA were based on 'disability support not an equality opportunity' underpinned by an ideology of welfare, care, concern and compensation with students as 'passive recipients' (p.291). As such disability is a 'welfare issue within higher education' with stakeholders with a commercial vested interest shaping the DSA support system (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2011, p.265) the legislation follows a means that support has moved from a 'needs based to a right based focus' that disability support for students was reviewed from the basis of an equality policy to be streamlined rather than genuine support for student success

The idea of consulting and including those that are affected was partly addressed by Wray and Houghton's (2016) work which also used semi-structured interviews. The work was based on how disability policy is being implemented in a particular learning environment. Linked to the work of Beauchamp-Pryor (2011) Wray and Houghton (2016) state that the National Union of Students (NUS) believe that not enough student stakeholders were consulted during the changes to DSA and the sole purpose of the review was to remove costs and remove the 'obligation to disabled students' away from government and to place it at an institutional level. Therefore, the success of disabled students is 'measured' at an institutional level for those universities that are audited by the TEF. This, one could argue, is the reason for a national shift for accountability for success or perceived success to the universities themselves. Wray and Houghton cite Bal (2003) who said that support for disabled students means an 'individual response not a removal of the barriers to learning' but now the 'policy discourse is being linked to performativity'. Wray and Houghton argue that students can only truly be supported if there is a day-to-day practice of learning and teaching driven by underlying values of inclusivity. One could argue that this would appear to be far removed from the more centralised approach to DSA and generic learning support plans found in the institutions researched by Kendall (2016). Kendall (2016) argues that learning support plans (LSPs) are often generic and not individualised, teaching staff are untrained and lack awareness or are unwilling or lack confidence in being able to make individualised adjustments. All those points are evident within my own institution and were the reason for this thesis. Without a clear definition of 'reasonable adjustments' (Kendall, 2016, p.2) Learning Support Plans (LSPs) may become a barrier to participation with inconsistency between lectures and alternative arrangements meaning students are in effect segregated in exams or 'ghettoising disabled students' (Fuller et al, 2009). This very point was raised and discussed within the workshops both in the context

of our own learning support plans and those of our students. Therefore, some disabled students may in effect be treated totally differently from their 'normal' peers. Institutions rely on the safety net of DSA and the generic support offered through the funding for equipment and 1to1 support rather than 'offering alternative assessments' (Kendall, 2016, p.9). This is reinforced by Fuller et al (2009), who stress that their study shows disabled students are rarely consulted nor seen as participants in the negotiation of learning support plans nor in the adjustments of learning. Rickinson (2010), and Lewthwaite (2014) state that the increase in the uptake of DSA and support for hidden disabilities means that allocation of disability support is reliant upon a medical or psychological assessment, another stakeholder who have a fiscal interest in the system. Therefore, DSA support is based on an individual deficiete model rather than a genuine supportive learning environment. Throughout this whole process students incur both financial and emotional costs due to the need for diagnosis and labelling.

From the literature I have concluded that there is little insight into the negative impact on students who are recipients of DSA and the business of education and how other benefits of higher education are being considered or reviewed. We know that some students gain more from university than just a degree, for example, new hobbies, skills, interests, and confidences but these 'outcomes' are not measured and are to some extent anecdotal. Through the NSS (National Student Satisfaction) survey we measure student satisfaction via structured and profiled questions and indeed we measure how satisfied students are with the learning, teaching and assessment and the standard of teaching. The is no measurement for student happiness!

2.3 The role of teacher identity and its influence on learning, teaching, and assessment.

This thesis seeks to consider whether we can challenge the stereotyping and labelling of dyslexia within an educational setting by using the insider voice. To consider how the 'privileged' voice of the teacher or educator could be used to challenge and influence the nature of learning and teaching. In this context literature and theories were reviewed which considered the role of the educator identity and the influence of this within the classroom. Positioning this alongside the critical approach considered by Habermas. Habermas's third area of human interest is an emancipatory approach based on "an interest in emancipation from domination and in autonomy in the sense of being in control of the conditions under which one lives" Thomassen (2010, p.27). Habermas's classification of emancipatory self-reflection is based, Bernstein argued (2007, p.12) "on giving a rational reconstruction of the universal conditions for reason." This work clearly links to values held. For both me and the participants this links to our personal values as educators and how our own dyslexia links to those values. Linking Habermas's knowledge of interest and the nature of research, Cohen et al (2018, p.53) shows that for a researcher coming from an area of emancipatory interest the research methodology will be linked to an ideology critique. A researcher with an emancipatory interest will be interested in the "political agenda,

integration of power, transformative potential, people gaining control over these own lives with social justice and freedom from oppression" (Cohen et al, 2018, p.53). Habermas argues "citizens become depowered by the very welfare state provision that are supposed to empower them" (Thomassen, 2010, p.18), an idea echoed in Margaret Thatcher's politics in the 1980s. This would appear to be a good fit with the consideration of how the current government use DSA as a measurement for efficiency rather than as an empowerment for recipients. An emancipated society will be critical of a contemporary society and those wanting to be part of an emancipated society would work through the public sphere to convince others.

If therefore we consider the basis of the teacher's knowledge from an emancipatory framework one could assume that self-reflection would be critical. For a teacher to be more inclusive in their teaching we should therefore consider the basis of their own knowledge to try and frame the representation of 'disabled students' in a context of their teaching environment. If we are therefore considering that inclusive teaching would be based on an emancipatory interest, one can assume that we need to examine the language used and the connotation around the language used.

If one considers Habermas's definition of knowledge as being developed from a post modernism perspective, it could be assumed that a teacher with an emancipatory knowledge would be critical and reflective in the environment in which they are teaching. This then positions the teacher in an environment of self-knowledge and self-reflection, with knowledge being gained through self-emancipation. Habermas considers that for teachers to develop their own knowledge we need to consider that knowledge can be gained through reflection to a transformed consciousness. A key element of the constitutive interests in this area would be the characteristic to challenge and research changes to society to promote democracy. Therefore, one could argue that this would raise concern around not just the nature of higher education being commoditized and marketized but also around the representation and potential suppression of students within the environment who in fact should be developing new ideas and growing as individuals. If we assume that higher education should be transformative, and we take a pragmatic approach we can assume that there is a need to be critical and liberal. Using a theory of discourse such as an analysis of the language used, we could perhaps change the positioning of learning and teaching tools. Having now established the basis for emancipatory interest as being possibly relevant for inclusivity, we need to consider the use of Habermas's insight into for critical theory and why this would be relevant to developing an inclusive teaching practice. How can we use a theory like critical disability to consider say the identity of the teacher and the lens through which they teach? In his work Terry (1997) links Habermas with education and considers the potential for critical society theory to help us conceptualise the issues in education. He concludes that the definition of education shifts and that as a teacher "our interest in freedom (the emancipatory interest) corresponds to the critical element of our knowledge base" (1997, p.271). This work is interesting if we consider the influence of artificial intelligence and the difference this has made in the

last decade. With the potential impact of AI for all students and the use of some tools within AI aiding and supporting students with the actual process of reading and writing academically.

Terry (1997) considers that in post-modern society we are obsessed with power, and we need to look at collective social change rather than individual enlightenment. He writes that learning is equal to a new way of understanding reality through interaction with others so that the student constructs their identities. Terry considers (1997, p.269) that it is through the struggle with the social systems and how it affects students that add to the development of the individual. He believes that teachers need to use critical modes of thought to reconsider questions of policy and how they might influence both our teaching and the learning environment. Terry argues that there is value in considering education through a critical lens and he concludes that discourse based on a critical theory looking at the use of language and speech within the classroom setting could change and shift our definition of education. He further questions the right of absolute knowledge versus the political will within education. Terry clearly lays out the value of using Habermas as part of the wider review of education and makes the argument for considering the scope of society's role within education. He states that whilst learning takes place as part of a linear sense within the formal education setting there is "another type of learning, by which individuals (and indeed groups and societies as a whole) formulate new ways of understanding reality and interacting with others and perceiving their own identities" (Terry, 1997, p.278). It is Terry's belief (citing Peukert, 1992) that Habermas's "reconstruction of the first generation of critical theory offers an insight into possible reformation of education itself" (1997, p.278) through self-reflective communication.

The idea of teacher experiences and the impact on classroom behaviours through both critical incidents in teaching (Tripp, 2011) and how teacher stories influence the classroom and curriculum (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, Andersen, 1997) demonstrates the importance of being a critically reflective teacher (Brookfield, 2017). For the research active teacher this link between insight into classroom experience and the sharing of this knowledge through further research is, I would argue, how we drive change.

The intersectionality between the role of teacher and researcher.

For many of those researching inclusive teaching within the higher education setting (Grobecker, 1996; Liasidou, 2008; Barnes, 2006; Galvin, 2003; Booth and Ainscow, 2020) it is the identity or role of the researcher and their own position or knowledge of disability which forms the platform or bias from which the discourse is considered. Liasidou (2008) argues that no teacher can leave their identity and bias outside of the classroom. Riddell and Weedon (2006) consider for example that it is only those who have dyslexia themselves or have a close family member with it that really understand or perhaps more importantly wants to understand how to support dyslexic students.

For Barnes (2006) the role of the researcher and their perspective are crucial in how we might use reflexive content analysis as a methodology. Barnes reviews Finkelstein's (1996) approach to what he considers to be the 'outsider-in perspective' versus the 'insider-in perspective' to inclusivity. Barnes quotes Finkelstein's idea that "direct experience of a phenomenon is essential not only to facilitate an understanding of such an experience but also for developing an appropriate political response" (2006, p.137). However, Barnes seeks to question Finkelstein's philosophy and places caution on valuing just the opinion of and listening only to the voice of those affected by disability. He questions whether for true discourse we need collective debate and discussion from all areas – teacher and learner, 'disabled' and abled bodied students. It was this idea and discussion that inspired me to consider how I might develop my work collectively with the voices of many rather than mine alone. He argues that the insider insight can be "personal experience over privilege and over-sentimentalised" narrative (2006, p.138), linking to my own reflection on my identity in the classroom. I am conscious of potential problems with collective work, how we establish equality of voice and how we manage differences in definitions and ways of thinking. Perhaps then the role of discourse is more fundamental if it is of course crucial to really understanding how we can be truly inclusive but still tread a fine line between individual and collective insights. Whilst Riddell and Weedon's (2006) research is insightful it is in contrast with Barnes's (2006) theory. Barnes argues that disability studies is a social model of disability; if we consider in the main that those that drive the movement are themselves disabled and therefore, he argues, have an inherent bias. The idea that those with an insider identity see the disabling barriers of society versus those with an outside perspective who see a coherent political analysis in the context of say student support this brings a very different bearing on whether we overlay or embed inclusivity. One basis for Barnes' argument is that by relying on the insider voice we are hearing a personal individual experience which could therefore be different to a collective experience. Hence Barnes argues not a true insight into the experience of disabled students as it will be an individual or personal story. Based on Barnes insights about critical disability discourse being too individualised, one might argue that Riddell and Weedon (2006) are inclusive, based on individual narrative and focused on individual case studies without any collective insight. One could argue therefore we need to find a balance within the discourse of listening and including the individual and to consider the narrative of a collective voice.

In contrast to this, Riddell et al (2004) believe that if we are to be more inclusive or to really widen participation, we must consider the wider social definition of disability. The insight from their study is that higher education can only be truly inclusive if we celebrate the difference. This links back to the advocacy done by charities such as Made in Dyslexia as mentioned earlier. Their work then goes full circle in challenging the use of DSA as a tool to give individual adjustment rather than removing barriers to learning. Terry (1997) clearly believes that using Habermas's emancipatory insight and a

methodology such as reflexive content analysis would be crucial in changing perceptions and practices in the classroom.

If as teachers, we position ourselves as critical theorists using a model such as Critical Disability Theory, we first need to consider the foundation of our knowledge base as a way of defining our own bias whether conscious or unconscious. Could the use of reflexive content analysis within a critical framework be useful for teachers to be able to reflect, review and reconsider their teaching in a more inclusive way?? Could the removal of the narrative from disclosure and diagnosis help us make a move towards genuine inclusivity? This research seeks to consider how reframing dyslexia and repositioning it outside of the current perceptions of being a deficit we might draw different conclusions and a different way forward. I should acknowledge that many teachers and educators will not want to share any personal information and identity with their students. For these educators the need to reflect and consider unconscious bias will still be an important part of their role and responsibility.

Chapter 3: The methodological approach

This thesis is critical in its nature as it seeks to challenge established stereotypes – both our own stereotypes and that within our working environment, to drive a change within higher education by reconsidering the lens through which we view dyslexia. It is based on an interpretivism research philosophy, that to understand a culture we need to understand people's perceptions, thinking and ideas. As an interpretivist I have adopted a relativist approach to ontology, which considers that what each of us perceive as real results from our perceptions of experience. Truth is therefore relative to how different people experience events. That the meaning and understanding of the society in which we live or how we experience it is relative to our personal history. The core epistemological framework for this work is social constructivism framed by the idea that my own knowledge and that of my fellow academics who call themselves dyslexics has been constructed through our social relationships and interactions throughout our educational journeys. Both as students and now as educators.

As already established in this narrative literature review, that I am seeking to deconstruct the narrative around dyslexia and to reconsider it through the eyes of those who are dyslexic but in a privilege teaching position.

> How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

This will be considered through the subsidiary questions:

> How does the dyslexic label lead to a culture of disability and 'deficit' within universities?

> How and why do we measure the success of dyslexic students in universities?

This qualitative study adopted an inductive approach whereby I sought to derive theory from the data which was generated from the research methods. The methods used to generate the data were recorded discussion groups featuring dyslexic lecturers at a British university. The participants are all academics working within Canterbury Christ Church University who have a diagnosis of, or self-identify as being dyslexic.

During recorded sessions, the research participants responded to a set of open-ended, semi-structured questions or word prompts and data was generated through a continually reflexive process of discussion. The sessions were recorded, and an artefact created in the form of a podcast. In line with the reflexive approach, the choice of medium for the artefact changed from a video format to a podcast, when it

became apparent that some participants were uncomfortable with being filmed. There was a degree of autobiographical inscription (LeMenager and Hebdige, 2013) in the whole thesis due to my own dyslexic status and those of my children.

The methodology is one of participatory action research with a personal reflexivity thematic approach to the data analysis, using the voice of the participants to frame and develop the research itself. There is a phenomenological approach in considering the lived experience of the participants. Using participatory action research promotes collaboration and inclusion and to embrace 'emancipatory' research (Aldridge, 2017). Using this interpretative methodological approach allows the participants to be involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data rather than just participating in the data collection. In addition, personal reflexivity embraces the subjective nature of the work and embraces my own personal reflection. 'Personal reflexivity – how the researcher's value shapes their research and the knowledge produces'. (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.13)

The methodological approach of participatory action research seeks to ensure that the voice of the unheard is included and drives change through action by the participants themselves. The initial method stage is to consider how higher education institutions position dyslexia and what the perception of it is within their organisational culture. This idea is influenced by Schein's (2010) work on organisational culture and the idea of using a cultural paradigm to really understand the true behaviours within an organisation using a thematic approach. This is based on the concept that to really understand the culture of an organisation one needs to consider the language, hidden artefacts, and layers of culture. Schein's theory considers that there may be subcultures within an organisation and that by building a cultural paradigm we can see these sub elements. For example, the cultural perceptions of dyslexia may differ between different job roles or occupations within a university. Those working in student support services may have a different perception than those for example who work in learning and teaching or research roles. Once the words and themes were established these framed the prompts and discussions for the collective memory-based discussion workshops. These workshops were recorded so they could be shared not just for research purposes but for future education purposes. The recording allowed the respondents themselves to listen back to what was discussed and to all agree collective that they are comfortable for their words to be heard by a wider audience.

3.1 Method 1 – gathering and reviewing the words used to describe and position dyslexia within the institution.

The first method used was based on content analysis but through a reflexive approach. I reviewed and considered the words used by Canterbury Christ Church University to describe dyslexia within their student facing web pages. I have included below screen grabs of the web pages seen throughout Canterbury Christ Church which reference and discuss dyslexia.

What I did

I downloaded pages from Canterbury Christ Church's student and staff facing websites which referenced the word dyslexia. These web pages are freely available and openly accessible. In addition, I reviewed all staff handbooks, student policy documents and collateral produced by the student wellbeing team which mentioned dyslexia were collected and reviewed.

A critical analysis was conducted of these pages. I worked from a hard copy print out of each of these pages and handbooks. A hard copy allowed for an easier colour coding by a highlighter pen. This method was used as reading on screen is more difficult for me and the tactile nature of printed text and the act of physically colour coding words allowed me to cut out and reorder sections to see where words were duplicated.

The words I highlighted were then used as the discussion group prompts. These were developed based on the repetition of certain words and the emphasis placed within the text towards the words used. In addition to the words used, the different levels of the navigation and signposting within the text was considered. Rather than developing a grid of the discourse and basing it purely on how repetition of the word was used, I was more subjective in my approach, reflecting on how that word made me feel and how I interpreted the word as both an employee, a student and as a dyslexic.

Why I did it in that way?

I reviewed the words in this way so I could consider the use of the language, and the types of words used. were selected due to the repeated interaction of words and phrases as a prompt for the collective memory-based workshops. My intention was that the words would be used as a prompt to develop discussion during the collective memory discussion workshops. For those taking part in the research to be challenged by the words that the institution they work for uses about them. Words that develop the stereotypes and typecasts what dyslexia means within a university setting. Words that our peers and student support see as the truth positioned as they are within policy and training documentation.

How I did it?

Over the course of a yearlong period, I downloaded and printed out any information hosted on the www.canterbury.ac.uk website that referenced the work dyslexia.

The reviewed documentation and web pages were:

Access to Student Support – Staff Handbook (July 2022)

Dyslexia Support Handbook – (Accessible online July 2022)

What's it Like Being a Neurodiverse Learner? (Online training July 2022)

Student Support Web Pages (www.canterbury.ac.uk July 2022)

This was 265 pages of text when printed out at A4.

Initial phrases and words used within the organisation which were used in the first workshop were:

> *Dyslexia is a specific learning difference that affects literary skills and information processing.*
>
> *"There's no reason to think a dyslexia diagnosis will prevent you from studying at degree or postgraduate level."*
>
> *"With the right support, you can be as successful as any other students".*
>
> *"Disabling barriers to higher education."*
>
> *Dyslexic students "struggle with specific elements" "display behaviours that are detrimental to their wellbeing" (*these are the words used on the website as part of the definition of dyslexia)
>
> *Can apply for DSA to cover "essential costs that may result of their disability".*
>
> *Can we support with "interventions tailored to individual student's needs"?*

These phrases were then taken as prompts and words used for each of the workshops. Some of the words were used by the participants in the subsequent group discussions without me prompting.

3.2 Method 2 – Collective Memory Workshops

Why I did it?

Collective memory workshops were chosen based on the desire to look at a different method which was biographical in nature, and which would consider the importance of community and the collective. This shifts the balance from it being an individual story to a community of likeminded supportive people. The critical nature of this work links naturally to an approach based on critical ethnography, the use of autobiography, narrative, and a collective approach. I am driven by the philosophical approach that we all have a responsibility to challenge and drive for change. That that there is a political task within society to criticize the workings of the institution and to challenge the way things are done (Foucault, 1980; Madison, 2012).

The use of a collaborative method was based on a rejection of positivism – that there is no one way to measure how we feel. The idea of a self-other interaction links to the ethnographic narrative. This then drives the use of the self-other hyphen to ask respondents to co-construct ethnographic accounts. (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005). The Foucauldian concept of government as 'the conduct of conduct… a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons' (Gordon, 1991, p.2) enabled me to reconsider how this shapes the culture and policy frameworks within higher education.

That the 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 1980a, p. 82) affects the behaviours of people within the framework. For Powell his research approach strongly aligns with Foucault's work and the importance of understanding 'micro' level techniques of power: 'the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals' (Foucault, 1980b, p.39). This links also to Schein's work (2010) who looks at the micro cultures and power dynamics within organisations. What might a university gain from positioning dyslexia as a deficit? Does it review the hidden culture of the power of the written word being stronger than other ways or imparting knowledge??

This thesis considers my own positionality and in turn its subjective in its approach, akin to other works it is critical for my 'understanding of, and respect for, those under study' (Willis, 2000, p.113). The use of participatory action research as the underlying methodology meant that my participants were keen to shape the discussion, the research and to use it as a basis for their ongoing learning and teaching.

For Madison (2012) critical ethnographers must "resist domestication" by which he means that we show bias for those who share the same ethical experience. Critical ethnographers use resources, skills, and privileges to ensure the voice and experiences of the respondents are heard. To ensure that the stories which might otherwise have been restrained and hidden are heard. The critical ethnographer 'contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourse of social injustices" (Madison. 2012, p.6) It is this premise that frames my research, and the methodology approach used.

Using the stories and narratives of my participants to gain insight into how our lived experience as human beings has shaped their identities. Those labelled with dyslexia may feel their identity has been constructed by this very labelling, but every dyslexic person will interpret this in a different way. Autobiography would therefore seem to be a useful way to gain the individual's insight and as such to allow us to hear the voice of the oppressed. That by 'othering' or labelling those with a disability we are trying to fix them. This is an idea being challenged throughout the advocacy moment (Betts, 2022; Collinson, 2018, 2020).

3.3 Ethical considerations for the use of autoethnography

Using autoethnography can pose some ethical questions and it is important to establish that all ethical areas have been considered and managed. The irony is that the university Ethics Committee initially rejecting my research ethics form on the basis that colleagues who are taking part might want to be anonymous and worry about the potential impact on their professional standing if they were open about their dyslexia. From an ethical perspective I felt that I needed to support my peers as they have discussed and relived some of their childhood memories and traumas. I hope that I have resisted 'domestication' (Madison, 2012) and the whole group has challenged the discourse of the injustice they still feel from their childhood experiences. The use of collective memory practice as an autoethnographical tool had serious ethical considerations.

Ellis (2007) considers the importance of three areas of ethics for areas of autoethnography including procedural ethics which includes the usual research ethics considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, rights to privacy as well as protecting human subjects from harm. All these areas have been considered and covered by following the ethics guidelines from the university. All participants were taken through the participants' information, and we discussed the fact that by recording their voices they would not remain anonymous and there were ongoing conversations around the right to withdraw and the opportunity to have final veto on the final podcast.

The second area of ethics considered is situational ethics. How the participants might be affected by the situational context, my own role as a more senior member of the faculty. This area was considered and reviewed throughout the process with the fluidity of attendance of the participants, the change to the recording of the workshops and the flexibility of approach around how the discussions were managed.

The third ethical area that Ellis (2007) considered is the idea of relational ethics. This third area is particularly relevant in the context of my research due to the dynamic and the make-up of the group. Lapadat (2017) considers that autoethnography can be 'ethically fraught' and that by using a collective or co-construction approach there is a mutual respect, dignity, and connection (Ellis, 2007) and that using the 'hearts and minds' through the changing relations with research participants. I was conscious that there may be an 'incompatibility between the personal and professional identity' (Lee, 2018) and that participants felt supported in their role in the work. Therefore, by having participants who were active in a collaborative approach (Edwards, 2021; Davis and Gannon, 2008) it would allow us to develop a richness of data through the contextualisation in experience, culture and history (Lapadat, 2017). The participants discussed earlier were involved in many aspects of the projects from pre-research discussion through to dissemination of outputs, they were collaborators rather than co-constructors, in that they were not involved in the collation of results and have veto on the final output, but they did not get involved in the write up of the analysis nor the initial scoping of the project. As 'reflexive researchers' all the participants interacted and influenced the research spaces and site – both in the actual physical space we used and the discussion that took place.

This kind of collaborative approach also helps to support individual participants. This kind of collective approach has. I hope, helped to "broaden the gaze of lonely trauma to locate them within categories of experience shared by others." (Lapadat, 2017, p.599). Autoethnography could be criticised as being 'self-indulgent and lacking in rigor', 'self-absorption and self-celebration rather than addressing social issues and proposing ways of addressing issues' (Lapadat, 2017). One might also argue that in the case of my work I am using a privilege position within the university to be self-indulgent. It is important that the work needs to critically reflect on and describe their influence. The write up of this kind of research is more narrative in approach and as such some argue (Lapadat et al, 2017) that it is more accessible in

its output and therefore opens up to a wider audience. All critical aspects to the work and linking strongly to the earlier discussed strength as dyslexics as storytellers.

How and why, I did it??

I ran collective collaborative discussion workshops recording the actual words rather than transcribing and interpreting the discussions. Capturing the words through audio gives us insight into how the words were spoken. Whilst the recording was edited by the researcher, the recordings were cross checked and reviewed by the collective group. It is a collective output – produced with insight and the consent of all present, a collagenic approach rather than an interviewee/interviewer relationship. This is how the idea of recorded collective memory workshops evolved. To allow a space for colleagues to consider their own story in a setting with likeminded colleagues, with the hope that the sharing of the narrative – storying telling - would both highlight collective themes and empower and offset any imposter feeling.

Positioning this research within an interpretivist philosophy means we are considering how we consider the life story of others (or even ourselves using autobiographical research). Pring (2005) states that "to understand other people, therefore requires understanding the interpretations which they give of what they are doing" (2005, p.117). Pring does this by considering research from a position of review and reflection. This then considers how lived experience of being human shapes our identity. If we as researchers want to gain real insight into people's life stories, how can we base our understanding on observation alone without gaining insight into how those stories and identities were constructed? Biography (West and Merrill, 2009; Davies and Brown, 2006; Dominice, 2000) allows us to learn from people's lives to gain insight into their behaviours through the gathering of personal stories and giving people a chance to talk. If we consider this from a relativist perspective, a standpoint where there is no absolute truth, then an individual's perspective is formed from the materiality of our experience and what we feel. So how then might we gain insight from different individuals to see if there are overarching themes and similarities in their lived experiences. There would appear to be a tension and even a contradiction in trying to gain a collection of individual stories when we consider that there is no absolute truth. With the gathering of multiple life stories and memories we can consider the similarities in the experiences of individuals – we may see consistencies in the types of truth. This approach would therefore use a philosophy that is a more robust way of critiquing the value of applying any label of dyslexia.

Within educational research it could be argued that we need to develop insight into how we support the education of the individual in the context of both their collective history and sociological setting (Pring, 2015). One could argue that universities need to identify and label students as this "provides the grounds and justification for further practices (which is based on) the need to identify a deficit on a set of given terms" (Beighton, 2012, p.20). The 'categorising' of students within higher education is increasing; labels based on their gender, race, heritage, disability and even the postcode sector of their home

(www.officeforstudents.org.uk). This gathering of anonymous data would appear to conflict with the "age of the narrative" which West and Merrill (2009, p.1) argue is due to the genre of biography pervasive throughout our culture today. The popularity of biography as a research methodology comes from a desire to see the intersectionality between society and the individual. For researchers this in turn means we can use "other people's lives as a basis for social research" (West and Merrill, 2009, p.191). This has developed further into considering the use of collective biography as a way of seeing whether "individual problems are also collective ones" (West and Merrill, 2009; Davies and Gannon, 2006). The idea that the voice of one individual can represent the voice of many is the basis for both educational biography and memory based collective biography. Revisiting then the labelling of students based on some deficit in learning leads us to question how we can 'categorise' people without any biographical understanding. It would therefore suggest that group biography – the narratives of many - could be instrumental in really understanding the label of dyslexia and the impact that has on the individual. This then would allow us to move away from the superficial generalisation kind of support, like template learning support plans and generic cover sheets (Ryder and Norwich, 2019; Leveroy, 2013) to an environment where we work to the strengths of those that learn 'differently'.

One could argue that only building a collection of individual voices together can we truly understand the learner's experience. In the context of this research how can we gain real insight into the impact of the label of dyslexia on a larger body of students if we base our insight on the interpretation of an individual story with its emotional subjectivity? Could the use of collective or group biography allow us to see themes that emerge from numerous individuals in the same way that West (2015) explores. If collective biography is a useful methodology for gaining this insight, which type of research method might be the most interesting? Useful methods of gaining life stories might be auto/biographical interviews with thematic analysis (Merrill and West, 2009), education biographical discussion groups (Dominice, 2000) or memory-based workshop groups (Davies and Gannon, 2006). This research wants to show that memory workshop based collective biography is a useful research method to gain insight into the voice of those labelled as dyslexic within universities. The supportive nature of the memory-based workshop approach means that a real research community can be developed following this project.

Using the voice of many rather than just one and seeing similarities of experience

Collective biography comes from a 'plurality of perspectives, rather than a single truth from a privilege perspective' Merrill and West (2009, p.192). Therefore, collective biography offers a contextual study rather than a grand narrative to look communally at different individuals' experiences which could draw together overarching themes. This might highlight similarities as differences in experiences. There are many ways in which collective biography can be conducted including interview-based research, educational based discussion group activity and memory-based workshops. If we are only listening to

an individual perspective, we tend to be subjective and emotive in our discussion to individualise the need and as such to single out those that are different.

Therefore, to counteract the disability narrative the work needs to be based on looking at the stories from more than one voice. There is much research (Burns and Bell. 2011; Alexander-Passe, 2015; Collinson, Dunne and Woolhouse, 2011) around the construction of the label of dyslexia and the discrimination linked to this through the corporality of the environment and in turn the culture of higher education institutions. These researchers have based their approach on interviewing those who already have the label to test a pre-written hypothesis of the need for support. If then we consider collective biography as being a way to gain a collective insight into the varying truths around labelling, analysing a collection of singular interviews retrospectively would bring in a layer of interpretative bias from the outsider (the researcher). This kind of oral narrative using semi-structured questions and interviews, relies on some kind of interpretative analysis to decipher the data. For the use of multiple individual interviews to gain insight into themes that emerge as being similar. For this type of collective biography, the researcher builds a hypothesis which may come from a position of positivist intent – to test a theory.

Many of the individuals will have different interpretations of their individual truths. By using interviewing as the method, the role of the researcher is to collect, analyse and interpret narratives from respondents - they are an outsider and as such some of the practices are likely to be subjective. One could consider the role of the researcher in interview-based research as from coming from a privilege position, as an intellectual expert. This is not the kind of approach or hierarchy that would seem relevant or indeed supportive in its design. From my own experience it is the peeling away of layers of trauma and perceptions that allowed me to be more open and self-reflective.

Another area of collective biography which I considered to be the most useful for looking at labelling and self-identity is the use of memory based collective biography as developed by Davies and Gannon (2006). Like educational biography, memory based collective work uses a collaboration amongst peers but within this environment the researcher is the participant. The subject and the object of the research are brought together through a circle of collective memory – reading, discussing, writing, and analysing the narrative together. For this method, the workshop approach means that the group gathers so that memories are uncovered in a supportive environment where the writing and reading aloud of the memory allows the participants to question and talk through the memory together. Therefore, the masking and unmasking of the identity through collective telling, writing, and reading aloud (Davies and Gannon, 2006, p.6) is through a plural voice of self-interpretation rather than through collection and interpretation of data. In this method the discourse comes from the constitution and those taking place are their own subjects therefore developing the hypothesis of numerous truths.

Chapter 4 The Data

4.1 Finding the words and the hidden meaning.

As established earlier the question to be addressed is:

> How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

This will be considered through the subsidiary questions:

> How does the dyslexic label lead to a culture of disability and 'deficit' within universities?
> How and why do we measure the success of dyslexic students in universities?

From the review of current research and literature I have established that students of higher education are being increasingly diagnosed with dyslexia and other types of neurodivergence. Universities, staff working within them and the students themselves are increasingly being measured and graded based on student outcomes linked to degree outcomes and graduate employment. Support within universities for students with a disability is linked to individual, 'scaffolded' support to improve academic achievement and I would argue there is little or no support for development of ongoing life skills. The literature also established the influence of educator voice and the impact of that on student outcomes and satisfaction. It also established the need to reconsider inclusivity and the need to celebrate difference and look at it from a positive perspective rather than purely from a deficit. Therefore, I have established that the voice and influence of educators who are themselves dyslexic might be useful in reframing the discourse of negativity in my own institution.

This research was developed through several different stages to help us consider and address each of those questions in turn. Firstly, a review and collation of the words and phrases used within the institution when it referenced dyslexia. Then using these words and phrases as prompts for workshops and collective discussions with my colleagues. These workshops were recorded and developed into a podcast which was reviewed and discussed again with the participants. The work was then presented collectively, and the feedback used to reflect on the process and the personal change felt by the participants.

4.2 What words are used within the institution and where?

To consider how dyslexia is positioned and how this underpins institutional policies and practices and what the cultural understanding of the word itself and how it affects students a review was conducted of all literature and web pages across the university which reference dyslexia, and the student support attached to it. I read and reviewed policy and literature that was published within the university in the summer of 2022 and reviewed this again in early 2023. It should perhaps be noted that there was the start of a cultural shift within the institution with some updates being made to certain areas. This follows the move across universities and society as whole to refer to dyslexia as being a 'neurodivergence' sitting alongside other conditions such as ADHD, autism, and dyspraxia.

The reviewed documentation and web pages included:

> *Access to Student Support – Staff Handbook (July 2022)*
>
> *Dyslexia Support Handbook – (Accessible online July 2022)*
>
> *What's it Like Being a Neurodiverse Learner? (Online training July 2022)*
>
> *Student Support Web Pages (www.canterbury.ac.uk July 2022)*

A total of 265 pages were analysed, printed out and sections colour coded. The use of the word dyslexia was coloured in one colour and the text which positioned dyslexia was highlighted.

As the university policies signposted me to general government information areas, I also reviewed the Student Finance web pages which discussed Disability Student Allowance. The diagnosis and support process is also discussed in the podcast. With both Participant T and Participant A commenting on the process and lack of insight around how we feel going through the process of gaining support.

Once the policy documents, web pages and training were reviewed key words and themes were pulled out and used as a prompt for the discussion within the workshops. Schein (2010) talks about culture being layered and that we need to peel off the layers like an onion to see what the centre of the organisation or institution really feels about something. It is only through revealing the different layers that we start to understand the hidden or subtle differences in cultural understanding of an issue. On this premise the first area I considered were what I have termed as signposting words. These are the words that are used to direct students, potential students, and staff towards the relevant information and support processes within university.

4.3 Signposting words – how do we direct people to get the support they need (or we think they need!)

The first area or layer of words that are used within the institution are the headings, subheadings, and web page naming conventions. These are the signposting words to allow you to navigate through the system to gain the relevant information and support.

The web page navigation directs current students via the general support pages (Figure 1 below) to the *Student Support* area of the web pages (Figure 2 below). At this point students are signposted to *Disability and mental health support* (Figure 2 below). It is only after clicking on this link that the word dyslexia is shown in the drop-down menu (Figure 3 below). After then clicking on the Dyslexia support pages students are then referred to the Disability Team (Figure 4 below).

Throughout the whole process there is no mention of dyslexia until you have gone through two pages which are titled disability and disability support. So, throughout the navigation through the webpage's dyslexia is clearly listed and signposted as a disability. There is no mention if it being a learning difference nor of it being positioned as anything other than a deficit. An analysis of the words gives the reader the impression that those dyslexics are the problem and yet many still feel that the system is there to help them.

This web journey is quite revealing. Some students, who do not previously have a dyslexia diagnosis, are referred by Academic Staff to these pages for advice. Straight away they are clearly labelled as being disabled.

Website navigation (www.canterbury.ac.uk/support downloaded 5th January 2023)
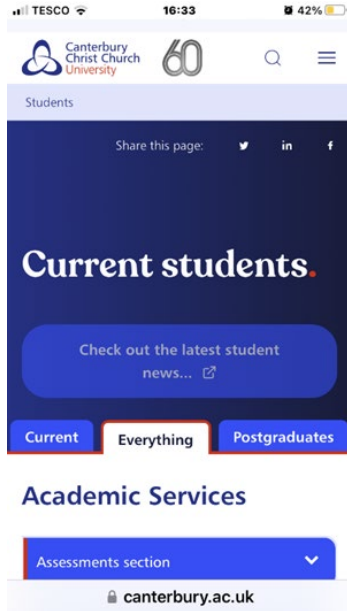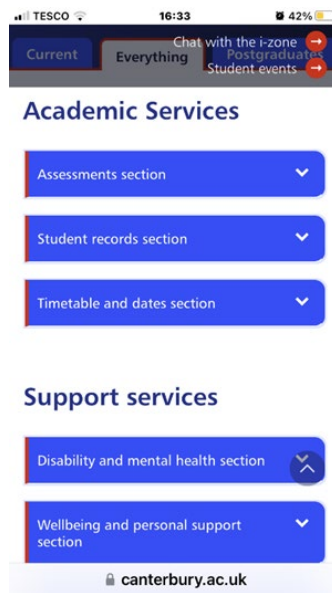

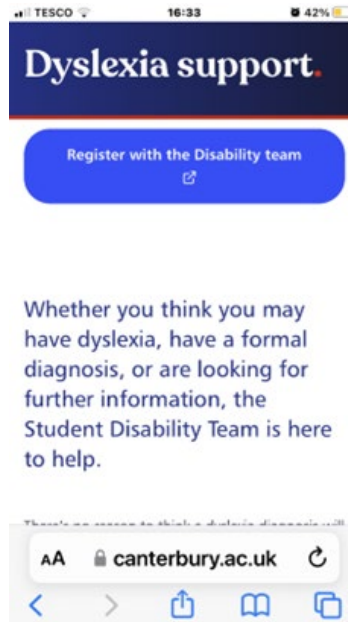Figure 1:

Figure 2:

Figure 3

Figure 4

Web referral pages for potential and new students

Potential and new students face a similar navigation to get support via the Welcome Hub pages of the website. However, on these pages there is some support with navigating the terminology and different naming convention between schools/further education colleges and universities. It is at this point for example that dyslexia is defined as a learning difficulty rather than a special educational need.

Definitions and descriptions used.

Within the web pages there is a definition of dyslexia and whilst it is positioned as a specific learning difference rather than a disability it is hidden within the disability support pages. The webpage explains what dyslexia is about, written from a deficit perspective with an almost negative discourse. There is an assumption that a diagnosis of dyslexia is a negative thing, and it will hold you back. It includes the following text:

> *What is dyslexia?*
>
> *Dyslexia is a specific learning difference that affects literary skills and information processing* (www.canterbury.ac.uk/our-students/ug-current/student/support-services accessed January 2023)

The label of dyslexia could have an impact on your ability to study at a university.

> *"There's no reason to think a dyslexia diagnosis will prevent you from studying at degree or postgraduate level"* (www.canterbury.ac.uk/our-students/ug-current/student/support-services accessed January 2023)

I interpret this as saying you will only succeed at university if we give you support as you are not on the same level as other (non-dyslexic students)

> *"With the right support, you can be as successful as any other students"*. (www.canterbury.ac.uk/our-students/ug-current/student/support-services accessed January 2023)

I interpret that as saying your dyslexia is disabling and it could be a **barrier** for you. The use of the word barrier is interesting as it positions dyslexia as being a block, an obstacle, or an obstruction to succeeding at university.

> *"Disabling barriers to higher education."*

It is also suggested that there is a struggle for dyslexic students, so it will be hard for them, and could even impact on their wellbeing more than normal or non-dyslexic students. As part of my research, I am seeking to address or suggest new approaches to these issues.

Dyslexic students "struggle with specific elements" "display behaviours that are detrimental to their wellbeing". (www.canterbury.ac.uk/our-students/ug-current/student/support-services accessed January 2023)

It can be clearly seen in this section that the discussion around dyslexia is positioned in a deficit way, language used included struggles, barriers, and challenges, clearly positioning dyslexia as a problem that we need to fix and support. This is one of the core themes that was discussed – the stereotyping around the challenges and struggles faced by dyslexics.

Diagnosis and support

The advice and support quite clearly position dyslexia as being the individual's problem as an issue that will require support and interventions. Again, the use of the word support and intervention suggests that there needs to be an external scaffolding for students to succeed.

Students can apply for DSA to cover "essential costs that may result because of their disability". (www.canterbury.ac.uk/our-students/ug-current/student/support-services accessed January 2023)

Students can be offered "interventions tailored to individual student's needs". (www.canterbury.ac.uk/our-students/ug-current/student/support-services accessed January 2023)

Learning Support Plans and Reasonable Adjustments

For students to get support there is a requirement for them to gain a diagnosis and to produce evidence of this. The process can be both costly and complicated so some students will decide not to pursue a diagnosis.

So, by peeling away the layers and looking at the use of the language we can see that dyslexia is positioned quite clearly in a negative way. It is a disability, a weakness, a barrier, a deficiency that requires support and interventions for the student to succeed. And these interventions require a diagnosis and a label, which would be costly, and may have an impact on your wellbeing and mental health.

4.4 The Workshops

The approach of using discussion workshops was based on a need to gather a collective voice through conversations rather than interviews. To see areas of similarities between the lived experience of all the participants and allow us to celebrate areas of commonality. Whilst all the participants were known to me prior to meeting the group did not all know each other. It was therefore important that everyone felt comfortable and in a supportive space so they can share their experiences openly and honestly. The

workshop approach and the theme-based discussion meant that there was no agenda, the conversation took a different direction each time. Quite deliberately I allowed the meeting discussion to be free and for it to be conversational rather than a structured interview approach.

As previously mentioned, there was no call for research participants they were invited or volunteered to be part of the group. They were all colleagues who had discussed their dyslexia before I started the doctoral work who were open and transparent about their dyslexia. Throughout the taught stages of my Doctorate in Education I had discussed the ideas and scoping of the thesis and some of the philosophical ideas and methodological approaches with the participants. To some extent the participants had helped to frame the research methods and to scope the meetings. This meant that not only were they comfortable in the discussions, but they felt part of the research rather than being just interviewees. This was important as the critical nature of the work means we need to have consensus on the collective voice used.

4.5 Collective Memory Participants

When we first met, I asked each of the participants to draw round their hands and to write in each finger what they thought about themselves and what they wanted others to think about them. There were words that were used by more than one participant: honest, trustworthy, empathic, and reliable. In the podcast each of the participants introduces themselves and gives some background on their journey of self-discovery around their dyslexia. I have included their own words in the podcast as an introduction.

Honest
Approchable
Trust
Caring
Reliable.

CHAOS TRUST TRAUMA

LOVE

HOPE

.

HONESTY

RELATABLE

CONFIDENCE.

APPROACHABLE

PASSIONATE

empathy

knowledge

neurodiversity

human

understanding standards

creative

narrator

empathic

hopeful

open
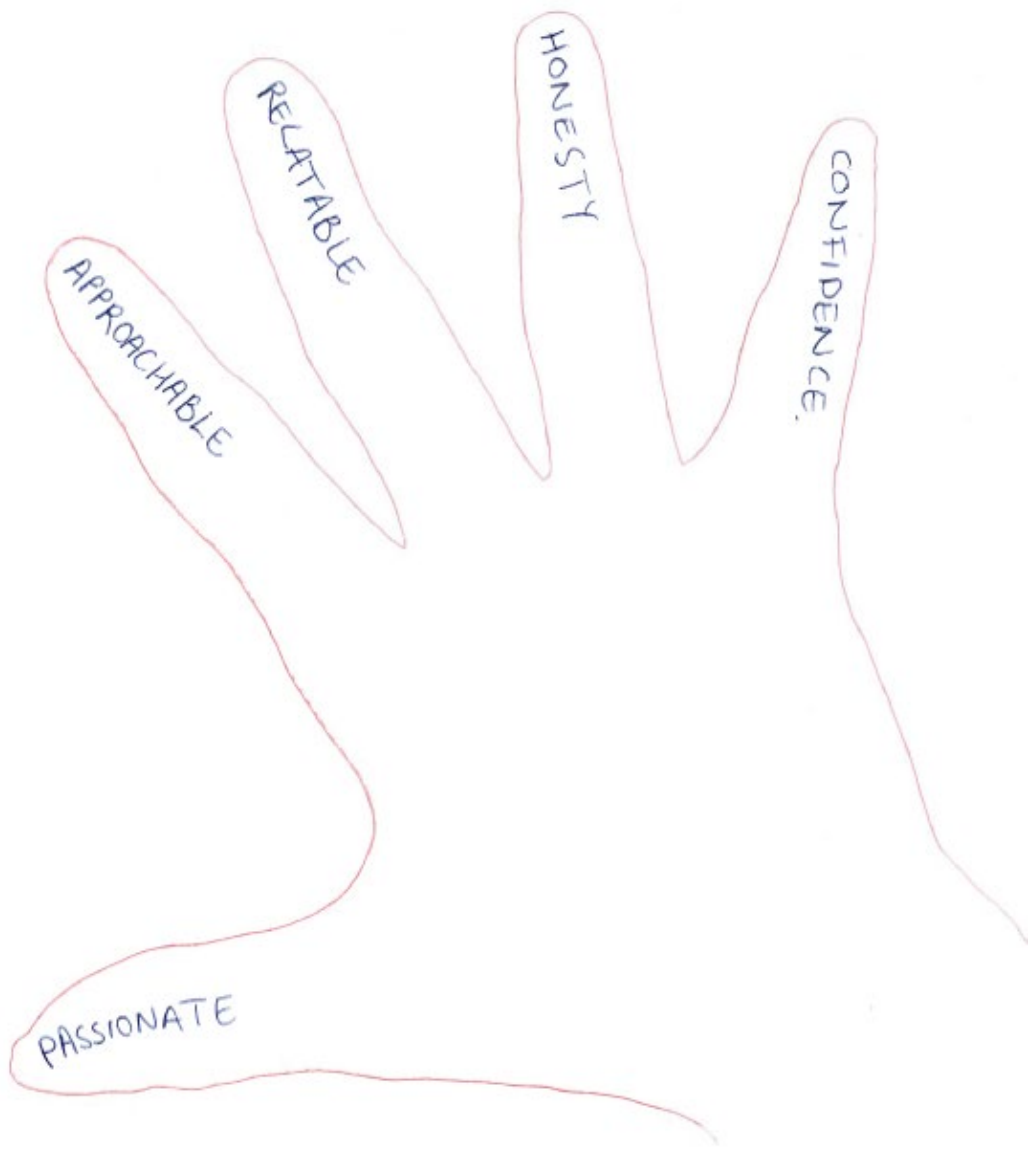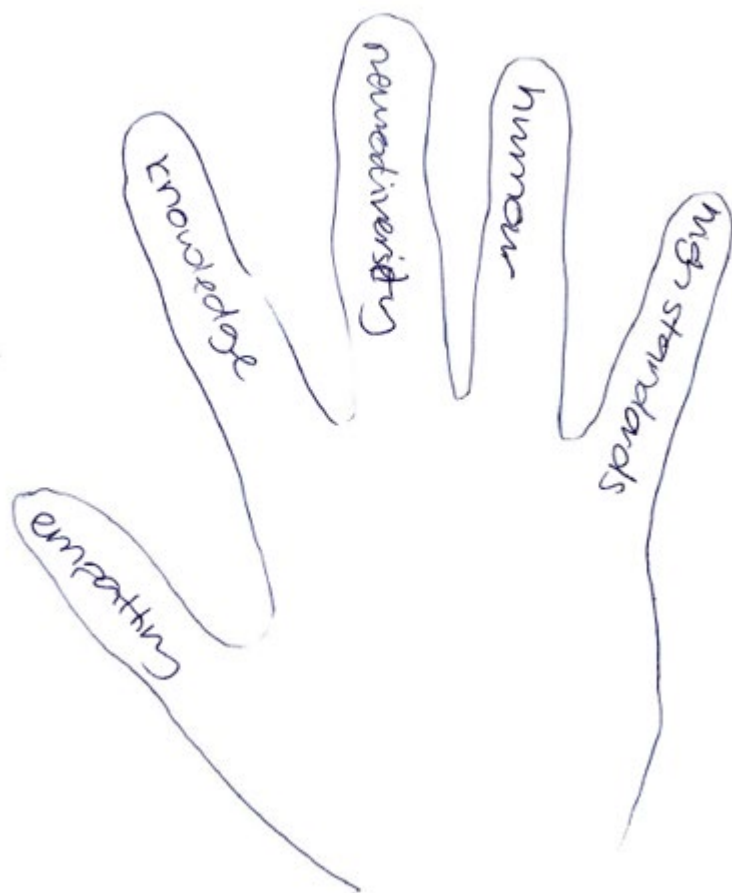
4.6 Preparing for the workshops.

Prior to the workshops I met with all the participants individually or in pairs, some of the participants are close colleagues, some are friends and others are supportive peers. The idea for the doctoral research was framed and scoped over a period of two years with one of the participants, Will, when we shared an office. After teaching and tutorials, we would discuss how we wanted to support students differently and our frustrations as how the 'systems' were failing some of our young people like they had failed us.

The workshop idea was formed on the desire to have a united approach to see if there were synergies and similarities between life stories, with the belief that a shared voice would be stronger to start to challenge the status quo and drive change. The workshop idea and some of the themes were discussed and agreed jointly in advance rather than just being written and coordinated by me. Throughout the process I was keen to develop an open and honest approach for everyone to feel comfortable. The idea was to try and break down the researcher/interviewee scenario and to remove any outsider or privilege. The autoethnographical approach would hear my voice alongside others rather than just in isolation. This research environment meant that participants could be involved in the process and veto any elements. It was following feedback from Participant T that we moved the project from being produced as a film to a podcast.

During these initial meetings the scope of the project and the nature of the research was discussed. All colleagues were happy, in fact very keen, to be involved. All participants were invit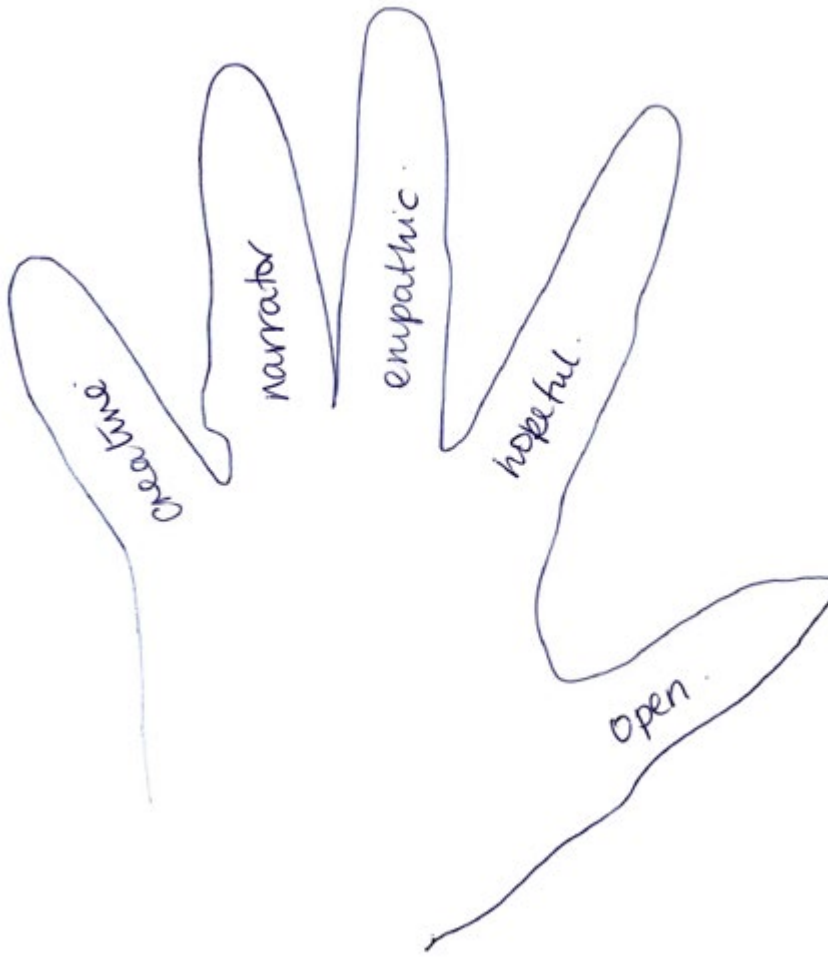ed via my own network and existing friendships within the university. They were in fact all colleagues who had been open and honest about their dyslexia in the past with me. Prior to meeting collectively each of the group were told some background and information about each other so they were prepared prior to the meeting.

Three workshops were run with the team initially. We met to discuss the themes and words that had been gathered from the websites and leaflets. After these three workshops the initial discussion points were presented and discussed by three of us (myself, Participant W and Participant A) as a collective panel at the Joint Universities (Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Greenwich and University of Kent) Learning and Teaching Conference and at the Neurodiversity in Higher Education Conference at the University of Bristol. We then met to discuss the process and to agree how we might move the research forward. This allowed us to gather peer feedback and to reconsider how we might change the culture we felt within our own institution. For Participant W and Participant A this process allowed them to feel like 'real academics' and that the message and insight they had to share was valid

and more importantly valuable in higher education research. You can hear in the podcast our own stereotyping of 'corduroy wearing' academics.

4.7 The environment – feeling comfortable and able to relax.

The group met on campus within a large open plan space in the design area, and the dates were set in coordination with everyone so people could attend. We met on each occasion over lunchtime and whilst there were no set timings generally, we were all 'talked out' after 1.5 hours. There was an open and honest attitude straight away with people leaving early or arriving late if they needed to. Some of the members of the group knew each other in advance whereas others were new to each other. Ethics forms were signed in advance, and it was agreed that we would be open and honest with agreement on the final output being sort from everyone before it was published. The podcast would be listened to and signed off by everyone before it was finalised.

Initially the intention had been to film the workshops and the first two were filmed. I had hoped that we would meet up off campus to be outside in a non-classroom environment, but we gravitated to a teaching space that is home to the graphic design course and laid out as a studio. This was in part due to wanting to film inside and everyone agreed that the space was comfortable as it was not a structured classroom as such. It also made it easier to pop in and out when time or personal comfort allowed. As all colleagues are teachers working around the timetable meant meeting on campus was easier. The initial workshop was filmed using a large camera on a tripod and this felt very 'obvious' and intrusive throughout the discussion.

For the second workshop we tried filming using an iPad which was set up on the desk to allow for more informal recording. This however had a different impact; the participants could see themselves on the screen and very quickly it became obvious through the body language that for Participant T this was uncomfortable and made some people feel apprehensive. Participant T was looking away from the screen, kept his hat on and sat slumped in his chair. He then decided to leave early which I think was in part due to seeing himself on screen. When it was broached with him, he said he didn't want to be filmed. I had already noticed this and decided to move to producing an oral recording instead of a film.

The mutual decision was then made to move to just an audio recording of the workshops and to move from a film to a podcast as the final output. The most important part of the workshop was that we felt comfortable and in a safe space and if filming hampered that then I would stop and change the kind of output. The podcast would still allow me to submit an oral piece as part of the thesis rather than relying just on the written word and the hope was that a podcast could be listened to and reused as part of the ongoing critical nature of the project. It could also potentially be expanded to go more in depth into different areas of the discussion. During the discussions it became obvious that all of us of are great story tellers and narrators. The only way to capture the words and the trauma that was shared during our discussion was to capture the words as they were spoken. Ultimately, I wanted the 'voice' of the

dyslexic to be heard, and a podcast would do just that without it being interpreted through transcription and editing.

4.8 The group make up – the same but different.

Participants ages ranged from 34 to 52. All in the group were diagnosed or self-diagnosed as being dyslexic. Three of the group had studied at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) as undergraduates and all the group had completed postgraduate studies within the institution. As well as the researcher one of the group was also completing a PhD at CCCU. Therefore, all the group had experienced life at CCCU as both a student and as a staff member. This was a discussion point in several of the sessions and will be expanded later.

One of the participants was deaf from birth, though this was not diagnosed until she was a year old. There was a belief in her family that being unable to communicate had affected her learning. She had a dyslexic parent or sibling, but she was not diagnosed until she was studying for the foundation year of undergraduate degree. Being diagnosed herself had made her question her own perceptions of her sibling – previously she had thought of them being lazy or not working hard enough!

Several of the participants identify with a gender different from that assigned at birth. When we discussed this there was a feeling that being neurodiverse and thinking differently 'out of the box' allowed them to be more open and questioning of what might previously have been considered social norms. All the participants had worked in other full-time roles and careers outside of academia prior to working at CCCU. All the participants were white and had been educated only in the United Kingdom this will be discussed in more detail in my further analysis.

Only one of the participants had been diagnosed with dyslexia in childhood, in their late teens during the sixth form. The remaining participants were either self-diagnosed or had been diagnosed during their student journey at CCCU, three during their masters' studies and into late adulthood. Two participants had been recently diagnosed with a second neurodivergence (ADHD and ASD). One who self-diagnoses does not feel the need to pursue a formal medical diagnosis, having been screened and identified as dyslexic he feels this is enough to identify as being dyslexic.

4.9 Workshop 1

The first observation was that we bonded very well, very quickly. There was an instant culture of openness, understanding and honesty. The atmosphere in the room was welcoming, with the body language clearly showing acceptance and support. Participants would lean in when others were

speaking, nod their heads in agreement and smile in acceptance. Within the group there was genuine desire to reach out and share experiences and have an open discussion. Very quickly the respondents forgot they were being 'researched' and the conversation naturally flowed without the need for prompts or discussions. It was also noticeable that participants would leave together chatting as they left.

There was a supportive atmosphere, and the conversation flowed very naturally with the story telling starting and the natural flow of conversation weaving childhood memories into the path that had led us to our position as 'educators' today.

The words and themes that had been chosen for workshop one was structured with an introduction section to allow people to get to know each other and whilst we followed the structure and the themes loosely the story telling soon started in a natural organic way.

Getting to know each other.

- Introductions – who are you, what you do within CCCU – my dyslexia and me!
- How would you describe yourself?
- Can you give us a bit of background about yourself – age, professional background, when were you diagnosed (if you were diagnosed?)
- What is your role within CCCU – what area do you teach in, how long have you been teaching?
- The project – what it entails and why I am undertaking it?
- Some of the words and phrases used within the institution and how they make us feel.

Initial phrases and words to be used in the first workshop:

In the initial workshop I introduced the words and definitions that are being used within the institution to see how the words and themes affected the group.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difference that affects literary skills and information processing.

"There's no reason to think a dyslexia diagnosis will prevent you from studying a degree or postgraduate level".

"With the right support, you can be as successful as any other student".

"Disabling barriers to higher education."

Dyslexic students "struggle with specific elements" "display behaviours that are detrimental to their wellbeing".

Can apply for DSA to cover "essential costs that my result of their disability".

Student support available are "interventions tailored to individual student's needs".

4.10 Workshop 2

In the second workshop we looked at the use of words linked to deficits and difficulty which are associated to dyslexia. That the struggles with dyslexia are linked to literacy issues – reading and writing. The prompts for the workshop were framed around how dyslexia framed our childhoods and our associations with learning and education. How the dyslexia shaped our life and careers before academia.

> '*I was good at working in A&E (as a nurse) I knew what it is like to be broken so I could help other people*' Participant T.

> '*I worked in PR and advertising in the UK and abroad I was good at seeing the bigger picture*' Participant S.

During this second workshop the conversation was more open and honest, the participants were becoming closer, at the end Participant A asked how soon we could meet again, and coffee dates and meetings were being arranged outside the group time. It was obvious in our second meeting that participants were starting to talk and even meet up between our meetings. There was a feeling of new friendships being formed.

The conversation started to look at the strengths, strategies and coping mechanics that we had developed throughout our lives and how these offset our perceived weaknesses or deficits. We discussed how we had mitigated during our professional lives prior to working in academia and how this was influencing both our teaching and student support in the university.

We discussed how much we shared of our personal history/background and life with our students.

> '*I started to do some work here and I could tell the students what is was really like in A&E I was honest, so the students wanted to have me in the classroom*' Participant T.

We discussed how our dyslexia framed our life before the university, our trauma of earlier education and how this affected our opinion of further and higher education. With many of the participants coming late to undergraduate education or taken time out of education for years before having the confidence to pursue Master study.

In the second meeting we discussed how much we share with our peers, how supported (or unsupported) we felt within the university. We discussed the struggle with the idea that our dyslexia might have an impact on our professionalism. How do we feel when peers come out with stereotypes or when we see peers teaching in a broadcast or rote manner without any passion??

'I see colleagues just spouting out the information and put up the slides with no passion thinking that students can learn like that.' Participant W

One common discussion point was how students were supported or how we were supported as students versus the lack of support as staff member. How isolated we now feel as staff members, as we feel like outsiders with massive imposter syndrome.

'I had loads of support as a student but now it's just my Line Manager – she's a great Line Manager but there is no other support.' Participant A

4.11 Workshop 3

In our third meeting we talked about the teaching, learning and assessments within universities and the impact of the structure and procedures on dyslexic students.

The common theme around organisational skills for dyslexic students managing workloads, deadlines and assessment was discussed.

'I write out dates and schedules for students – I have to lay out the deadlines for them in a chronological order as they can't manage multiple deadlines.' Participant L

Within the university students with a disability are entitled to a Learning Support Plan which gives them reasonable adjustments such as extensions to deadlines, extra time in exams or for spelling and grammar to be considered when marking assessments. Within the workshop we discussed the use of Learning Support Plans (LSP), whether we had them ourselves when we were students and how they supported us as part of our own journey as students and how we now worked with students who have a LSP.

'*I spend so much time with my students to support them along the way. They don't need extensions as I realise, they are struggling before the work is due' Participant W*.

We discussed the *othering* of students with a disability and the fact that a learning support plan is written in a templated form for the student and then shown to the academic department rather than being written in consultation with the teaching team.

'*Don't get me started on reasonable adjustments – reasonable to who? Not to the student that's for sure'. Participant T*

Throughout the workshops we talked about how we felt about our diagnosis and at what period it happened in our lives. The impact this has on us, our wellbeing, and our professional standing. The fact that researching was difficult for us not just because it took us a long time to do any research work but also because we were too busy supporting and listening to others.

'I know I should be researching doing more but I am so busy doing everything else as it takes me so long to get my teaching stuff done.' Participant W

'I had a good career I was successful…. but then I was told I needed a cover sheet for my masters' Participant S.

There was a recognition and mutual understanding of how the label of dyslexia came with institutional assumptions and fed our lack of self-confidence and self-belief. Participant A commented that due to deafness she had always been disabled and she would have struggled to be labelled as disabled as an adult. She said she could not imagine having to face this change to her identity as an adult or later in her life.

We discussed whether we now feel that we need a diagnosis and do we feel we still need this label? One of the participants does not have an official diagnosis and doesn't feel the need to get one. Yet, Participant W is open about being dyslexic and is now proud to share his life story and educational challenges with young people.

As a group we began to see similarities in our teaching approach about how we frame things differently and why this makes us good teachers. That we see the whole student, their potential and can be open and honest in the classroom. Part of our empathy and honesty means we 'wear our hearts on our sleeves' and want to see the best in people. Participant W talked about allowing his students to move around the room and to leave for breaks when they needed them. Participant W even demonstrated how he moves around the teaching room on a wheeled chair during our chats and said he was happy for students to do the same during workshops if they needed to move. Participant A talked about needing to step out of the classroom environment using the need for a cigarette as an excuse when really, she just needed to move out of the environment. Participant A also talked about a student who they allow allows to sit under the desk if they need space or time to regulate if the classroom was too busy or noisy.

Throughout the third workshop we started to discuss university assessments alongside the learning and teaching policies. We started to challenge what the institution meant by alternative assessment and why we need alternatives? If we are teaching in a truly inclusive way that all students can access, then there should be no need to offer an alternative assessment type. As part of this discussion, we talked about the lack of consultation or freedom for a dyslexic student to co-construct learning support plans or influence the reasonable adjustments they are offered. We talked through how we might change the institution, the assessment types, the spacing of deadlines to really help students. We talked about how reading and writing took time, but it was the organisational 'stuff' and the working memory that had the biggest impact on our working lives. It was these elements that we had all developed strategies around and these tactics and ideas that we shared with our students.

Following the third workshop I presented my initial findings and themes at the Medway Universities Learning and Teaching Conference. I also invited the rest of my participants to present alongside me – Participant W and Participant A agreed to attend. The reflection from the workshops were collated after this conference and the subsequent attendance at an external conference at the University of Bristol – *Neurodiversity in Higher Education*. For both Participant W and Participant A this was the first time they had attended an academic conference.

4.12 Workshop 4

Workshop four was slightly different as it was not recorded and was more reflections from Participant W and Participant A about both the process and the presenting of the initial work and findings. Following the presentations of the initial findings and gaining feedback from peers both within our own organisation and other universities we met to reflect on the process and the way forward.

Both Participant W and Participant A now felt more secure in their professional role as academics, they felt empowered to talk about their experiences and felt they could be more open and honest with their peers. There was the realisation that the work they do within their classrooms, the openness, and the support they naturally give is unique to other institutions. The three of us began to feel that we had something to share with other institutions and that our voice as dyslexics was powerful in driving the changes that universities now need. There was no embarrassment, worry or anxiety about presenting and we were open about how it felt. This led to useful questions from our peers around how we use our identity to support students to start to unmask and develop confidence in the classroom throughout their university studies.

4.13 The production of the podcast – getting the words together.

Following the workshops, the words from all the audios were transcribed so that the words that were spoken could be read and reviewed. The words were then colour coded so that the different themes could be clearly seen. The transcriptions and colour coding can be seen in the appendices. A word count of key words was conducted the basis for the themes that are highlighted. The podcast was then produced so that audio from the different workshop sessions were put together by themes, rather than being edited chronologically or split between the different workshops. It was edited and trimmed so that the flow of the conversation and some of the story telling remained.

The rough edit of the podcast was shared with all the participants, and they were given the opportunity to object to any areas or to feedback any edits they wanted to make themselves. I spoke to or met with all the participants to discuss the content and made sure everyone was happy. As part of the collaborative

approach ethically it was important that all participants had the final veto. The final edit was then made and a voice over added to take the listener through the discussion. Whilst the final podcast is just over an hour long, over 3 hours of audio was initially recorded. The podcast is emotional with the childhood trauma raw in places and some reliving of memories that had been hidden for some time.

Chapter 5 The Analysis

Having reviewed and analysed the data from the workshops there were several themes that have emerged which throw light on or help elucidate the main research questions:

> How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

Using a framework of reflective thematic analysis I have reviewed the data produced throughout the workshops, listening both to the words spoken and making different interpretations on how participants reacted to those words. The evaluation of the data went through several stages:

Firstly, I listened and relistened to the initial recordings and reviewed the filmed footage from the first two workshops. Then the audio from all the workshops was transcribed using transcription software which resulted in a written record. I then reviewed the written record and amended the text where there was inaccuracy – during this process the participants were anonymised with any names removed from the text.

I then reviewed, and colour coded the transcriptions, initially I highlighted the words that had been used by the institution in the corporate literature (for example dyslexia, disability, reasonable adjustment). After initially reviewing the text, I then reflected on the main themes that had emerged and reviewed the text and colour coded these themes. I then relistened to the audio and annotated the copy to record any emphasis placed on some of the words and elements discussed. I then reflected on the highlighted words and reconsidered the themes and considered whether there was any duplication of the themes.

After pulling the themes together on the paper versions of the discussion I then worked with a colleague to edit the raw audio into a podcast so that the different workshops are placed together. This hour-long audio had several themes across all three workshops edited together. Participants then listened to the edited podcast to approve of the final output during these follow up meetings we had time to reflect on both the process and the final output. The richness of the data meant that there were other themes which could have been identified in addition.

Following the final edit of the audio I met regularly with some of the participants, and they volunteered to present the initial findings alongside me at both internal and external academic conferences. By meeting regularly with the participants individually we were able to keep reflecting on both the discussions and how we had felt since. These meetings allowed me to triangulate the results and allow my colleagues to challenge my conclusions. Following the conference presentations and we met again to reflect on both how the audience received the work and any questions we were asked. I then revised

and reviewed the final podcast. The final edit was then produced, played to the participants and used to supplement the analysis here.

The audio discussion leads us to what was perceived as shame we felt as children in the classroom. To relive the memories, experiences and the words spoken to us, to relive what was perceived as the childhood trauma that had shaped us now participants used strong words such as segregated, defiance and troublemaker.

> *'You're one of the naughty children' Participant W.*

It was interesting to observe some of these words and phrases being used by the participants in both meetings and social media posts after the workshops. The hash tag #dyslexicacademic was used on numerous platforms for example X, LinkedIn and Instagram. All the participants are active on social media platforms, and it has been interesting to see that they all started to mention the themes we were discussing.

There were themes and discussions we kept returning to, where unprompted by me the conversation would turn to these areas. Following a review of the wider topics I decided on four overarching themes which covered the main areas of conversation.

1. Deficit model, to feel or be handicapped or disabled and the impact on our personal and professional identity.
2. Coping strategies and techniques that build useful life skills and the confidence to develop self-advocacy (different from reasonable adjustments).
3. Labels and stereotypes – how many of the effects of dyslexia are misunderstood (including the groups own misunderstandings).
4. How we use the positives of dyslexic such as empathy and creative thinking to shape our own teaching practice.

Theme 1 - Deficit model, feel or to be handicapped or disabled and the impact on our personal and professional identity.

We revisited time and time again how as children and to this day we were seen as the *problem.* That it was our fault that we struggled at school and that for all of us the classroom and learning environment had led to childhood trauma.

> *'I questioned too much so I was segregated' Participant T.*

> *'(I started to think) You just aren't that bright' Participant W.*

We talked about our social exclusion, our daydreaming and being taught to behave and learn in a set way. We discussed how our diagnosis had made us feel.

> *'Being diagnosed took me back to being 4 years old and writing my name backwards and the kids in the class laughing at me' Participant S*

We collectively relived how we felt as children and this in turn had a long-term impact on our identity then and now as adults. There were times when you had to stop being a researcher and just be a human sympathising with or caring for another distressed person. That we felt that we were the problem, and the solution was for us to fix or support ourselves. How being labelled as an adult had an impact on our professional standing now building on the imposter syndrome we felt as new academics anyway, and the impact this had on our working life now.

> *'It's that imposter syndrome again, because I have always had it, I've always been different, I am not like a normal person, I am deficient in some way. So, I must put more into it and prove by another 100% that I can do this person's job and more' Participant A*
>
> *'I was constantly being told are the class were like all ships, and we can only go with like a convoy of ships, and we can only go as fast as the slowest ship, and you are the slowest ship.' Participant W*

Working together and discussing how we now worked in the education space we concluded it was not us or our students who are 'broken' but the system. That we can make this a safer learning space for our students.

> *'School is dull, and you're being made to formally sit constantly and there's no interaction with things that are interesting. There's no interaction and it was only when I was here doing the master's that I found work on transcendental phenomenology and then I was like, there you go. That makes sense of it. That's why I look out the window that's why the cloud will tell me a story or a light on a leaf will tell me what I need to do next.' Participant T*
>
> *'Just before about opening my mouth that imposter syndrome that I get every time is almost crippling, but now you know, knowing you, and that this is a safe space I can talk about it'. Participant W*

To challenge what higher education is now and why students come to study this is further influenced by the commodification and 'cost' of higher education now.

> *'I hear people referring to their masters, "*I'm doing a master's because I've been told that it'll increase my annual salary"*, and I'm thinking, that's nonsensical.' Participant T*

It is the assessments, the approach to learning support and ultimately the environment to them is disabling.

> *'Reasonable adjustments – reasonable to who – to them not to me' Participant T*

We are now changing the teaching environment, assessments and learning and teaching so that we mitigate as much as possible against the disabling environment. By recognising that it is possible that we are being disabled by the social construct around us we can build to students' strengths rather than focus on the deficits. This initial theme clearly links to Collinson (2020) work which establishes that by positioning the dyslexic student as being at fault we may in fact be disabling them.

Theme 2 - Coping strategies and techniques that build useful life skills and the confidence to develop self-advocacy (different from reasonable adjustments).

The members of the research group now feel that have more insight into what our challenges are and the impact that dyslexia have on our behaviours. For some we know it takes us longer to do things and we have learnt to mitigate for the additional time spent on tasks.

> *'I'm always early, like massively early to everything. Everyone will comment on how good my timekeeping and my organization is on tasks and stuff. And it's because of the colossal amount of time and anxiety I spend over it. And then a fury I feel when somebody asked for anymore, or, you know, seems to think I find it easy, which is just not the case at all.' Participant L*

At the time of discussions, the group felt more empowered and supported to acknowledge our differences and to advocate for strategies that work best for us. We could connect with others and could emphasis and support in a different way.

> *'All of my skill sets that were sort of perceived negatively suddenly became really beneficial when you get into work. If you are naughty, if you are bad, if you're older, you've got a connection with someone else in a way' Participant T*

The perception above can be seen in our discussions; our working memory and processing issues and the bigger impact this has on our working day. That we have developed resilience and strategies to manage these difficulties. Most of these are life skills but are self-taught but interestingly we are all similar in our approach. An example of this is how we manage deadlines and the need to clear emails quickly, allowing extra time to get to meetings and setting reminders and alarms on phones. By normalising the use of phone alarms, we have no issues with students being on their phones in class as we know students maybe using the phone to set alarms, check in on information or write notes and prompts. During the discussions some of my peers clearly link poor working memory and processing speed to their dyslexia. Once they have acknowledged this they have moved onto new strategies and techniques to mitigate this. Participant L, Participant A and Participant W also confirmed that these they share these strategies with students and even help students learn how to manage dates chronologically as many are 'time blind'.

> *'My students don't need extensions because we work on time management and projects as we go rather than give them extra time' Participant W*

> *'I spend time with my students writing out the dates of their assessments so they can work through them chronologically' Participant L*

This insight contradicts Snowling and Hulme's (2024) definition of dyslexia which links to phonological processing as a main factor, rather than the associated issues of working memory and speed of processing.

Theme 3 Labels and stereotypes – how many of the effects of dyslexia are misunderstood (including the groups own misunderstandings).

We discussed the idea of our professional identity and questioned how we see ourselves as academics, lecturers or educators.

> *'I don't see myself as an academic – it's a stereotype but I think of academics as wearing corduroy and I don't wear corduroy!' Participant A.*

> *'I always say I'm not a real academic, I used to think it was because I was a new academic but now 10 years in the university, I still say it because I don't think I fit in as an academic' Participant S.*

We started to reconsider our own stereotypes we had developed about dyslexia and dyslexics.

> *'My youngest sister and my dad had been diagnosed before me. And the worst thing is, especially now I've been diagnosed, the worst thing is, is the biggest thing was, (me thinking) but they're being lazy. They're not trying hard enough.' Participant A*

Contrary to the narrative around dyslexia that phonological issues are disabling (Snowling and Hulme, 2024) some of the group members love reading and writing, but we do need more time.

> *'And although I'm a filmmaker, my absolute love is writing. I love academic writing. I really do love reading and writing, which doesn't sit with some people very well, because stereotyping is dyslexics don't want to read. So that will really confuse people. And yeah, that kind of is frustrating as well. And I love to read. I love to write, but I can't sit still long enough to do it. There's also that so when I read, I get up every five minutes, like do something and then sitting back down again' Participant L*

We therefore need to drive the change to help colleagues understand that dyslexia is more than reading and writing issues. The use of AI tools may mitigate against some of the traditional literacy challenges faced but the reading and processing of information and cognitive overload remains for many. We are happy for our students to behave in the same way, to move in class, to ask for help with time management, so they are comfortable and at ease in their learning.

We also need to move, sometimes to doodle and might need longer to collate our teaching materials. We are OK with all that, in fact we want to be open about it, but many of our peers don't realise or appreciate the impact this has on us.

> *'I whizz round the room on chair… the students know I need to move and comment on it' Participant W*

Participant A for example talked about a student who likes to sit under their desk to get away from the lights if the environment becomes difficult for them *Participant A* has normalised this behaviour by being open about her own challenges in certain environments. Some argue that physical behaviour is linked to a comorbidity with another developmental disorder such as an attentive issue (Rose, 2009; Snowling and Hulme, 2024) rather than the dyslexia itself. It is difficult to unpick how much of the behaviour we see in ourselves, and our students is due to comorbidity, other causes or linked to childhood trauma or being othered (Collinson, 2012) or due to the feeling of exclusion due to society around us (Riddick, 2001). I would argue that we feel all these things and the insistence of measuring academic achievement based on literacy skills only adds to this hierarchy within some institutions or

colleagues themselves that written assessments are somehow more valid. The idea of an alternative assessment for a dyslexic student means we are still highlighting their difference. We also continue with the stereotyping that dyslexic students 'struggle' with reading and writing; for some they love it but just need more time or clearer frameworks to complete what is required of them.

We use this insight to challenge higher education practices including assessment types.

> *'It's finding that balance sometimes with the students as well, that thing of like, you having to say (to yourself) yes, I did a master's, I have written those words. So you can but then I am why are we getting students to do 1000 word reflective pieces? Why are we doing this? Let's get them to make a video instead.' Participant W*

> *'Assessments like these presentations are so geared towards you going into industry, and you'll be doing the listening, focusing on presentations, because you'll have to pitch stuff and all the rest of it. Whereas obviously, the academic side of learning research writing was not a very big focus, or it shouldn't be'. Participant A*

Theme 4 How we use the positives of dyslexic such as empathy and creative thinking to shape our own teaching practice..

We have strengths – many strengths and we want our students (and our peers) to know about these positives. We share these strengths with our students so we can help to build their confidence. We agreed and listed our strengths as: The idea that we consider dyslexia from a position of difference or even ability rather than deficit. (Collinson, 2012). The idea that we are discriminated, that 'literacy should be done in a certain way' (Collinson and Barden, 2016; Collinson, 2012, 2014) That we should frame dyslexia as lexism – the othering or discrimination of dyslexia and as such undermines the power of the spoken word rather than just the written word. We agreed that we would want people to know about the positives we have as dyslexics, through talking and sharing our stories we agreed in our discussions that all of us we are brilliant at:

- Storytelling
- Problem solving
- Big picture thinking
- Empathic and sympathetic helping and supporting others.

All of us has other skills as well that helped us in our roles which we felt certain were linked to our dyslexia.

We started to discuss how different we were from other academics

'We are different to potentially other academic colleagues because they are used to getting the information and then regurgitating it to the students, whereas we bring a bit more of a personal element in in the way that we empathize with our students.' Participant A

We are not just lecturers, we are educators, and, in many ways like a lot of lecturers, we are the ones being educated by the students. We want our students to have better support than we did, and we are open about what worked, and we share our own strategies and stories. We do this from a place of our own experience.

'When you kind of think about your own experiences, and what you were really lacking in terms of support your kind of what I'm not going to make the same mistake with my students' Participant A

'Within my sessions, when I introduce myself to the students, and I say I've got dyslexia, the number of times I've had students go, oh, yeah, I've also got it but they do it in a quiet kind of way - after the session. Participant A

We were somewhat cynical about the support our students were offered and whether it was of any use. We all agreed that the 'one size fits all' approach to learning support plans were not always appropriate.

'With the assistive technology, (for dyslexia) I found that I didn't use it that much, (it didn't solve my issues) it wasn't part of the problem that I had. So, I just found if anything, it was more of an issue to try and work out and so I did it my way' Participant A

'(But) You should use it because it was like given it to you, right?' Participant L

As practitioners we are learning all the time and are open to feedback from our students. By teaching in a more open and multi-sensory way – encouraging rest breaks, moving around in the room if required and being open about our own differences.

I say, look, I know when I get excited, I jump from thing to thing, and I will go down random rabbit holes. If you're confused by what I'm saying, why not explain, please just draw me back to the original path. And then I will reexplain or kind of, say, it in a different way. Alicia

Group members agreed that we allow our students to open and to sometimes unmask.

'Even if they don't feel comfortable talking to each other about potential dyslexia or anything like that, I want them to feel comfortable with me. Because at the same point, I suppose I'm going, look, these are my potential weaknesses, you might also have the same, I'm not expecting you to stand up in front of everyone tell everyone and give details. But if there's something that you want to be able to try and discuss in terms of assignments or anything like that, I'm basically I'm trying to create an open-door kind of thing'. Participant A

We are therefore able to measure the success of our students in a different way. Assessment types can be varied – no relying on just written assessments, but we can also measure the success of our students through their confidence, development of self-advocacy skills and personal wellbeing.

The edited version of workshops can be heard in the podcast. It is edited so that four themes are compiled together. Through the discussions in the podcast the voice of the dyslexic can be heard, and the power of collective criticality and challenge felt. The podcast was edited so that the different workshops are mixed by theme rather than chronologically.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to consider the research question:

> How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

And to consider the secondary questions:

> Does the dyslexic label lead to a culture of disability and 'deficit' within universities?

> How and why do we measure the success of dyslexic students in universities?

Reflecting on the conversations and discussions through the theoretical framework of the social model of disability (and dyslexia) the participants returned again and again to the labelling of dyslexia as a deficit. Of the dyslexic being the problem, being the issue and of the institution building scaffolding and support rather that really changing the environment.

Developing the project using participatory action research has seen an increase in the confidence of all the participants who are all now challenging the status quo. The voice of the dyslexic academic can be heard, and it does challenge the restrictions imposed upon both by the structure of the institution. Throughout the workshops Participant T commented on the inflexibility of the institution.

> *'Well, that's not going to work as **the institution** doesn't want to do that' Participant T*

Which leads me to question what might a university gain from positioning dyslexia as a deficit? Does it review the hidden culture of the power of the written word being stronger that other ways or imparting knowledge. Why do we place greater value on literacy rather than oral narrative within our cultures?? And ironically how might the change in both how people now digest and share information as well as the 'threat' of AI might challenge the perceived importance of the written word. We do still measure success of students based on the grade of their degree, and their progression (the kind of job they get afterwards). But increasingly we need to hear the student voice the recent changes to the National Student Survey which now includes questions on wellbeing might be a step in the right direction. Or is it for some institutions the fear of persecution for not supporting students with protected characteristics?

6.1 Deconstructing and unlearning together.

This thesis set out to consider and challenge the label of dyslexia within higher education. To consider the voice of the dyslexic, to challenge the stereotypes from within the institution we are working in using some might argue the 'privileged voice' of the academic. To consider the discrimination or lexism we feel in an environment where the written word is seen as the most powerful form of communication.

Through the review of the literature, the language used within the institution and listening to the collective voice we have established the stereotypes that the diagnosis carries. We agreed that for the institution and many of our peers to be dyslexic means:

- A struggle with reading. This means that as a child it may have taken a long time to learn to read with poor word naming and recall. As an adult it may take you longer to read and process text. This does not however mean dyslexic people cannot read.
- Struggling with writing, as a child this might have been the actual act of writing with handwriting being difficult, forming letters and letter reversion being very common. As an adult this might translate into not being able to write well with spelling and grammar issues (though these are largely helped with AI tools). This can however affect the structuring of essays and long pieces of writing. (Something I have struggled with through this whole doctoral process).
- You are not very 'bright'. This stereotype is perhaps only true for dyslexics before they are diagnosed. For some very intelligent dyslexics they can hide or mask their literacy challenges. This is known as stealth dyslexia and is often the reason many students are not diagnosed until they get to university or further into adulthood.
- You are lazy. Sometimes even though we know we are dyslexic we think we are lazy as we put off, delay, or avoided doing things. Does this mean we are lazy or that we find these tasks difficult to do? (Participant A thought her own sister who was diagnosed earlier in her childhood with dyslexia was lazy or just not trying hard enough).

The diagnosis process itself was very emotional – some of us were relieved but others were angry about the process. We all agreed that students are not supported emotionally during this process and the referral. As discussed in the podcast to be labelled as being disabled at any age is difficult but in adulthood is particularly emotional.

The use of collective memory autoethnography worked as an open and honest way of developing insight in a supportive non-biassed way. The process of *unlearning* the harmful lessons from our own education in a collaborative way made us feel supported and allowed us to acknowledge that we may not have been the *problem* after all. It has had a direct impact upon all the respondents, they now feel more

supported, part of a team and empowered to go out and challenge the institution. Whilst the research set out to be critical in nature the power of collective change and activism was a bonus. All the participants are now actively wanting to drive change in this area both through their teaching, their research as well as in the roles they are now taking both within and outside of the institution. There is however a challenge with all memory-based work in that we may 'misremember' elements of our life stories and that collectively we may be discussing similarities which may be inaccurate. Some of the participants have subsequently spoken to family members about our discussions to revalidate our experiences. For some participants the process has allowed us to have some sort of closure on our school memories and even to advocate for our children and family members in a different way.

The use of the podcast means that the voice of the participants is heard rather than it being 'interpreted or transcribed' by the researcher. The collaborative nature of the work means that all the respondents can use the podcast in a way that is transferrable and drive critical change more than a written thesis. During the editing process for the podcast the journalist who worked on the production with me could feel the emotion and commented on the value of the work outside of a purely academic field. Therefore, the podcast and future research from the project has the potential to challenge stereotyping of dyslexia beyond higher education – in schools, the workplace or just within the social space. The idea of recognising classroom trauma is growing and the need to challenge the interpretation of behaviours which are in fact masking. We need to notice how our learners react in different environments. To consider learning spaces as being organic rather than just classrooms or lecture halls.

The collection of themes and thoughts mean that the 'voice of the oppressed' is heard but it is not just one voice but the voice of a collective to see patterns and commonality between people. This has had the added impact of building confidence in the newer academics. One participant is now heavily involved in driving the Equity and Inclusion consultation within the university. Another participant now feels empowered to undertake PhD work themselves and wants to consider the question and discuss the perceptions of disability in universities. Several of the participants want to continue to work and support each other going forward.

6.2 Empowering and more confident

Participant W is empowered and has volunteered to be out in the community supporting the outreach team working with students who have started to disengage with education. He takes the ideas of fanzines and music lyrics out to schools to help get students involved. Participant W starts his sessions by introducing himself and on the slide, it says,

> *"I am W and I am dyslexic". Participant W*

Participant W says that often half the class sit up and say I'm dyslexic too or start to engage in the workshop in a different way.

> *"It's like an "*'I am Spartacus' *moment". Participant W*

When reflecting on the workshops themselves it felt like one hour is not long enough! The talking and emotional discussion was a lot, at times too much for all the participants. The space felt inclusive and safe but if anyone felt overwhelmed, they could leave if they needed to without any apology or excuse. Mutual counselling and ongoing friendships have started and continued. Following the initial workshops, I decided to present some of the ideas at a joint universities (University of Greenwich, University of Kent, and Canterbury Christ Church University) learning and teaching event and two of the participants wanted to come along. They presented the findings and their feelings about the work and discussed openly how their childhood memories have influenced their teaching and their identity in the classroom. During these presentations they made comments to their peers like:

> *'Our ideas and way of teaching work for everyone' Participant W*

> *'What we do naturally seems to be best practice for all'. Participant A*

> *'My students don't need extensions or to ask for help – I know when they need help or are struggling (and I support them then not when it's too late)' Participant W*

When we presented at the learning and teaching conference, we were asked how we encourage honest discussion in class to help students to be open and discuss how they are feeling. One question posed was how we help students to 'unmask' and to become at ease in the learning space. We all said we were to some degree open and honest with our students around our identities and how they had impacted our school days. We let students know when we needed to fidget, move around the room or when we found the flow of conversation too much. This normalised behaviours that might have been othered in school and gave students the confidence to be themselves. The importance of acknowledging the negative experiences we have had in the classroom is important as it has both allowed us to reframe this experience but also shared with students that this does not always hold you back in life. This can be seen in the work Participant W is doing with the outreach team working with secondary school students who has started to disengage with education. One recommendation from the research is to explore the idea of allowing students to consider their school days and the negatives and positives they have experienced as part of the transition into university.

The idea behind the use of collective memory workshops had been to allow the voice of the *disabled* to be heard but to offset any feeling of individualism or emotive bias because it is the voice of many. The collective and autobiographical nature of the work means that whilst the work is emotive the similarities between the life stories can be used to drive change through a critical and activist approach. However, the research has not heard the voice of all types of dyslexic academics – there are those who are not

open about their dyslexia who do not want to discuss this with peers or students. The work also does not include colleagues from different ethnical backgrounds nor those that work in professional services roles.

6.3 How inclusive was the research itself?

It would have been useful to have included some colleagues who were educated outside of the UK or colleagues who have Black, Asian and Ethnic minority heritage. Talking to colleagues within the university there are perhaps intersectionalities between race and dyslexia that needs exploring more. There is, for some cultures, still the shame and embarrassment of being labelled as deficient or handicapped and the sense that you might not want to seek a diagnosis. Some young people may be discouraged from pursuing a diagnosis by family members or members of their community. As the literature shows the idea of dyslexia being a disability could be seen as a Northern centric approach. Yet within Northern European cultures there is a different approach to dyslexia. My sister, for example, was educated in Canada and now lives in France – she suspects her own children are neurodiverse but says the French are 'behind' in their understanding or diagnosis of difference. Whereas my cousins in Australia were screened and diagnosed with Visual Stress (Irlens Syndrome) as part of a consideration of environmental impact prior to any screening for dyslexia.

The next stage for this research is to potentially involve those peers who were educated in other countries who may bring a different insight and would help to drive further change developing the intersectionality with race and heritage. To further explore cultures where storytelling, or the oral narrative are more respected in education. One colleague who was interested in the research commented that she was probably dyslexic like her child but as she had been educated in Greece it was not considered in the same way. Her belief was the Greek alphabet had evolved in a way which made the sounding of words easier when a child first learns to read.

In some western cultures written knowledge is power and the art of storytelling or the oral narrative is not held in such high esteem. The education system in the UK emphasises reading, writing, spelling and handwriting within primary schools all areas which dyslexic children might find more difficult. This fosters a perception of failure from an earlier stage whereas communities where education is focused on learning through play or indeed storytelling would not segregate children in the same way. Thus, the childhood trauma and feelings of inadequacy felt by my participants may possibly not be felt as deeply in other communities. Indeed, had colleagues been diagnosed earlier in their schooling might their educational journey have been different and what impact might this have had on them as educators in the UK?

It might also have been useful to have included some colleagues who might want to remain anonymous or who have chosen not to be open about their dyslexia. I have met several academics including those in very senior roles who do not want others within the institution to know about their dyslexia. I would like to discuss this further with them to understand why they feel the need to be anonymous and thus create another stage of the research. Undoubtedly, they have developed excellent strategies and skills in their workplaces, and it would be useful to include these in further action-based research projects as well as trying to understand why they might want to be anonymous in their diagnosis.

6.4 Presenting the research in an inclusive way.

I felt passionately from the start of the Doctorate in Education that the final work should not be presented solely as a written piece. The writing itself has been difficult – not the spelling and grammar but the structure and layout. Areas like the literature and methodology were difficult to structure and write. My brain works best at looking at the bigger picture and it was difficult to section off and structure these areas where many of the themes run across all these areas. There are sections where the layout is still confusing, but I have retained them as they reflect some of the challenges I face as a dyslexic in writing in an 'academic' way. It also felt hypocritical to submit the research using only written text when there are other more inclusive ways of sharing research. Yet this was a challenge. There were no clear regulations around assessment types nor criteria for *alternative assessments*. So, there was a need to circumnavigate the regulations to allow the submission to include a different assessment. The regulations meant that the work could be submitted with 'an artefact' which would account for up to 30% of the word count. I have therefore considered the podcast as an artefact and have submitted it alongside the written theses. There is however no guidance on the length of the podcast, how it should be submitted nor how the two elements work together. It felt right that the podcast should form the main element to the analysis section with some brief introduction – rather than a synopsis of the project. This meant that the voices can be heard – both figuratively and literally and the words spoken be edited to pull together and link the analysis of the work undertaken. There is currently no way of submitting the Doctorate in Education as a 'practice based' piece of research and this is something I am continuing to challenge within the university.

Initially I had wanted to film the meetings, I had felt that the use of film would pick up more than just the words spoken and would show the body language and the group dynamic in a way that would be more three dimensional. Following, as discussed earlier, the challenges some participants felt at being filmed and I made the move from a film towards a podcast which seemed the appropriate way to allow the project to move forward. During the sessions I could feel that some neurodiverse colleagues were anxious about seeing themselves on screen and this made the discussion uncomfortable and even the

body language was hunched and pensive. The idea of a podcast still ensured that the information and results were shared in a 'non-written' way. The podcast also makes for clearer analysis. The transcription of the text allowed for themes and key words that had been repeated to be considered and to be developed. However, moving away from the film did mean we lost the hidden meanings, expressions, and body language we might have captured. The moment when colleagues were mutually supporting each other, smiling and nodding heads when colleagues were talking is lost. Throughout the story telling and memory recall it was telling how we reacted both in our eye contact (sometimes closing our eyes as we tried to remember the classroom memories), the way we held ourselves and even how we physically reacted to reassure each other. With some colleagues wanting to hug and embrace when they felt they or others needed it.

The idea of a podcast also means that it is accessible outside of academia and can be used for conferences, learning and teaching events and other shared practices. For the nature of this work, it seemed more appropriate to produce an output that can be used both as an academic piece or research as well as training or CPD based activity. Ultimately the podcast can be both critical and assessable in its approach.

6.5 Challenging the stereotype and the normative practice.

The critical nature of the work and what can happen next was discussed in the workshops and in follow-on conversations. We debated whether the voice of the neurodiverse could be the future of higher education learning as we face the challenge of Artificial Intelligence. The creative and three-dimensional way of working, the empathy and intuition thinking skills that are all strengths of dyslexia need to be recognised and validated within higher education. We considered how we include the voice of the dyslexic in our student facing work and how we develop the student self-advocacy so they can produce work that develops their skills but also plays to their strengths. We discussed the idea of moving to one assessment at the end of each semester – like an end of year show seen in Art Colleges. How do we instil that education is about trying and sometimes failing but learning from the experience. We have students that have not had an easy journey through academia but who have learnt so much from the experience but who are now unfortunately crippled with more student debt.

This work has shown that neurodiverse staff feel less lonely and isolated, the group has helped changed this feeling and now we need to drive change within the organisation and move it forward. The reviewing of the university's equity and diversity strategy is considering the staff voice and several of the group members felt empowered to contribute to this strategy. This work allows staff to be open and honest and to self-advocate for themselves and their neurodiverse peers. There was a marked improvement in self-esteem raised amongst participants being open about their dyslexia and sharing it

more. This has contributed to both their day to day and strategic roles. Participant W, Participant A and Participant L have all now taken on roles within the university which focus on learning and teaching, inclusion and outreach, which is a sign both of increased confidence and the desire to keep pushing for change.

6.6 Making the change in the future.

The research from this thesis has already developed into an action group going forward driving change and challenging the status quo. We have started to contest the normative practices around learning teaching and assessment, to challenge the support for neurodiverse staff members and to develop more research practice areas. Presenting the work collectively allows all the participants to defend the work has expanded the potential further. I wrote an introduction to our abstract to position our group and it is this that frames the ongoing research.:

> We a multi-disciplinary bunch of neurodiverse academics (and two of us are also students) who are fed up with the deficit model that we and our students are surrounded with. We are story tellers, poets, filmmakers, artists, and educators who hate filling in forms. We take a wandering path through our teaching, and we love to fidget, go off on a tangent, spin on our chairs and doodle our way through meetings. We know from our own educational journeys that institutions can be too rigid and inflexible for our neurodiverse minds. Our neurodiverse students come into higher education traumatised from fitting in and navigating the inflexible education system. We want to challenge '*reasonable adjustments*' '*alternative assessments*' and maybe even deadlines to shake off rigidity of the system. We want students to unlearn all the structure they have been taught, to challenge the feeling of inferiority, because they think differently, can't learn by rote or need to daydream. Come join us whilst we debate how we can empower students to choose how and when they learn. To drive the positivity in difference and to consider how important problem solving, storytelling, and picture thinking is as we fight against the AI machine.

> Join us as we share our ideas, get involved in our story telling as we reconsider the power that comes from having a neurodiverse mind. There may be poetry, there may be film, there may be music or there may be some meditation who knows what we might create on the day.

As well as sharing the research in an academic way we have been pushing to make structural and cultural changes within the institution. We are trying to empower students to change and develop – to put on the extrovert overcoat, to self-advocate and develop strategies that are transferrable and work in

postgraduate life. It is difficult to measure this using traditional metrics but anecdotal comments and stories from students and new alumni are reflecting this change. It could also be shown by the high NSS (National Student Satisfaction) results for the courses the participants teach on. In addition, all the participants (except me) have been recipients or nominees for Golden Apple prizes which are student nominated awards for staff,

The research has also led me to question and develop a new working way with the wellbeing team. I have challenged why students and staff need a diagnosis to access support and how we develop an environment that is inclusive. Diagnosing is expensive and can be a barrier to some – both financially and culturally. And the mental knock-on effects of a late diagnosis and the change in identity to being disabled needs to be supported and managed in a holistic way.

We need to review and reconsider the language used around dyslexia. The younger generations are more inclusive and more understanding of difference – with the increase in levels of anxiety amongst the younger generation the need to be more open and honest is increasing. However, the governments drive to focus on STEM based subjects and the obvious downgrading of creative courses means that some of the learning opportunities where the dyslexic brain might flourish are declining. This in turn leads us to consider how we build positivity within HEIs? Are we equipping our graduates for postgraduate life if we encourage them to move away from the scaffolding, specialist accessibility tools and more of them towards a model of self-advocacy. Normalising difference rather than using a deficit model means that we are preparing students for graduate life in a way that the can use their own strategies. Accessible and everyday tools that are built into their mobile phones to dictate, check and rewrite. To send voice notes rather than emails or even text messages, encourage unmasking and the developing of coping skills and strategies that can work in all environments and workplaces including higher education institutions.

As a direct result of the research, I am already piloting a project with students on the Games Design Degree and Wellbeing to look at course-led learning support plans and pushing for change in course revalidation. Initiatives that are taking this work forward include:

The idea of screening a whole cohort of students rather than just singling out some students and making them feel like they are being treated differently than their peers.

Working with the Wellbeing team and Learning and Teaching Enhancement to change the institutional culture that students must have a diagnosis to be able to access support, by being truly inclusive in our assessment design we don't need alternative assessments for dyslexic students. Embedding learning and teaching practices that include assessment which are multi-sensory. An interesting example of this

within my own institution has been the use of podcasts on the Occupational Therapy course. Equipping OTs with the tools to develop podcast means that not only are they being assessment on a 'non-written' assessment but there are producing public health advice in an inclusive way for their future clients.

I have recently started teaching on the Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching which all new academics completed when they join the university. In the session I deliver on inclusive practice we discuss developing teaching strategies which embed study skills that work for dyslexic students; breaking down tasks, checking in on understanding and using visual prompts for example work for all students. I used an example of whole cohort teaching on the Media and Public Relations course include teaching all students to use the embedded software in Microsoft. Using tools such as 'read aloud' to proofread press releases works for everyone and doesn't rely on dyslexic students having buy or download specialist accessibility software. This has the additional benefit of developing skills at university that are easily transferrable to the workplace without needing specialist scaffolding

As a group we have are being open and honest about our own strengths and weaknesses to ensure sharing amongst peers. This has developed into a neurodiverse staff network where both academic and professional services staff meet virtually to support each other. This has normalised working practices and environments and allowed us to share ways we change our environments and how we self-advocate for ourselves and advocate for both peers and students

The university has now undertaken a full curriculum review and looked at a new academic framework with an embedding of inclusive practices throughout. We are normalising needing to move in lessons to consider more breaks, changing the environment whether it means using outdoor space, moving furniture or adjusting lighting.

6.7 Final Reflections

So, what are the final reflections from both the research and the research process itself?

Firstly, staff members felt more supported and less isolated. – one contributor asked when we could meet again, another contributor said they didn't feel so lonely anymore. In the same way that colleagues who play football together or sing in the university choir the idea of a supportive work-based group is a positive outcome. All the groups are now founding members of a larger university wide staff neurodiversity network who are starting to push for change. The tribe is growing, and more and more neurodiverse colleagues are reaching out to get involved. In addition, other staff members are asking my advice or asking me to talk to team members about how we support dyslexic students. Secondly, staff members can see the value of the approach and the work. There is a real desire to drive this forward and the feeling that we could work together to make critical change. Following the presentation of the

work my colleagues now feel more like 'real academics' having attended and presented at several research conferences. However, one does need to reflect on why they were not supported in this by the institution anyway? Thirdly, the team started to share and brainstorm ideas on how they can share best practice for learning and teaching and assessment ideas. They have also started to share how others might make dyslexic students feel more comfortable and empowered in the classroom. Fourthly the work has influenced our approach to outreach and support new students as they transition into higher education. One colleague has started to introduce himself as being dyslexic when visiting schools on outreach visits and was delighted with the response from the young people. The positioning of being dyslexic but still successful in open days and community events is helping to challenge the negativity and deficit model that young people might face. Fifthly the sharing of the research to date within CCCU at conferences and research events quite clearly shown engagement and buy in from many different colleagues including those in professional services roles such as student support and estates. The open nature of the discussion had allowed other colleagues both academic and professional services to open up about their dyslexia and the impact this has on both their daily lives and their working environment.

Finally, the discussion has started about intersectionality, the cultural differences between the acceptance of a 'disability' or dyslexia and how that might impact on a student's identity. In the same way that gender, sexuality, illness, or trauma might affect their sense of belonging. When this work is shared both within and beyond the university, we can see the need for a network of neurodiverse staff alongside more established networks such as LGBT+ and working-class networks. We can also see the influence of the teacher's identity. We are all story tellers, and the workshops allowed us to discuss our stories and to share our narratives. We are normalising habits and behaviours which might previously have been seen as bad. It is OK to fidget and move, it is OK to not want to make eye contact. It is OK to share these feelings, emotions and coping strategies with students and peers to make the classroom more inclusive.

The emancipatory nature of the work means we now feel empowered. The collective nature of the work means everyone feels they are part of the work. We have challenged the stereotypes – we are not deficit, broken, have issues with reading and writing, we do not struggle any more than any of our academic peers. We are problem solvers and work with people.

One final reflection this work, and the process will make a change for both the participants, their students, and the wider institution.

"I have had an awakening; I am enjoying being mischievous, I will push for change" Participant W.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Cover Sheet for Dyslexia

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS COVERSHEET FOR EXAMINATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS	
Candidate number:	4003460

DETAILS OF ADJUSTMENTS AGREED
• Consideration for spelling, punctuation and grammar

Notice to academic staff

This coversheet should be passed to the person marking a piece of work.

Please mark the attached assignment or paper in the usual way before applying consideration in line with the arrangements detailed above. Please sign below to confirm that you have given consideration to the arrangements detailed above.

To the Marker/s

Please make sure that the special arrangements have been applied, after the work has been blind marked.

To the Programme Director

When the completed sheet has been returned to you by the marker, please forward it to the Deputy Chair for presentation to the Board of Examiners.

To the Board of Examiners

Please minute that the special arrangements have been applied and retain the coversheet on file within the academic department for the period of time outlined by the University's procedures.

Name of marker............................... Signature..........................Date.............

Name of marker............................... Signature..........................Date.............

Signature of Student Disability Services Manager

Appendix 2 Transcripts of workshops

I have included full transcripts of all the workshops and have shown how following a review of the transcript's themes were identified and sections of each area colour coded. The final podcast was then edited so that the audio from the different workshops were edited into one final piece.

Colour coded for themes:

Purple – personal memories and stories

Blue – positioning as a deficit

Green – higher education stereotyping and how it impacts us now.

Red – how we can drive change going forward.

Workshop 1 Transcript

Participant S:

So, I don't have structured questions. This is not a focus group. This is not me interviewing. Because the whole premise of what I want to do is take, if we're comfortable that part of what Participant T's always talked about deconstructing kind of our identity, how we sit here as hashtag. And this is something that we both use hashtag dyslexic academic what that difference is between being dyslexic and academic. Part of what I want to get from today is for us to kind of introduce ourselves, but not in a, you know, this is the job I do. However, you want to introduce yourself, however, you want to kind of position yourself, label yourself, whatever if you don't want to label yourself and then I want to just start having a conversation around kind of impart of that I think that background is do we have we self-diagnose? When will we diagnose? Why did we feel the need to diagnose? Kind of and then thinking about? Yeah, I'm going to get a PhD out of this. But actually, what more importantly, out of it is hopefully, a body of people that can work on different projects in different ways, and help student nurses or help student filmmakers, or help student graphic designers feel that you don't necessarily have to mould to fit the system. Does that kind of make sense? Yes. So I'm gonna go first, just to warm it up. So you will know me anyway. So I'm S, I did teach on media and comms now Faculty Director learning and teaching. I was not diagnosed being dyslexic till I was 45. And I was only diagnosed because I was doing my Masters by Research, and I was told a cover sheet would be useful to take into account my spelling and grammar issues with part of my master's that actually was six, seven years ago, and then covered. Quite a lot of what I didn't realise at the time was deconstruction, quite a lot of anger around

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kind of my feeling in the classroom, probably distress. And it's interesting that I used to get exhausted at university, I used to have to go to bed at eight o'clock, because I was exhausted with keeping on top of everything, but always still got the two days and a pay level. Scraped to toe, all of that kind of and I think part of what I've learned from that is that what I wasn't prepared for was the labour was there supposedly to help me. But actually I wasn't prepared for there might be dramatic, but the mental anxiety of what it bought out and there was no support within the university or anywhere else for someone to go, this is going to make you go back to being four years old and under not understanding why you couldn't write your name the white way round. And that's really what's driven the Doctorate in Education plus also seeing students here struggling hearing all the stereotypes around I once had a bright PhD student who was dyslexic, you know, really, and then seeing my own case, hit certain educational milestones and just see their little confidence in their personalities discipline. Enough of me who wants to go next

Participant _A:_

Oh, goodness. Alright, so I'm Participant A. And I recently joined the digital media team. So right so I'm desk was born deaf. My mom didn't find out until one. So I missed a lot of normal development milestones anyway, in terms of speech and stuff like that. Anyway. I didn't find out I was dyslexic until I finished the foundation knew of my course, which was in 2016. One of the interesting things that dyslexic assessor said to me was because I've been able to develop coping strategies in terms of my deafness, the dyslexia could have been missed purely because I had developed certain coping strategies. And as I've kind of gone through my course, what I realised is a lot of my coping strategies actually stem from anxiety. So because I'm so overly anxious about certain things in terms of spelling, writing, timekeeping and things like that, I turn up to everything half an hour early. I'm you know, very, I give myself lots of time in terms of writing as well. So I was then diagnosed with ADHD at the tail end of 2021. So yeah, so when I graduated in 2020, I then pursued Masters by Research. And during that time, I kind of my mental health, real proper knock. So I went to my doctor, I was like, this is this is more than just depression or an anxiety. There's something underlying there. So that's why I was put forward for an assessment. It turns out not only my ADHD, I'm also autistic according to the assessment, the only reason why I am perhaps not too vocal about the autism side of it is because I'm not sure how comfortable I sit with that particular label. And I think also because you can't really medicate autism, whereas you can for ADHD. And so I suppose I always kind of let people know that I'm deaf and got ADHD purely because there are strategies around that, in terms of what I do and what I can basically help other people to do in regards to me. But again, I really relate to the idea of you kind of then look back on your life and you kind of go, Oh, my God, there's so many things that have been missed in the trauma, like the unnecessary trauma that you then suffer. But also what I found was, oh, cough at a point where I was going with this. Yeah, no. That's another thing as well, my memory is absolutely atrocious.

And I know that ADHD and dyslexia are quite commonly linked as well. So yeah, so my, my working memory is awful. But ya know.

Participant   L:

So I'm Participant L. I was diagnosed in school. But a little late, like in school, because I wasn't doing as well as it appeared I should be doing. And I sort of knew as well, I guess, I know, I've got ADHD. I've never bothered having a diagnosis. I diagnosed my wife who that turned out to be correctly I can I know that I have. And also other signs of neurodiversity that I find eye contact really difficult. And particularly in this situation, actually. So excuse it. It's, that's why but yeah, I think the divers probably better than anything else. I've got quite a short attention span, I'm sitting still got quite a short attention span. And just feels like everything's always galloping at a million miles an hour, I think is one of them. I do exactly same thing. I'm always early, like massively early to everything. Everyone will comment on how good my timekeeping and my organisation is, and tasks and stuff. And it's because of the colossal amount of time and anxiety or spend over it. And then a fury I feel when somebody asked for any more, or, you know, seems to think I find it easy, which is just not the case at all. I also love writing. And although I'm a filmmaker, my absolute love is writing. I love academic writing. I really do love reading and writing, which doesn't sit with some people very well, because the stereotyping Dyslexics don't want to read. So that will really vary people. And yeah, that kind of is frustrating as well. And I love to read I love to write, but I can't system long enough to do it. There's also that so when I read write up every five minutes, like doing something and then sitting back down again, but yeah, I think that's a good description.

Participant   W:

Yeah. So Well, currently programme director of graphic design, and not diagnosed. But definitely aware at school. And I think it was things like teachers going home, you're sitting upright, and you're really paying attention. But actually, You're so lazy, you've gone all the way around, and you're so like not interested in class that you've come full circle. And actually, I just remember like, really attempting and trying and sitting upright to try and engage with the class and just things would go over my head. But yeah, the teachers took it as a complete kind of negative. And it was only like I'm constantly being told are the classes like chips and we can only go with like a convoy of chips and we can only go as fast as the slowest shipping you are the slowest ship. And again, it would be that thing of really like being attempting stuff or being told you have to attend all of the lunchtime dissertation classes to catch up with your work and just not dissertation. Detention sorry, the tension classes and just always being in these rooms going but I'm, I'm really wanting to do well and trying but always kind of just struggling. So I think knowing and I think that's one of the reasons I kind of grew up going to academia quite late after sort of 1015 years away from school, like even just pondering it. And I had that thing of there were two classes for graphic design. One was like the naughty kids and one was the good kids. And I remember like, Oh, this is this is a subject here I quite enjoyed but I was in the naughty kids and telling

the teacher like could I move to the and it wasn't like done skills. It was just it just worked out that they were the better kids and they were like no because you're one of the naughty kids like so you shouldn't be here. And that was definitely a thing of thinking about our general I have a have enough in me to do quite Well, it's something I recommend, if it isn't talking to you in the university doesn't have to be academic. It's not always like that. And once I kind of realised that and gave it a go, I was amazed at that kind of stick it to them. And then like I remember having a meeting about why you doing an MA and like, because I have a point to prove unnecessarily. Even just yourself. Yeah, but it's weird things like, just before about opening my mouth that imposter syndrome that I get everything is almost crippling, like, you know, knowing you, and then this is a safe space. And we're like, we're in the room, it Chin's still, I was like, Well, I feel that I have to say, and I think that stems from the

Participant S:

fact that that's probably not a good environment for you. Because originally I wanted to do it away from teaching space, right? So maybe next time we'll meet away from campus or away from teaching. But

Participant W:

thankfully, this isn't like the way that we teach isn't like a teach aids a very I sit around, we have discussion. So. But still, there's something in it where? Yeah, before I open my mouth about stuff, I have to like, feel like I'm in control of the environment. Tell me you happy to go next last? Yeah, yeah.

Participant T:

So I guess for me, it's sort of a pattern of all of these languages that are being used. So I was like, I was I was at school, but I question too much. So I was segregated from the sort of the spaces where you could learn. So I had to find other ways of learning. I chose mal adaption and a lot of other techniques to try to make things feel more okay for me, whether or not that was substance misuse, or just trying to find options to try to make the world feel as if I thought it should feel, but it didn't. And that kind of continued, really, until I sort of had to gain some sort of role. And that was, all of my skill sets that was sort of perceived negatively suddenly became really beneficial when you get into a&e. If you are naughty, if you are bad, if you're older, you've got a connection with someone else's way. And you know, and suddenly, all of those things that were kind of ADHD like, or whatever that whatever the term was, became real skill set. So I can manage people well, because I understand the humanism around being broken. And so it kind of just all panned out a little bit. And I sort of thought that would be it really, until like a sessional, I got invited in. And I just told the students the truth, and they were all like, we want him we don't want that one. We don't want them anymore. We don't want all of those

ones that just talk to us about like, the sort of the blueprint of what the NHS should look like, we want the one that's telling us about the reality of what it is because it matching placement. And so then they had to sort of come and employ me and I think a lot of for a lot of if it's always felt like you know, that I've been put in a position where people have regrettably, had to concede to having me and and that's a really difficult part of being sort of othered. And so now not not only am I right achieving things, what's happening is with the Masters, I achieved that distinction, but I had to write to one narrative that explained what I was going to tell them so that they could come along on the journey, otherwise, they would have approached it without any understanding, it would have been like, you know, sending them on an adventure and saying, do one, like it wasn't fair. So I kind of like I and then slowly what seems to have happened is, as I've accepted who I am, rather than the values around what others tell me, I am through doing art deconstructing, and then reassessing, and then doing that again, and then breaking things down and then playing. The left hemisphere is slowly falling asleep. And now my creative element, and my answer is absolutely awake. And it is flatly refusing to be involved in any oppression or language. And that language is all you're saying, academic language. For me. It's anything that's written down. It's anything that's a learning contract. It's anything that's a learning outcome, because none of that fits with the theories that I'm now kind of developing if you want within my own little world. But the problem with that is that it's the perception of others. It's knowledge of how they're going to come and meet you at your place where you're most comfortable when it causes them discomfort we've had, you've all given examples of the fact that you've had to all experience discomfort. And that was one of the one things that I kind of couldn't understand and still don't really understand, which was always the limitations of what I was being told. I'd sit there and be like that is clearly not right if like a bit like that classic episode with genius where Einstein questions Newton because he can see Newton's law is flawed. He visualises it and he goes, No, that's, that's false. So then he stands up in a Munich University. And the moment we suggest that there's something that goes against a statute of law, which is really what we're talking about with organisations, you know, statutes of expectation is objected. He's told to leave, and then eventually goes to another Strasbourg or somewhere where they're allowing that conversational narrative. And he gets up to leave thinking that he's gonna get thrown out on the blog site, or either and this is all part of the narrative. And that's what I'm now finding, but it's not within this university. It's within the arts community. They've now taken me on, they've gone, what are you doing, like, come out here, we're all up and I'm like, Oh, you're nice people around you lovely. So I just get to come along. Yeah, come along, come along. And it's not like, you know, Simon's calling into the rocks, they like genuinely want you there. And there's no imposter because they just do things that are unusual in the light shade. I was in the wrong petri dish. I've been in the wrong medium for like 45 years. And now I'm in the right medium. I'm now confined by what the university expects from a doctorate. And it's like, shit, right? So I've got a navigate that now taking certain bits out. And you know, and making them a success, despite the lack of support going like, actually look, you know, I'm going to do that anyway.

And being quite belligerent, which I think is definitely neurotypical trade is like, I'm sharp. I'm gonna do it anyway. And I think that's where, yeah, that's where it sits now. But it's interesting to hear the it's really cathartic to hear that there's the same story being told.

Participant S :

And that's what I kind of want to get out of this is kind of a support, cathartic area, but also to empower us to feel that we can push to check not to change culture, but just to push and make the changes to students that are sitting where we were sitting 20 years ago, or 10 years ago, to say, you don't need to be fixed, you don't need to conform. And actually, how can we challenge partly challenge the organisation and the culture, but also partly just use the flexibility that we should have to develop that. And I guess part of what I wanted to explore today, and we've already picked up some of the words is how do we feel because I've started looking at while I was going to look at kind of critical discourse around the use of some of these labels and words within the university, you've talked about that, like student contracts and reasonable adjustment and that kind of thing. But actually, if I look at kind of the words that I'm really diagnosed with dyslexia on their 20 year old, or 18 year old come to university, I get this diagnosis, because I need this cover sheet or whatever. Suddenly, I get thrown words that are new to me. So if I throw the word like dyslexia out, what, what does that what does that word mean to any of us? What does that word or that word make you feel, for example?

Participant A:

Well, for me personally, before I was diagnosed, my youngest sister and my dad had been diagnosed before me. And the worst thing is, especially now I've been diagnosed, the worst thing is, is the biggest thing was, but they're being lazy. They're not trying hard enough. You know, I put in this work to do this. I can't be dyslexic shortly. And I think my biggest issue was a lot of my problems, I suppose. My parents would always go, Oh, you do that because your death. And because it was almost assigned to the label I already had. I think if I have been hearing child, perhaps it would have been viewed a little bit differently. But it was a lot of so all your issues are because you're deaf. So I've kind of like well, that's my label. That's what I'm working with. So my coping strategies are to help me because I'm deaf. So once I was then diagnosed as dyslexic, I kind of had this. Like, oh, my God, I was actually really mean to my sister and my dad, because it was I was so hung up on Oh, it must be because you're lazy. Whereas I know I'm not lazy, especially when it comes to my work. And but I've been given this label. So I think I've definitely had a shift purely because I've now been assigned this label and what does that actually mean for me? So yeah,

Participant   L:

yeah, yeah, it really that really resonates. I mean, I in i still have an internal struggle of dyslexia or equaling lazy or an excuse. You know, that it's just an excuse to the fact that I haven't done it or I was

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lazy at school. I was really lazy at school. But I don't think it was genuine laziness. It might have appeared that way and I didn't do anything and it didn't work. Um, but I think there was a lot of, I can't, so I won't or, you know, it's I'm just I'm not being communicated with in a way that I can understand. So I haven't heard what you said for like the last hour, so I've got no possibility of doing the work even if I wanted to. I'm not going to attend to but there's still that point of you know, I've got a lot of academics in my family got, you know, my cousin's, you know, Oxbridge graduate was head girl, that kind of stuff. And there's always a comparison. And there's always a bit of me, it's just like, yeah, maybe it's just because I'm just a bit crap. And I sort of know intellectually, that's not true. But it's still there. Quite a bit. My school were just terrible, just absolutely awful. And it took into my MA, it took until my ma ukcc. To see that actually, I was fine. I was getting it. And I could debate and I could talk, and I could do that. I thought actually, no, it wasn't the other way around. But yeah, the lazy thing is big. It really isn't. Yeah.

Participant S:

I was gonna pick up on something you said earlier, which is what I struggle with, when I hear my colleagues that aren't dyslexic, talking about dyslexia, which is this stereotyping, or this idea that Dyslexics just struggle with reading and writing.

Participant A:

Whereas mine is mainly my working memory, for example, I get, it's just like, if I have a conversation five minutes later, I can't remember the good points that I write and things like that. So

Participant S:

both my kids read really well, once they learned to read, they didn't learn to read at school, because that wasn't being taught. But once they learned to read, they flown, because they got their strategies, but they both struggle with say maths and sciences. And so what I would want someone to think about if they heard the word dyslexia, is that's not actually reading and writing to me is a really small part of it. And actually reading and writing as well, you can develop coping strategies you can, particularly with assistive technology nowadays, but actually, it is the information processing the working memory, the fidgeting, and not being able to do eye contact, you know, that the kind of all the, and all that kind of interlinking stuff around it. So that even I'm beginning to think actually, is dyslexia, the right label to give what we consider to be this tranche of neurodiversity, and actually four years into the PhD, I'm now thinking it shouldn't even be on dyslexia, it should be on what the term that I prefer, which is neurodiversity, because it feels like it's more overlapping, it's more inclusive.

Participant T:

You D structure the pathologizing CD take it away completely. Don't you don't have any label you don't you know, you meet the person at the point of need. It's like all himself deficit model. You don't you don't you know, not, what really annoys me is when people try to give you a like, like you say, computer assisted or whatever assistive technology. Like, that's the last thing I want. Like, why would I want to rely on something like, you know, like, maybe just listen to the nature of how I think and behave and move and feel. Yeah. And then and then and then don't don't don't immediately think that there needs to be special considerations or anything, maybe just meet at that point of conversation. But that I think that's because we've moved so far away from linguistic learning. And, you know, and, like, the greatest thing has moved just as far away from it as possible. Like you wouldn't had like Chomsky was one of the greatest examples he just refused to write. It was never it was narrated conversationally, because that's how ideas and emergent ideas pattern survivor that was originally what exactly, but now what is it? Isn't the majority of thesis that's why they asked they keep asking for structural kind of analysis and stuff. And I say well, just because you don't understand it. That's That's not me needing to structurally analyse that you needing to actually maybe put me into a box. Yeah. Or just accept that maybe you're not going to be at that point and accept maybe that you need some humility over the fact that you just aren't that bright. It's a different kind of intellect. Like you were saying, each car it was not anything to do with being lazy is pace boring. School is dull and in you and you're being made to formally sit constantly and there's no interaction with things that are interesting. There's no interaction and it was only when I was here doing the masters that I found whose souls work on transcendental phenomenology and then I was like, there you go. That makes sense of it. That's why I look out the window that's why o'clock the cloud will tell me a story or a light on a leaf will tell me what I need to do next. Like it's like actual there's a there's a genuine reciprocation and if you don't believe in that, then that's that's not for someone else to kind of, you know, have to come to a point of explanation because others are able to just assert their kind of sense of meaning without having to be challenged. So I think, yeah, I think it's, I think there needs to be a whole D structuring of the nature of pathologizing people, and maybe re restructuring how we how we perceive the idea of, of intellect.

Participant L:

I would be in favour of no assessments at all, I'd say I could tell each one of our students what grade they should get by talking to them?

Participant A:

Well, I'm quite interested in it's just something I've just realised now is, whilst you may have started in nursing, we've all kind of gone down, like the creative and doing stuff. And I think that kind of fits in quite well with obviously how we work. And our coping strategies, and whatever our systems we put

in place for ourselves, to be able to do out workload, and but creatively kind of developed, especially with your mind. And then I think that's a brilliant way to almost externalise your thinking process, I think. Yeah, so it just blows me away. Because I think because I'm still relatively newly diagnosed, I suppose. It's, I've lived with the Deaf label all my life, I'm used to the Deaf label, I am used to the negative stereotypes around deafness. I am used to kind of going for that's not strictly true, is it? But when it comes to my ADHD and my dyslexia, I still have this kind of element of I'm not sure how I sit with it still, it's still one of those. I think, if I had been diagnosed at school age, it would be oh, well, I've had this all my life. I know what do you know, I mean, it would be more established in my identity. And it's like what you said, though, but because we're so hung up on labels, and what and those labels are what then kind of leading to the stereotyping of those conditions or whatever. But yeah, and I just thought it was interesting that we're all doing creative things, actually.

Participant S:

Because I would argue that that's the strength that we all have. So whether it, I don't want to look at a deficit model, but you know, a teacher might go, the reason they're good at drawing is because they're not good at writing. Do you see what I mean? There's that kind of that you can't be good at everything. So it's kind of this idea of your stupid strength, or your good indoor or, or, or anything else. All other people might say it's because we're just more open minded to trying different things.

Participant   A:

As well, if you if you live your life, understanding that you are broken in some way. So in my experience, it's my death. And so I always knew that I was broken, I was not going to be the same as anyone else. So I always knew that I'm going to have to work 150% Harder, just to kind of even out the playing field amongst my hearing peers, for example, I had to prove that I was better than them to even do the same things as then. But at the same point, it's kind of like, okay, so I know that I'm broken, I'm going to be more receptive to an idea, like you said, so I can be more open minded, because I'm not found by convention. And I think I'm more likely to experiment. But even when you said, you know, substance misuse to try and make the world feel normal. When I was in my teens, I got really heavy into drugs at one point, because I just didn't want to feel the way that I felt no. 14. And it's not, it's not a good thing to kind of go, oh, that's an option. Yes, no, but I mean, in the sense, it's not good for your health.

Participant   T:

You know, I think that there's like, you know, it's so hard because, you know, if they were to pattern because I always kind of was caught by this idea of the fact that it's like, oh, well they think that way, and I think this way, so therefore, you know, but then actually now, you know a lot of micro dosing a

lot of awareness around like opening of acetylcholine within the mind you can actually there's there's a significant benefit to just allowing drugs to permeate that, that cerebral hemisphere, there's no you know, it's just the type of drug and the dependency that leads to

Participant A:

You know, I think that there's like, you know, it's so hard because, you know, if they were to pattern because I always kind of was caught by this idea of the fact that it's like, oh, well they think that way, and I think this way, so therefore, you know, but then actually now, you know a lot of micro dosing a lot of awareness around like opening of acetylcholine within the mind you can actually there's there's a significant benefit to just allowing drugs to permeate that, that cerebral hemisphere, there's no you know, it's just the type of drug and the dependency that leads to. And, you know, having this broken kind of feeling, it was very well, I would, you know, my family thought, you know, I'd be dead by the time I'm 16 overdose, and I'll be found in a ditch somewhere. So that just shows how much faith they had in me and my ability to kind of go on and do better. And it's not until I was in my late 20s, and, you know, had suffered some traumatic events to then kind of go, Well, what do I actually want to do? I think I'm gonna go to university, I think I'm going to actually, but again, it was a case of I needed to kind of come to terms with, okay, so yes, I am different. I am not the same as other people. But University coming here as a student, because we're so heavy on the equality and inclusive activity and all that sort of stuff. It really felt a real safe space to actually be here. And I think the transition from students or staff member, I've been able to maintain that confidence in the fact that is a safe space. So when I talk to my students now, and I go, Oh, I'm deaf, and I've got ADHD. So if I don't hear you, I'm not being rude. Or if I kind of go down a rabbit hole, like ask your question, again, I'll bring myself back, you know, so it's, it, I'm far more confident. Now. This is the first job even even sweating my deafness. This is the first job where I confidently walked into a room and go, Yeah, I'm a deaf person. Whereas before, I would almost kind of hide it, I'd wear my hair down deliberately hide my hearing aid. So unless it was actually, you know, something I had to mention, then I've mentioned it, but otherwise, I could hide it mascot quite well, because people meet me initially ago, you know, I never would have known unless you'd say something. So. But if you don't say anything, and something happens, it's kind of like, it still works against you.

Participant S:

So it's really lovely to hear. And in many ways, I feel that in but some of what will sit at the beginning still resonantly this idea of being imposter syndrome, this idea of why am I suddenly the educator, why am I am I right to be the teacher or the educator? Because I'm

Participant A:

always going back to Joe saying, Are you sure I'm doing okay, are you sure I've done the right work for this? So you should Can you check my handbooks? Can you check the content, because even though she was my Pat, and again, this comes with the confidence of being a student, because she was my path, she already knows, she's seen me at my lowest point, she's seen me when I've been struggling the most. And so now as a staff member, we haven't kind of lost that relationship with anything is kind of built on. And but I know with full confidence that if I was to go to Joe with a problem, because of whatever, it's it's not going to be shut down. Because you're not trying hard enough. It's going to be a case of well, how do we help you get around that. And I think it's just the confidence in the space that you're in. And as an academic, transitioning from a student. I think the only reason why I still have that confidence in being very vocal about my, my disabilities, so to speak, is is literally just because I migrated from that. Just

Participant T:

curious how many people went from school to uni or took bits in between because it sounds

Participant S:

I went I went from school to uni, then then did an undergrad didn't didn't like a masters and postgraduate in marketing. Kind of fired, like, yeah, five years later, and then came back and did the Masters kind of 20 years later, and ironically wants to do a master's straight under the after the undergrad. But because I got a two two couldn't and remember thinking how am i I've worked twice as hard as everybody else around me. I've never missed a lecture, I've done all my revision, I'm shattered, I'm sleeping, I can't go out and party. I remember you know, if I'm that old opening the results envelope and getting to toe and just standing on the train station just sobbing and like, you know, family going, we've got a degree of degrees of degree, no, but I deserve more deserve to get that that higher mark. So part of it was like total running away, and to do the Masters but actually running away. And then so when I came and did the masters and got the diagnosis, it was even harder, because it was like, but I've had 20 years experience of working in PR and advertising in the UK. And International was quite good at my job. I could write a press release. I could write copy. You know, I can do this. And I can do that. But now I need a cover sheet to take into account. My spelling and grammar.

Participant A:

Yeah, no, I didn't come back to uni until I was 27. So yeah, and but it's like once we've got here, it's like I've never left. So I've been here since 2016

Participant T:

really interesting idea of like, because of the you once touched on that school and education isn't necessarily fit for purpose for everyone, and then that thing of like you can go out and discover the world Your way. And I think a lot of us seem to be much more to the USA, that thing of like being able to help people and actually being able to communicate and kind of see what the problem is with a human. I think, you know, that caring, nurturing kind of side leaving, but just being able to fit and then

Participant S:

yeah, I'm not sure I made this stat up at all, really. But I did go and talk to somebody in well being here, Kim rocks, who's stuck this hidden dyslexic support person, she gave me the stat and I must talk to her again, to make sure I keep quoting them so wrong, that 60% of students in health or education here are dyslexic. Because we have this natural need or want or ability to support others, to bring out this kind of empathy, to go into professions that might be considered to be kind of caring, or supportive, or, or anything else. And I think I might have made a massive leap forward. But I do feel that I don't know whether it's a hate this kind of deficit model, the broken model, but it's part of part of the strength that we have is actually to reach out, I don't know,

Participant A:

if you've suffered trauma of any extent through whatever reason, when you are bridging the gap with other people, it's far because I, I love the fact that when I have my autistic students talk to me, and they're, and they're really passionate about what they're doing. And it's like, yeah, I understand where you're coming from, I can really see how you're building that idea and stuff. So I think also as well, when you kind of think about your own experiences, and what you were really lacking in terms of support you kind of what I'm not going to make the same mistake with my students. So I think that's it's almost kind of like you're almost compensating for the support you didn't get Yeah, when you're

Participant S:

certainly a bit of a hypocrite because I feel like I've just gone already full circle in the last half an hour, I asked us all to introduce ourselves and talk about our dyslexia. But actually, I'm beginning to feel that I don't want that label anymore. I don't want my students to feel that they need to have that label to get the support. Going back to what you're saying, I feel that they need to be an environment that brings out the best in them.

Participant L:

That's the problem. Like we're not in that environment. We might be in some places, but we're not,

Participant A:

you know, because we don't get the support unless you got the label, right. We're not

Participant L:

in a in a setup or a system or university or a country where that can be allowed to happen to a point where you people can get what they need from things you need the degree to do or whatever to do, whatever. So it's a model that isn't working yet. Because it's not

Participant S:

generated. It's become medicaParticipant Led almost. Yeah. Is that the right word? Yeah,

Participant A:

I think so. If you're, I mean, just looking from a Deaf kind of perspective, I think, because so much emphasis is put on what I can't do. Definitely just what you mentioned, when you actually kind of overhaul I can do that. But I just do it differently.

Participant L:

language is different, as well. I don't know if you sign or not.

Participant A:

Well, yeah, BSL is different. But I, I don't actually sign up and use sign language.

Participant L:

Even like any, like, Deaf language is different. And it's, that's a strength. Yeah, yeah. It's their, their, their strengths, strengths to dyslexia, the strengths to

Participant A:

but that's the thing we're so hung up on. What can't you do? Yeah, what do we need to support you in, and it's like, well, I probably need some support doing this. But actually, I've, like, for example, with the assistive technology, with the dyslexia, I actually found that I didn't use it that much, wasn't actually

part of the problem that I had. So I just found if anything was more of an issue to try and work out, remember

Participant S

how to use it, because you've forgotten that I trained you and then you forget

Participant L:

that you should use it because it was like giving it to you, right? Or like a different kind of screen. I was like, it's just a bit of a, it's just a bit of an off site now can't use any computer. I feel right about it. Thanks. Again, if we

Participant S:

and I'm gonna throw I'm gonna throw a bit of a grenade in because I've already used a lot, Participant T has already raised this word of a, before reasonable adjustment. It's not,

Participant W:

I think he's more about the fact that like, if, you know, I remember being in that room where they were doing the assessment and feeling really, really tired towards the end of it, because they were just testing the deficit. And, and then seeing the, you know, the old adage of like, if you assess everybody in the same way, you know, you've got your elephant, your monkey and the fish. The reality is we still we still do so until you move the assessment guidance to the point where it's an open way of achieving the outcome. It's pointless because every single time you're asking the one thing and that's the one thing that's that's why you're having to put the considerations in it's just backwards doesn't work. All you need to do is you need to open up the assessment conversations. But like big says, the mechanistic will never agree to The Blue thinking so you won't ever get to that point of, you know, that's the issue, you should just say, right? Well, you will got to achieve this, then how you get there is what it should be more like your, you know, your idea of what the you know what the brief is. So when you have a brief you achieve it how you feel that you want to shouldn't be, it shouldn't be any different to that in all of it. But like you say it's it's structure aParticipant Led and pathologized, to the point where it's like, well, we know who the ones that are going to be the problems in the real world.

Participant S:

And maybe that's why when navigating towards the creative side, because that's a way of, of

Participant A:

the journey. From like, for example, you said about the brief and the journey to what you do for assessment output. For example, I think my modules that I teach is very good in that respect, because it is, okay, so this is what I'm going to show you, this is the brief. And this is the output that you need to generate. But ultimately, the journey is shortened. And there's a lot of emphasis on, you know, independent work, but I'm there for support if you need any. So I think I think just normally, so within my sessions, when I introduce myself to the students, and I say I'm, I've got ADHD, yeah, the amount of times I've had students go, oh, yeah, I've also got a yet but they do it on a quiet kind of after the session sort of thing. But um, I suppose in a way, what I'm trying to do is kind of like normalise the fact that, you know, we're not all the same. And I'm very different to a lot of the students in my room, I also come from a working class background. And I know that a lot of, and I think, because that's my kind of overall attitude, it makes me so I've already had comments that a lot of first years can relate to me probably a bit better than some of the academics on our team.

Participant S:

It's interesting, because part of the economy, remember who whose theory is because it's just gone. But part of the stuff I've looked at is kind of this idea of teacher identity. And that's quite split, you know. And I think, from what I know, of us around the table, we're all quite open about our identity. And we probably quite comfortable sharing that in the classroom, because we see that as a positive thing. But there are definitely individuals that don't ever want to share anything in the classroom. And there are people that could be sat around this table, that don't want to be sat around this table, because they don't want people to know they're dyslexic, or they might have been a little bit dyslexic, or they might have been dyslexic at school, but they're not now. So that the fact that they don't want to share it amongst peers, they certainly don't want to share it in the classroom. And in some ways, they're almost more negative by not wanting to share it. So that so part of what I want to explore is kind of this idea of, of professionalism and teacher identity, because as I said earlier, you know, my ethics was nearly rejected, because they didn't, they thought I might be exposing you all professionally, by making you discuss this round the table as it were.

Participant A:

But I don't think it's good. Like, for example, for me, personally, I don't think this would be damaging to me professionally, because it's stuff that I'm, I've already voiced to various departments. So I don't think that this is going to impact me in a negative way. If anything, I think this is going to be a positive thing, just because we are starting the conversation. We are trying to normalise in the language and

maybe move away from the deficit. And let's look at the strength. And I think that's probably a better way to do it. Especially when you then show the students that if you normalise this and you are confident about your own identity, then when you move forward, yeah, it can only be good things.

Participant S:

So there is still a stereotype. And there's almost like a hierarchy amongst having disabilities. And neurodiversity. You kind of said yourself, didn't you? I've got this diagnosis of autism as well, but I'm not sure how I fit with that one. So it's this kind of almost like, Are we okay with dyslexia? Because actually, that's been out in the open since the 80s, hasn't it? And you know, and kind of, I'd had comments made to me about dyslexia, that if you made the similar sort of comment to somebody about a non hidden disability, or gender or race, you'd have a case with HR. Yeah. Yeah. But actually, we can make those comments around neurodiversity, because we're more of an expert in it. We've all you know, feel that we can stereotype and genderized and generalise and everything, sorry, should run off on that run ran, but so part of what I'm kind of interested in is is that this kind of this use of words that we've just had to accept to give people this label in this structure, so dyslexia, neurodiversity, I mean what you know, we've gone as a university, we've gone from having a department or being department actually had a section called neurodiversity. And now we've done away with that now. So now if you've got a student that you suspect is dyslexic, you get them to email disability at Kent b.ac.uk. Do I want to do I want to stop new go?

Participant L:

To me that's yeah, because you used to be I just send to wellbeing as well for like anything Now you've got a student that you don't even know if they're upset and they're mentally ill or there's something else going on, you're forced to turn to either email, mental, whatever, whatever, which has such, you know, associations attached to it, or disability, which has such associations attached to it. The student doesn't particularly when are we

Participant A:

gonna say as well, when I found out my, my diagnosis later on, I had no problem obviously, with the disability label, because my deafness is a disability, and I've had that since young. So I've adjusted to that particular label. But I can't imagine what it'd be like for an able bodied student to be told, okay, so if you if you need any additional help, or assessment or anything like that, you'd like to kind of now assume this disability label disabled place. And the worst thing is, is like there's lots of negative connotations around all disabilities anyway. But I think for an able bodied person, so they can suddenly

don't Oh, but I'm disabled. That transition, I can't imagine how difficult that is for able bodied people. Yeah, it's really interesting.

Participant W:

Like I was thinking about, for graphic design, we tried to get the students to do presentations. And some people then suddenly go, oh, no, I can't because I have this. And suddenly, they're like, oh, no, I can do it. And I'll just go, can we change how we do it? And at the moment, it's not a, it's not an assessment. I just think it's good life skill to be learning how to stand up and talk. So actually how we do it, I'm not like, tell me like, if you want to, if you don't want to, we'll say it will change, it will adapt. So it works for you. But all you got to basically do is talk me through your work. Like where does it start? How to end? What's your thought process? Oh, all right. I think you're gonna grill us. No, I don't have to say that. You can, like completely like, if you feel that that's gonna help you right now. Do you hear something called quote outside? think we've got this thing? Right. Can you sit down and talk to me? Or stand up? I'm gonna stand up. I just thought you should know. I was told I couldn't do what I was told. I couldn't Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that's a no, no, I completely can. And I had one student a couple of years ago who were doing presentation. I definitely can. But I've been told I need to do half an hour extra. Yeah. So well, it's a five minute presentation. Yeah, I prepared to 35 minutes. No, no, no, like, that's, that's gonna be weightless to you, isn't it? Yeah.

Alica:

But it's a framing of that concept. Because I've started telling my students like, when you're doing a presentation, you're telling me a story. We're telling me the start point of the brief how you generate your ideas, and you're gonna talk me through the stages or where you hope to end up. And I think finding it like a story even as opposed to, you're doing a presentation in front of everyone, and you need to stand up and you need to do it,

Participant T:

then there's the visual thinking,

Participant S:

I think naturally when the writers Yeah.

Participant A:

I think it's really built into what you said about the narrative, rather than like, we're all kind of telling a story.

Participant S:

Did you prepare your 26 minute narrative? Did you pre record it? You just went and did it?

Participant L:

Yeah, I think it's dangerous to tell people they can't do things. real problem. And actually, presentations are quite important. But you can do it Krakow. And if there is an issue up, which means that you can't do it. At that point, let's find a different way of making it work. But let's not set you up

Participant   A:

to fail to fail. By all before we actually show you any work you might want to do. But then they show you some stuff you're like, actually, this is really good.

Participant S:

Actually, that isn't isn't a reasonable adjustment at all. No, it'd be reasonable. But who's, who is saying it's reasonable?

Participant L:

Well, it turns up on Fe LSP. Every single one, I can't do presentations, and I think this person is absolutely fine.

Participant S:

It's just a template. It's a template. I don't know. How much of it is a discussion, what is reasonable to me is not going to be reasonable to you, it was an adjustment to me, it's not going to be an adjustment to you is it? So

Participant T:

it's interesting because often they get to that point and they haven't done a presentation before. This is written beforehand. And then it's that kind of thing, okay. Because we might be teaching a skill that's

amazing. It's the wrong thing. call this the unknown that you're teaching as a film it came in your teaching like a new arm movies, and then you go and I'd like you to deliver it in this way. Although I don't know that bit. I know the subject area, rather than like what we might not be doing is going let's do 20 seconds presentation. We don't build up those skills to kind of go Do you know what your you will be confident? Because without you even noticing we've drip fed this. It's the the the fear of the unknown.

Participant S:

And I do feel we are sitting in a culture we are sitting in an organisation actually compared with teachers to have to fall on us to quit can we do have some freedom? Yeah, sure. We don't have to make a student. We don't have to student like make an essay but actually sometimes we're not exploiting the freedoms that we've gone because around us we suddenly On Oh, organizationally, of course, they've got to do a 2000 word. Selection. Yeah. Yeah. So actually, potentially we can. I'm not, I don't even want to say challenge because it shouldn't be a challenge, but we can just be more open. Because we shouldn't be bound by those conventions. I mean, I'm saying that from the creative perspective, I don't know how that fits in health, you know, debate fits.

Participant T:

That's like I shouldn't even be in faculty, really, to be honest, you know, that as well as everyone else does. Nothing fits. But that's part of the kind of long term kind of, you know, that's the nature of the hobo poll. He doesn't fit. He does. He likes the people that are there when he enjoys the company of the individuals, but the reality is, it never feels like home. That's the reason for that move on. It's like, I just would like to feel that there is more of an intent to listen. That's, that's the only issue. So empathetic listening is something that we do naturally. neurodiverse are interested in people interested in the conversation and narrative, because it's exciting, because you can create pictures in your mind. But if you if you are trying to deliver that as a as a sort of a method, so shut down very quickly. So So

Participant W:

yeah, so I don't know. I think I think that. Yeah, I think that from an artistic point of view, it would be it would have been better, but I wouldn't have had the richness of the trauma that I've experienced in order to create the narrative that I've created. Yeah, I was gonna say it's just off the stock.

Workshop 2 Transcript

Participant S

Last time, Participant T and I had this hashtag for us on Twitter, which is dyslexic academic. And kind of part of what we talked about on really good conversation, I think last time was kind of dyslexia neurodiverse identity. So kind of want to think a bit more about that word, academic, and kind of teacher identity. And almost our professional identity I kind of touched upon it before, didn't know about the whole ethics form about do people want people to know academic. So I guess I kind of want to throw out the word. I don't want to throw out the word slightly. Academic, academic, when you said about the word academic,

Participant A

I think it's funny because when you I know we're trying to move away from stereotypes in terms of dyslexia. But when you think when I think of an academic, especially when I was a student, I always thought of, like a middle aged man in a suit, kind of, like, I am an expert in my field. So when I then went down the academic route, I, I still feel very, like, perhaps I'm not supposed to be here, like in this, like the imposter syndrome really does kind of build up on me a little bit, because I, I feel like I'm so not what an academic is, if that makes sense. But I couldn't really tell you exactly why I don't yet aside from the fact that I'm not a middle aged man. And so yeah, so

Participant S

isn't that what academia as well?

Participant W

Yeah, I mean, it's interesting, because you so many multiple hats now. So like the academic and academia is really just like, the researching area, then you have teaching supporting, like, the care kind of thing, and I navigate to those things. So like, you, I think, at the end of last week's thing, you said, it feels that we have some of the best educators in here, do these discussions. And that I would, like I preferred that. Because I'm able to, I think I support people, perhaps better than some colleagues do. And I'm more tentative, and I'd probably do have more of a sort of a caring side of I will get you through this thing that you didn't think you could do, versus just regurgitating information at them. And I know that some other colleagues are very good at disseminating books, and then kind of going, like just spurting it. And it means nothing to some of the students and not finding that link between them. So what's the point there? Yeah, I think because there's so many different areas. And we're being asked to do so much, it's hard to kind of pinpoint,

Participant A

I think, as well, I think when I kind of think about it, from what you've just said, I consider myself more of a teacher than an academic, if that makes sense. So whilst I've done research, and I've done my MA thesis, and I'm really interested in the research element, I, even at this point, wouldn't consider myself an academic in the traditional sense, I would consider myself more of a teacher.

Participant W

So I wonder if that's entry level as well. Because I do think I would like to do more creative research and creative practice and meeting and talking to people. But think of when you first come in, you're like, I'm being asked to do this function. So I'll do it very well, like I'm being asked to teach. And it's only once you start to kind of establish yourself a bit more. But you need the room and the the who to talk to you to kind of almost get to that point where you come in doing a PhD. So it feels that you're being established as that before teacher So establishing

Participant S

it certainly just occurred to me, of course, that Participant L is the only one that's sitting around the table, it's already got a PhD, that I don't think got her teaching job until she got the PhD. Right. So, you know, I'll pick up this conversation independently. I mean, obviously, you and I both used that term, didn't we dyslexic academic. So at some point, we must have thought we were academics to want to kind of create, I don't know, didn't

 Participant T

do about that. I did it some personally. I was like, kind of like, so the world is is so like, the way you guys describe it is is right but like so as you're talking visually, like I get this kind of perspective of like, again, the loss of the academic really so there there are like these structures within society that are like boxes, but we don't have the luxury of sitting within those so we're like the that the ones that are risky because we can enter into an environment that we feel we want to if it's kind of a culture that we're happy with and then we can leave that

Participant T

almost like you know, like in the in the in the films where they have like, they have like that beautiful kind of, like liquid wall. Yeah. So you can place your hand upon it and it'll reflect and it'll and it will move. It's that ability to move in and out. And the problem is that what you realise, what I've come to really happens is the limitations of what we perceive by an academic world, which is just that there's, there's absolutely no nuance, there's no joy. There's nothing within that, that. So now what I used to sort of almost perceive as being like otherworldly, I now see as being absolutely limited and restricted, just limited, it just doesn't reach those points unless you unless you draw in, like, unless you make your Xbox or your mind, a place that you don't own those things. And that's the the hardest part is to become

genuinely wise is to reflect, to not own to not take ownership. And that's not what academia is, like. They they talk about it as in like, people talk about it as almost like a commoditization of like, what do you do? Who do you think, you know, what do you think like, I was a nurse, I'm still a nurse, I was, you know, I've done all of these different roles associated with kind of trauma and experience and facilitating as part of that process and educating. But essentially, the strongest narrative that exists is the autobiographical narrative, which is the I'm Participant T. And what I've had to do is the realisation I've had to go back and reengage with the elements of self that were, that were long dead, you know, in the past, so the book, the book that's now in the library in the bookshop is me telling me that I have value, it takes a long time, because ultimately, those worlds are stripping people that value that neuro linguistic Li, like Chomsky says, they're just slow indoctrination. And I got no interest in that space anymore. But it's only now. And the problem is you evolve. And then you look at the master, and you think, I don't want what you offer, but you're at a position of having to because you're sat at their table. And it's like, Okay, I'm gonna have to mediate it, isn't it, and that's the real art, the art is in mediation of those spaces, and to flex between them, and to not be owned by any of those structures. But that's, we'll see how that goes, it's gonna happen in the next five years.

Participant A

Also, as well, when you think about, okay, am I an academic, because I am yet I'm still not in a position to own that part of my identity yet. And I think that's probably why I've seen myself more as a teacher is that I have established by own that, that's me.

Participant S

I am afraid that I'm not a real academic. And that you are used to us that the first sort of four or five years I was here, because I'm new to academia. But now entering my 10th year I realised I say that because it's not about being new to academia, or what I perceive as being academia. It's about what you just said, Participant T, that actually, I don't want to sit in that box. I want to bring in what you've just said, well, about being an educator is about that, you know, flexible. And you said the word about can't use the word caring, you've used the word, trauma. And part of coming through the trauma is, I think, partly our identities of what we mean when we were pupils or students.

Participant W

Yeah, and I think it's interesting, like the route to academia. And Robert, I think it came up last week. Many of us have done things elsewhere and not just straight into a teaching well, but that thing of stepping out for a while because you bring in some life experience, but you know, if it was the ideal academic or fast track, school, you do Sixth Form College, whatever it is, you do your degree,

Participant A

literally, education.

Participant T

What else do you bring other than dissemination of books and telling it back?

Participant A

Also, it works? No, but he's absolutely right. You said we are different to potentially other academic colleagues because they are used to getting the information and then regurgitating it to the students, whereas we bring a bit more of a personal element in in the way that we empathise with our students. So

Participant S

I think Participant T touched upon this last time that you now feel more comfortable in your space because you found the creatives and maybe we'll sit I mean, I'm potentially not as creative as the the others of you, but it may be fits more comfortably in the core horses that you teach because you're teaching students from that perspective. And do you feel that you've had that space in health to teach in that way?

Participant W

No, no, absolutely not, in a way, like, it's, it's almost the construct of the spaces has been one of the most difficult frustrations and tensions that exist in because it's not wanted, the narrative that is expected is the one that you do, which is where you, you, you do as Trump's you sense you indoctrinate into the process that you accept and you accept that process, despite the fact that it is linearly in finite focused, and it's not attending to any of your expectations. None of what I've done, since the Masters has been expected. And so the unexpected offers tension, because it's still the tension still happens in email, but you know, what, what precedent is there? What is this, you know, what, you know, what can we get out of it, essentially. And there is a commoditization, like I said, what, what people want from things, which is, you know, I hear people referring to their masters, I'm doing a Masters because I've been told that little increase my annual salary, and I'm thinking, that's nonsensical, because then I'm reading, you know, deeper philosophies on the fact that there's a finite point of earning, nothing happens past that point, doesn't matter what you earn, you can earn billions, and it's not going to make you happier, because that construct is transitory. So it's like, the mind room, if you want is my way of, of compartmentalising and seeing all within one space, and then being able to then understand the deeper kind of texture of those themes. But again, they weren't that there was no availability of rooms, there was no, you know, it's never something that's easy. So I am, yeah, I just, I guess, for me, it's just a process of attrition, or I've been quite used to that now. And I just tend not to give up. So I just tend to stay within that space. And sometimes staying within space. And being cited, is the biggest language

that you can offer. Because you just do what you're doing. And then everything else chapters around it, and you offer nothing. And eventually, it becomes obvious that there's a there's a lack of in, you know, intent from them to ask the question. And then when they realise that, and they come to ask the question, they realise how limited their window is. But that doesn't mean that things move. Just, you know, it's like an assimilation, really, you just, you're the species that kind of like, that's why the blog, The mudskipper, on the back of the Black Dog is so important, because it's telling you that there's a, there's a, there's a frustration of the nature of the Evolve evolution of that animal, you know, because it's ugly, but it's brilliant. You know, it manages to go from liquid into mud into whatever it wants, but it's little, it's unbelievable. That's like, they look at it, and they're like, but it's perfect. It sits perfectly within its environment, it can move from one to the other. And it sits on the back of the Black Dog, because it's kind of heightened by this idea of social depression. So there's like an intent to everything that I sort of see. But that doesn't necessarily pan out. Because it's like, if I'd done this monitoring anywhere else, it would be sectional. it because it's being done inside of the university.

Participant A

Yeah, I was gonna say as well, I think doing stuff within the university context makes it a little bit more. For me personally, I feel safer. Because you, you are encouraged to kind of further yourself as a kind of like a bass kind of role. If you were to do it anywhere else you could be what are you doing? And that's, that's not within your remit?

Participant S

How do we as let's use the term educators rather than academics? How do we empower our students who might be like us to feel safer in this environment to challenge to experiment to go I don't want to write a 4000 word dissertation, how else can I do it to still submitting how because to me, it's part of our educators not getting them a first in media and comms and graphic design. It's about supporting them through that personal evolution and education thing

Participant W

I say, on the open day straightaway to everyone it's some of the design courses that I've read, they very much want you to come up with, like their style. So you know that you've studied and all your your students are well, that's why you do it like this. But as I say, actually, I really don't want that. Like if you have a thing that you're interested in like let's find way better. Chris Yeah, like you can make the modules work for you. I think people have like really latched on to that idea. So we've looked at a lot of the different assessments that asked for a specific thing at the outcome, like you're going to work and make a poster for a charity. And now let's make a poster for what you kind of want. But you have to propose the idea that it is gonna be different.

Participant A

But I think also as well, it's the encouragement of their own developing ideas. But I think within my actual sessions, especially on my first couple, I'm always kind of do a bit of an intro on what we all do like to new students, but I always talk about my disabilities, you know, I will say, I'm deaf, because that that's a potential safety issue. So I go, if I don't hear the alarm, but you do, and I'm not responding, just let me know that you can hear the alarm. So it's very kind of generic, let's be your own safety and mine. But I also kind of go, you know, I'm dyslexic as well, I really struggled with written work, but I've done a thesis, you know, so it's kind of not. So I'm, I suppose, in a way by doing that, especially when I'm talking about my ADHD, and I say, Look, I know when I get excited, I jump from thing to thing, and I will go down random rabbit holes. If you're confused by what I'm saying, why not explain, please just draw me back to the original path. And then I will re explain or kind of, say, a different way. But the point is, is what I'm trying to do is kind of facilitate, you know, even if they don't feel comfortable talking to each other about potential dyslexia or anything like that, I want them to feel comfortable with me. Because at the same point, I suppose I'm going, Look, these are my potential weaknesses, you might also have the same, I'm not expecting you to stand up in front of everyone tell everyone and give details. But if there's something that you want to be able to try and discuss in terms of assignments or anything like that, I'm basically I'm trying to create an open door kind of thing. Because as well, because I am a disabled academic, on my team. You know, it has been said to me before, it potentially makes me more relatable. But I think I own my identity in that respect, I own my neuro divergence, I own my deafness, that's part of me. So to tell me to change my teaching style or not to tell the students those particular details about myself, I think would be counterproductive to how I feel, well, I want this safe space, I want the students to be able to have the ability to not only make their ideas and pursue them, but if they're not, you know, a normal student, and they need that kind of additional consideration. I want them to also go well, actually, this doesn't really work with me. So can you know, I mean, so it is basically trying to create that open door policy in a way.

 Participant S

So as professional educators use the word like that we're actually quite comfortable. I think all of us about being open and honest about our life journeys. About like, well, I don't know, not terrible, my journey, but some not everything. Yeah. Like kind of us as people rather than educators here. Classes, as I think personally say ADHD is a weakness, you know, that what makes what makes us

Participant A

but I think as well, you can't, you can't go oh, that students not engaging with me for whatever reason. And it's because I don't know, if a student's dyslexic and they didn't feel comfortable talking about their dyslexia with me, if I hadn't indicate that I was also dyslexic, they probably go home, there's no point saying anything, because they're probably going to say to me, what has been said to me in school, college and all the rest of it. So I don't want to be perpetuating the kind of trauma that has already been

especially suffered by myself. So it's, it's one of those. And I think also we're very emphasis on people and the empathy and the caring in the, we want to nurture and stuff like that. So yeah.

Participant S

How does that pan out in the health world, though? Is it more open? Can you be open?

Participant T

Within assessment?

Participant S

Well, within the teaching environment,

Participant T

oh, well, like I'm not the greatest, like advert, you know, like, so the rest of much more hard scientists. And then there's me that kind of wanders around and annoys that system. aggravates disrupts disruptors are very important. They're heavily looked for now in multiple industries, you know, that we need disruption but as like, you know, they want a certain type of

Participant A

luck. type thing. Yeah.

Participant T

Whereas la I think I think I'm what I'm trying to do in a way is I'm trying to tell the student that they're important and offer them that sense of value. So that's what the butterfly farmer about. That's what the wandering lab is about. That's what a lot of my research is about. And the assessments are an opportunity for me to, to tell them that and open them to the kind of points of knowledge but really, it's the the D structuring the D structuring, and unlearning that's the most important part, we don't have the time to kind of talk about the the depths of where that comes from, because it is associated with deconstruction of self identity. So I know those things, and those are the things that I'm kind of trying to kind of pattern out and understand. But I think as far as Justice the student, it's the engagement of knowing that I exist, that I can carry on doing not losing my job, you know, that I don't fail, although I do, and I turn up late. And you know, and the acceptance of who I am, comes quite quickly once they know. So it's about involving that compassionate element as well as like them understanding the paradigms that assumptions based around how I will be and what I will be like, and but yeah, there's a certain amount of honesty, but they're not going to know everything, because then that puts Well, actually, there's not much. Now, my path students know most of the, you know, the things that underpin why I'm feeling the

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way I do depending upon how I am where I am. And actually, they become one of your greatest advocates, a lot of the blogs that are written or CO written by students who are saying, that's what made the difference, or, you know, which is beautiful, you know, they're engaging with art, or whatever it is that they're engaging with, alongside the harder sciences, because they are constantly pushed towards this finite focus of academic acceptance and process. And I'm the last person, they need to speak about that. Because I'm basically saying, I'm not doing it, I'm not doing any more I did it, I proved it, you've got it on the wall, you can see I've done a master's, I've done that bit, you need to meet me halfway know. And then that's proving very difficult because they want you to be disabled. So I'm being re referred back to Disability Services, because they need you to be identified disabled before they offer you the support, even though you're doing your PhD. So there's a definite pathologizing this sorts of things that go on. And it's just like, Okay,

Participant W

let me think, is that finding that balance sometimes with the students as well, that thing of like, you having to stay? Yes, I did a master's, I have written those words. So you can, and sometimes I hear that the discussion is going like, Well, why are we getting students to do 1000? Word reflective pieces? Why are we doing this? Let's get them to do a video. And there is that support in developing, if we are talking about changing assessments, that we don't do it to a point where you suddenly go, like, Oh, your master's was a video essay, and you don't know how to do it. But at the same time, there's still that thing of leaving with these abilities, or this this way of doing something. But at the same time, working out how to make it fair and doable. Yes, we're seeing the learning objectives. But sometimes I think it needs to be structured the paragraph, so like, it doesn't need to be. Yeah, a real look at it. Because I do think there is that thing of like, yes, we will do the masters. And it was difficult. And here it is. But that isn't for everyone. So

Participant S

I guess I kind of almost bring in my poor bits. It's kind of bringing in that sort of professionalism around.

If they go into graphic design, or go into nursing, and they're going to need to write about someone, they're going to need to write something to substantiate their pitch or whatever else. But they're not going to need to write a full

Participant W

rotation. That's exactly it. It's, we're not necessarily teaching more often than not, we're not teaching the next PhD. We're not teaching people that. I mean, yes, a handful of books about graphic design come out every year, written probably by about three people.

Participant A

Yeah, but predominantly, we're gearing our students to instruct, yeah, I was gonna say off the back of doing digital media. And this is why the academic route was not very apparent to me at that time when I was doing my undergrad. But because it's so geared towards your go into industry, and you'll be doing the listening, focus on presentations, because you'll have to pitch stuff and all the rest of it. Whereas obviously, the academic side of learning research writing was not a very big focus. Obviously, in year three, we had to do an undergrad thesis. But funnily enough, the only reason why I then did a master's in research rather than a post grad tool, was because I stumbled across kind of like a side point and I was doing my undergrad thesis, not like I I really want to look into this idea, none of the top things really kind of, you know, get me going. So I'm not going to be passionate enough to kind of do that. Whereas this idea that I've latched on to, I really want to explore it. And I think it depends where the student passion is. But when I then went to do my, my Masters by Research, the amount of stuff, I had to learn about how to write an actual thesis, because the undergrad thesis was like a 4000 word essay. So to go from that, to a 25,000 word thesis, where I had to actually think about one methodology, and I had to think about ethics. And I had to think about actually, collecting data and things like that it was it's very disjointed, I think, from a creative programme to the academic route that is done. So it depends, like you said, it's all dependent, really on the student and how they're, how they're good. But I think that's why I don't consider myself an academic. Because the way I did it was, so when I just kind of fell into it, and I've just kind of muddle my way through it. And just generally just regurgitate your 25,000 words at the end, and just hope for the best. And that's how I felt about my thesis.

Participant S

I met people outside the university environment, which consider us all to be academics. Yeah. Because they were all sat here with the Masters around the table. You know, so do I do wonder how much part of us feeling we're not real academics is because we're within an environment with people that tell us a real academic, does this? Yeah. If we were were teaching in just an art school or teaching in adults conservatoire or somewhere we would, you know, be comparing ourselves with colleagues that are totally practical. Yeah.

Participant A

But I think also as well, it's that imposter syndrome again, because I have always had it, I've always been, I am not like a normal person, I am deficient in some way. So I have to put like, kind of high back and prove by another 100% that I can do this person's job and more. And I think it's just the environment

has been so different from me, in the sense of this is the first role I've ever had where I could, I turned up a job interview. For new I've got just let in. Yeah, I am. And it didn't go against it. And I just think that, you know, even now, when I'm doing my marking my students and I go back to Joe, and I'm like, Is this okay? And she's like, really got to try and overcome this. Because you can do it, I can see that you do it. You just need to tweak how you're, like how we're all kind of managing your time and stuff. But yeah, even now, even though I was a sessional, for two years prior, becoming a part of the team, permanently, I still have this kind of, I don't even know if I'm teaching my I don't even know, I'm marking more. I don't know if I'm saying the right things to students. I don't know. You know, I mean, so I'm always in this kind of cloud of doubt.

Participant S

But as long as you don't, I feel as long as you don't spiral too negatively, that actually makes you a better I think, okay, tech, because you're constantly open to feedback, you're constantly, you know, as Participant T said, because you're still deconstructing your identity as you become more established as an educator.

Participant A

But I think this is where the foundation, you was very important to me, because there was a lot of emphasis on reflection. And because it was kind of like, okay, so we're always in a cycle of reflection, instead of, so now now, I've done more my degree and my master's, I'm very aware of the process of reflection that I do. And it's like you said, I don't try and spiral locked down negative kind of route, which I would have done before doing my degree. I now kind of go, Okay, so I'm in this situation. So what do I do better next time, you know, so I'm always reflecting reviewing how I'm teaching what I say. And

Participant S

so as educators, as an academic, from from, you know, it's part of the research I'm looking at is kind of teacher identity, and the fact that we're bringing part of our identity into the classroom, it's a part of our identity as a teacher, we're all open about our dyslexia. We're open about it in we hope, a supportive way. Some of our other colleagues would go into a classroom and maybe I'm too open, but you know, we'd go into a classroom and a pupil wouldn't know anything about them. They wouldn't know you know, whether they live locally whether they drive a car or when they got stuck in traffic or anything else. Which to me feels kind of quite alien. But I think part of that feeling alien is because of it. Think what we bring is this kind of, are we broken are we deficit, but whether we are or not, we've had to flex our way through the education system. And so we're much more flexible as teacher educators. So to turn it on its head, how do to me that's a real strength? And how do we actually take that strength to

other educators and go, you've got to be stop being so black and white, you've got to stop being so in a box.

I think part of it would be, like educators that don't do that, I think their biggest thing would be I, my biggest question would be, so how to encourage student engagement, if you are closed as a person, I mean, if even if you're networking, okay, and you're talking to people that you're interested in there is and you want to collaborate, all that sort of stuff. If you can't kind of do that direct communication with your students, how would you? Do you know, I mean, so if you can't, I would then assume that they probably struggle with networking as well. But if they're really good networkers, why they're not bringing it into the car,

Participant S

because I think for some, it's more there. And Participant T kind of alluded to it, I am the educator, I am here to broadcast information to you, you're like these hungry students, like

Participant A

I think that hierarchy, I think, especially in the creative programmes, you can't have that because you are. So I want you to have an idea, and I want you to pursue it. And I want you to come to me if there is any problems, so I can help you. If you're always kind of standing there going, well, you should know. And if you have a problem, you need to go here, get the support and all the rest of it. And I think that's, that's really negative. And really, like, in a bad way continue the student experience definitely.

Participant W

I think one thing is sort of setup of timetables in the time you've got to offer though, say you've got you teaching, think that it's still very much a lecture, and you'll have big lecture hall. But then your delivery has to be here, the slides, it's there on time, then if you'd like, you're someone that's higher up, and you've got that professorship kind of thing, and then other people give the seminars, then your opportunity thave those discussions has been removed from you. So you know, the workshop environment here. Again, on an open day, I'll say by the end of the first week, I'll know if you'd like pizza or pest if you've got like dogs or cats, peas or beans, like in the tailor and because you know, I'm in here for four hours with you. I will be walking around. And then it's kind of late last week, because I am how I am. I spent I think eight hours doing Pat's. So for people that I don't have time for this, like was getting really stressed. But at no point could I go enough's enough, like international students wanting to tell me about how their first Christmas was? Oh, yeah, we'll talk about that for 45 minutes. And they just couldn't say, you know, it's been 20 minutes. No, I

Participant S

don't know how much of it. We've all alluded to the fact you've said you know that you go off on a on a tangent or you go down a wormhole. And I know, Paul will sharing an office with me, you know, it asked me how I was an hour later, even though what I'd have for breakfast. Yeah. You know, so part of that is, is kind of our own? I think that's and Participant T talked about it before, and I think listed the kind of the narrative that we like to tell a narrative. Absolutely. So in a way and Participant T's already said, hasn't it? He has this relationship with his pats where they you know, you

Participant A

start with now, we're natural storytellers.

Participant S

But actually, maybe part of what we need to learn to do is to have students respect our time as well, you know, kind of, I've allowed allowed 15 minutes for this tutorial, we've gone on for half an hour, I feel really awful all the time. When I say to people, I'm so sorry. I'm Yeah, I do constantly have to look at my watch, because I'm not very good at predicting how long 10 minutes, you know, I don't watch some charge phones on charge. Suddenly, I've lost him. It's I get quite panic that the day is gonna kind of snowball. But it is partly that. I mean, I'm teaching I don't do that. I'm actually studying and teaching. I don't do that. But it's part of that kind of caring, isn't it? That empathy that building relationships, and wanting to not just tell our story, but to have people tell their stories to us so we can understand the whole identity?

Participant A

Yeah. But I also find it quite interesting, especially because this is the first year that I've taught first year students. So I've had a couple of students that have really bad anxiety problems and like really struggled with their presentations and stuff. And, you know, I I also suffer with really like crippling anxiety at times, and they go on, but you don't look at it. When you're standing up and you're doing the lesson you don't you don't look anxious. I'm like, yes, because I've learned how to kind of push that down. While I'm doing one thing because, like, even yesterday, I was kind of like, oh my god, semester two is coming up. I'm really nervous. Now. I don't know if I'll be able to give the two modules that I'm supposed to. I'm like, hello, you've just taught a semester. You've taught All these random students, and again, it comes the anxiety within like, kind of, Am I doing my job? Right?

Participant S

That's just showing the human. Yeah,

Participant A

but I get the impression sometimes, especially with me when I, and I know you shouldn't compare yourself to other people, but I feel that I just feel like I'm always swimming in this cloud of doubt. Like, I'm really just other people. Oh, yeah, they look like they've, they've got it together. And, and I'm, I'm panicking that I'm teaching a semester too. But I've just done this semester. And it's almost like, I don't know, it's perhaps it's part of the fact that this is like my first real teaching academic year. That I've got all of that with it. But yeah, so when when students like only I suffer really bad anxiety, and I'm like, I really understand, you do not understand how much I understand. So I've had really good kind of response from the students, especially if they've gone on worried about this particular element, specifically. So I had the student that was overly anxious, and he kind of jumped the gun a little bit in his presentation, and it kind of triggered him. And it's like, just take a seat, breathe, you're just telling us the story on your production? How are you going to do it? What is the idea? And then once he kind of sat down, and just and then he kind of went through it again. But then towards the end of his presidency, he'd got up and appointment stuffing is really going into it. And honestly, it's like, right? You really pushed yourself from five seconds ago, where you're like, Oh, my God, I don't know how to use your animated and you want to show me so I think it just, I think being open honest, definitely really does help with the student kind of engagement. But I think in terms of other colleagues, I feel maybe I'm still kind of harbouring previous kind of experiences in the sense of whenever I've said I have a problem. Well, you just need to do this, you need to sort it out. It's your your problem you need to fix. And whilst I don't have that here, I still kind of feel a little bit apprehensive at times when I'm like, I'm supposed to be professional. Now. I'm no longer a student, I should kind of get my act together a little bit. And I'm trying really trying, but it's still feels like, Am I doing this? Is someone watching someone who told me? No, I'm doing this or

Participant W

it's a bizarrely lonely job. And compared to that, when I came here, I don't know. That's what talking to others. It's not just culture, but it's it's lonely, even in a way I brought up the other day with you little bit in the weeds that kind of like orientation and how it's how it's done. And that you can, yes, there is an orientation thing. But once it's done or during it, they say here's an here's one, here's one, here's one, here's one, here's what you like. And again, that kind of thing of different people with different kind of workflow processing. And when the information happens, it can be you're kind of told that actually just knocking on people's doors can be really annoying. Yeah, asking people like, then you get that vibe from some people

Participant A

that don't like organic conversation. Yeah, like,

Participant W

that's the ease, you know, I'd rather that for different reasons, then 50 emails and for me to sort of be like, Alright, I've got that one where I've sent it to that person looking for this thing. Yeah. So you have like different things where they set up like the lunchtime surgeries for different things, and they're always significantly easier for that thing of, yeah, it's a bizarre like, you don't get to meet people. You hear of names, but it doesn't mean anything you get, I mean, hopefully, Jamie's new system will help for it's called. He's online.

Participant A

Oh, what the staff page thing? Yeah, I was gonna say building on that. I think as well, previous roles that I've had, I've always been micromanage to a certain extent, which I've always expected, whenever, again, go with the kind of experience gathering from leaving college, I've always been in jobs where, you know, you have an immediate manager, there's always gonna be watching everything you do, and they're quite happy to go, that's wrong. Yeah, again, and operate, you're in front of a cusParticipant Ter or whatever, like that. And they're quite happy to have that power trip. Whereas when I started here as a sessional, I kind of felt like it was very freelance and I was just, oh, yeah, I'm just gonna do my thing. And, you know, everyone was kind of, it felt like everyone was okay with me just doing my thing. But then when I moved into actually becoming a permanent member, and I was giving my office, my own space, and it was very like, oh, so I have just been trusted to do all the things that I've been told that

Participant S

there are a lot of structures that you're meant to know about that you don't know about until you've done them wrong.

Participant W

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. All haven't done it.

Participant S

And and almost feeding that full circle, sometimes you then think we assuming that all level four students know that a deadline is a deadline, and they're gonna get a late penalty, you might tell them that and welcome week, but they might not comprehend with that because if they've come just from an A level background, which majority of your guys students wouldn't have done but they've just done exams, they haven't had to manage coursework. If they've come from a diploma background, it's been very much more kind of staggered portfolio approach where you know, you're working on your art portfolio, but actually, you've always got time to go back and finish off another bit that you didn't quite finish. So it's almost that kind of assumption that they're going to come into this new environment and understand not just that it's now they're learning that student that learning. But this system is actually as though it's there is more freedom. They're tighter, probably than they used to in school. You miss an

essay, you get a detention at school, when you miss an essay here, it has an impact upon your final degree. Great.

Participant A

I just want to add to another to smoke, not saying that I want to be micromanaged. But I definitely think in terms of See, the problem is, is I'm very aware that I need external validation. Yeah. And I need reassurance on a regular basis. Not to say I want my line manager to be popping in for you, right. Like, I don't want that all the time. But I know that, especially when I am kind of in my sea of doubt, I know that sometimes just someone coming in and going, that's fine. Yeah. Is that's all I need. Yeah. But again, it's how, but it's like, if you think about support structures for staff members that are neurodivergent, or disabled, or anything like that. i The worst thing is, is I don't feel comfortable. I think it's almost like I needed to trial and error, just to see how it works in the first instance, so I need this impact before I then go, oh, by the way, I'm gonna need additional help on XYZ. Yeah, it

Participant S

was like Participant T just said, Isn't it he's now got it, because a PhD is now gonna go be referred to disability students services again, I'm going to try again to join the disability staff network to see what support that might get me I don't really want to join a disabled network. Because I don't consider myself disabled and but we now need to be channel channel now on this. I mean, partly, I feel a bit hypocritical. Also, in that we're saying to students, yeah, you know, we're accepting of difference. And we will, you know, like equality, diversity and inclusion. We're all this summer all that. But also, I know, it was you said earlier. I've only been diagnosed with dyslexia since I've been here. If I was to leave here now and go back and work in PR, would I declare it an interview? I don't think I would

Participant A

know why wouldn't even declare my deficit, I've got a job.

Participant S

So what how are we actually building our students.

Participant A

But that's another thing that

Participant S

education for life, to develop their positivity around their pets, like I said,

Participant A

last time, you know, the the emphasis on those safe spaces for students to kind of come out and kind of admit, what their weaknesses are, whatever, is far stronger from the student perspective. So me as a student, the only reason why I'm fairly comfortable was because I was made to feel very comfortable transitioning into staff, whilst I don't, whilst I'm not uncomfortable. Now, the thing is, is the team that I now teach with, they taught me so they're very aware of what my struggles are, you know, because my line manager, my line manager was my Pat. Yeah, Chris was my supervisor, my mid, so they're very aware of my issues. But again, I think, yeah, it's the whole, we're trying to encourage our students to be kind of open and honest about themselves, and when they go into the big world of work, and all the rest of it, but we don't have that same emphasis at the staff level. And like I said, last time, I'm already disabled, I've already been carrying the disabled identity for my deafness since I was born. So then to get diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD, as an adult, there's been no real adjustment on the kind of disabled identity fund. And that's why I said, I can't imagine what it's like to have a diagnosis of dyslexia, or a disability when you're an adult, because then you've got to adjust from what I was able bodied, up until five minutes ago, then I've got this diagnosis. And now I've got to call myself disabled. Like, how do I adjust to that? I couldn't imagine what that adjustment would be. Like when Participant T was saying you deconstruct your identity. I think that's very difficult in the first place. But if you then have to adjust, you know, and you're an adult, and you have to adjust to this new label, like, yeah, so I can understand why a lot of students like I'm not disabled, I've got dyslexia. It's not just,

Participant S

I think you What I tended to bring into the classroom or with my dyslexia was my story about being diagnosed late. Because every year, I used to be able to pick out one or two non diagnose Dyslexics and nine times out of 10. Because in class, they would engage like we're engaging, talking, chatting, or whatever, and you'd get an essay. And it wasn't about the spelling or the grammar, it was actually about the construction, it was actually about in the essay, they were telling a story, because that's how they feel most comfortable telling a story. And actually, there were three paragraphs when you could potentially do it in one, one paragraph.

Participant A

What I always found interesting is when you can see the flow, and then it will jump to a side point. Yeah. And then it goes back to it. And I'm like, that's how I talk.

Participant S

So partly, I would then be open and honest about being diagnosed late and say, in a positive way, never held me back. Career wise, it never held me back. Yeah, I went through, you know, years and years, it probably did looking back. And I had to take three times as long as anybody else to write some copy or whatever, but I didn't any different, to hopefully try and support them with going to get a diagnosis. But

I'm also kind of quite open, honest and going, actually getting a diagnosis is not going to make that much difference too. Because you've already got your coping strategies anyway, it's gonna cost you some money to get the diagnosis. But that, you know, these are ways you can get support, without even going to well being in some ways,

Participant A

more emphasis on encouraging students to get a diagnosis. And well, I just stupid support.

Participant S

But why is that for the good of the student? No, I think it's more or was it institution?

Participant A

I think it's more for the institution, they want to go Oh, yeah. So we've got 10 dyslexic students of this pope, whatever, like, but it's, I think, because of the adjustment to the label, I think the emphasis on dude must get a diagnosis. I don't think that's the right way.

Participant S

And I also think, depending on the industry, you go and work in, there's still some real stereotyping around. Well, you mentioned it last week about the autism label versus the ADHD label. There's still some stigma around dyslexia. I had somebody from the business school a couple of years ago, so that local accountants did not want dyslexic students anymore.

Participant A

Why? It's nothing to do numbers. That's just calculate. Yeah, absolutely

Participant S

different. But it was quite interesting. Some of the business school who was basically saying that, that they didn't want to

Participant A

waste like when when I was younger, I had a real kind of fascination with wanting to join the army. I don't know why. But I really wanted to join the army. And I spent a lot of my childhood Oh, no, but you can't do that. Because you're done. By don't take definitely, because you have this problem. They won't even look at you. And I think if you start kind of doing that, so if a student is like, yeah, I want to be an accountant. But someone comes in from the business going, yeah, they don't take Dyslexics for, I'm not gonna get that label. Because once I've got that label one, I'm definitely not gonna do that job. But if you start, because you start to almost see these doors kind of close in your face. So I've kind of like as a child, just on my deafness, kind of like, well, what route can I take? You all? My whole family did it?

And I'll be honest, but I'm going to I want to be a cop, and instead are no but your depth and they won't take it because you're deaf. So it was all you know, because you have the sensory loss, they're not even going to look at you. And I think if you start applying that same kind of relation on Dyslexia as well, I think I so if you just start seeing doors slammed in your face, at the early stage, so why are you going to then try and pursue.

Participant S

So that's why I would argue that as educators rather than academics, our role is to bring our dyslexia into our teaching, to help students develop their own coping strategies, which is slightly contradicting to go down disability student allowance, because when they leave here, go work in PR go when grafted on, they're not going to take their mentor with them. No, they're not going to take potentially this read and write software, they're going to have to sit in any Mac or whatever, in a design studio and just get on with things. So I was

Participant W

feel quite bad, because I think when I hear a lot of people talking about, like, additional extensions, or LSPs, and like and things and I always think it's very rare for me to sort of be pulling them out and offering them to students as a thing, because I hear other people really talking about, like, the excessive amount for their course. And they actually have normally, again, it's time in the classroom and having that ability, but I've normally talked about it and fixed it in the room before the deadline, the deadline, okay, like okay, why do you and it's again, it's things I've learned, why don't we get your calendar out now and start plotting when you can and can't do that

Participant A

because that's what they're gonna need to do because they can't

Participant W

because I always like struggling how many MSP No, no. Did you just write them in LSP? As soon as they said they've got an issue at the moment? Did you sit down with them? Did you do those kinds of things? And I think that's, that's, like the overwhelming feeling thing, because I think you'll still be feeling overwhelmed. And like, I felt that we're home, we're gonna get these devils oh my god having to do. There's lifeline, there's a 14 day thing, I might be able to get my I'll do that, and I feel better not.

Participant S

Let's still do that. And to me that 14 day thing is not developing a life skill

Participant L

no to take.

Participant A

But that's why I also emphasise the importance of their timelines in their presentations, you know, because it's them managing themselves. But also when it comes to, like deadlines and stuff, I think, personally, with my dyslexia. In my undergrad, I never asked for an extent, even though I could get one, I never asked for an extension, because that deadline date, actually gave me a bit of fire to get it done on time. You know, and I was really successful doing them because I learned how to manage my time in terms of the projects that I was doing. But I think in terms of LSPs and stuff, I think the worst thing is because I even when I think about my, my LSP kind of equivalents at school, and the focus on my deafness. It's not, what is the student actually doing in terms of the programme? What is it they're actually going to be doing in terms of assessments? And how do we kind of help them navigate that? It's, you have a problem that's associated to these issues? What can we do to fix those? So it's like, in terms of my deafness, it's very obvious in terms of Okay, so the students deaf, you need to make sure that your video content has subtitles, so potentially easy fix, but obviously, that's not always going to be okay, in the context of the content videos, not always used, things like that. So it becomes Okay, so yes, you have these issues. And these might be your areas of weakness, but how in how much does it actually impact what you're doing? Yeah, I don't think anyone actually looks at the LSP and go, like, what causes it? Quite cool.

Participant S

So the way that I describe that as a as a as a SENCO, Governor, almost as in schools is is it scaffolding? Or is it inclusivity? is a bit scaffolding you're giving it all to it's that classic meme isn't you see with the kids that you know, the shortcut behind the fence, you're giving them at all, you know, like that

Participant A

guidance software that I was given, I've never used it because actually, I found it easier to manage my workload in terms of doing an SR. Two, I had a process so I would write notes, I then write notes, my research and then I will start to kind of build up

Participant S

together and that's that's that skill will take you in Yeah, exactly. Whereas if we make students just do it that way, it goes back to what you were saying, you know, the graphic design students don't come out here looking at their studies at Christchurch, they come out with some confidence. And I suppose where I'm coming up to begin to finish now anyway, it's like how we use our deconstruction and our teacher identity in to actually challenge what is considered organisational, constitutional norms, almost culture.

Yeah, let's pick up at the next one, I hope. Yeah. Should we stop there because I'm on time and everything else. Thank you very much.

Workshop 3 Transcript

Participant S

And we're not doing film. We're doing a podcast now. So I'm hoping this might be the last and final session, got a meeting with a Podcast Producer next week, ex student who's going to have put together. But it might be that once we put together the script, I might want to do kind of little bits of one to ones with you guys and stuff like that, if that's all right. So thanks so much. So far for being involved. I feel a bit under pressure now, because I've got a review date coming up through pasta syndrome, fraud, everything's coming out. I feel like I don't want to do it. Well, I might just get a job outside of academia that I don't need a PhD for and everything else. And then kind of hit me last week. I don't know if anybody's met Denise, the new head of wellbeing and student wellbeing. Yeah. So I was at the 2030 vision yet last week. And I was with one of the Josh, one of the community support people. Yeah, he's lovely. Yeah, hunted him out, found him. Well, he found me with my classes. Yeah. And he was talking about her really wanting to change how we look at mental health support within the university for students, which there was a reason for this long story, because it links to the dyslexia, which was like, rather than it being seen as something we go to in Crisis or something that we go to, that we're ashamed about, it being just a general understanding that everybody goes through periods of ups and downs, and we need to be equipped with that toolbox kind of going forward. Which also links to kind of some personal stuff that I've had going on with kind of trying to get my little one, some sort of toolboxes as to how to cope in school where she feels that and we've talked about this before that because she's deficit, she needs to be the police, she needs to be looking after everybody else. And that's had an impact upon her kind of mental health. So it all sort of came together then with me ==thinking there's a university now looking at negotiated learning plans, extensions, learning support plans, and all that scaffolding, me kind of thinking that for this final session, which is rather apps that will just show me a slide where he's gone out with outreach and put a slide on saying, I'm dyslexic. How we can share? Or do we want to should we share our own journeys with our students to say to them, you don't need a Learning Support Plan, you don't have to have a learning support plan, you don't have to diagnosis you don't have to declare this, you can be comfortable with just being the way that you are, and helping them work through or help empowering them to work through what they're doing==. New School. Cool, let's do it. Right? What new school?

Participant T

Because that's, that's not gonna work, is it? Because the ==reality is you're going to hit a structural expectation, which is an assessment of a deficit model==. So the only way that you do it, and the only conversations I'm having is, the reality is they invite you to do a PhD, but they want you to do it their way.

Participant A

So we send that to undergrads as well, we're saying

Participant T

It's anyone comes into education, that the prophecies set by Chomsky and others and the nature of oppression or pedagogies, you have to conform, whereas the realities of positional education or education, through all of the spheres and perspectives that you can adopt are kinesthetic visual, auditory movement, anything to get to an end point. So I just think that you would have to start again, you would start with a space where actually what would likely to happen if you were to gain not that it would ever but if we were to talk about blue sky thinking if you could create a centre of excellence based around near a typicality then what you might find is that the linear wants to come in and you could say no, that would be that that's, that's the, that's the glass beetle. That's what I talked about in the most recent blog. That's the hessayon. Like position of life, actually, you've positioned us in a way where it is but uh, now I'm an activist, and I've gotten the language and I've read the research reviews and I know the language that can be used. You want to silence that because the reality is it becomes disruptive. That's the nature of punk.

Participant A

So what about I agree with all of that. But if we've got some, if we're teaching on a creative type programme, do you think you've got more flexibility to say to a student

Participant L

within the systems? Yeah, if I don't give my students their best I I can't get a TLS. Or if they don't have an LSP, then I can't allow them any flexibility of deadline. So I can tell them all of that stuff, as long as they work to the deadline. I mean, it might be, and I'm sure it is that there's value in telling them that anyway, because it will help them to work, then it will help them produce their work in a really good way. But where we have deadlines, set for exam boards, the process gets in the way, I'm actually in favour of scrapping, very radically scrapping every single assessment that we have. Yeah. And talking through it. Right.

Participant A

Question there. The reality of the question is not whether or not within the creative attributes, were there opportunities that were more like, valuable than the more linearly sort of focused is that? Where would we be if we didn't assess? Yeah, right. Now, I'm telling you, I guarantee you give me a room full of little wonderful X Men, and within a very short period of time now work with just blossom, because you wouldn't have to set attributes associated with time. Right? Now know that I've got ADHD, one of the biggest killers is time slot Are you got to fight I might not be able, I might be hyper focused one minute,

no focus at all the next, I might want to go for a walk or so you'd have to restructure the entire thing. And you'd have to ring fence the money and say you don't touch it.

Participant L

So for you, it's the time that's the challenge more than giving them the freedom to go. You have got a deadline at the end of the year. But actually, you could produce this in the way that works best for you, as a story as a piece of what our as a film,

Participant T

whatever or not hold, the greatest of art is sometimes the silence created between the words between the brushstrokes.

Participant L

How'd you get the thing at the end of it? If they want a degree, if you don't want a degree, it's fine, isn't it. But if you want the degree, what you have to do is

Participant T

You have to associate it with a sense of value, right? So what you do is you start at the beginning, and this is what I'm trying to talk I spoke to the farmer about his he wants to sort of create a space that sort of holistic, is you have to associate the values at the beginning, which is it doesn't matter if you get there or you don't it's the joy of the journey Because? Well, no, because you know, the position that I'm in right now is that I don't want to be here. Because the conversation or narrative that I'm having with the university is one that if they don't move soon, they don't get anything. And it feels unfair. There's not a parity in the association of science and art, there's no understanding of anything outside of the models with which we expect and the expectations associated, and the compilation of individuals that tend to navigate towards those spaces. If you were to stop doing that, then you would find more polyculture you would decrease the amount of silo working, I can't work with him. Because we're not working together because we're in different faculties. What a stupid idea is that? Because quite clearly, he and I would work beautifully. We would resonate beautifully together; we would resonate unbelievably together just as we have. So, you've seen the poly cultural idea. But the reality is, if you then say to someone, I'm just going to work this week there No, wait, no. Your workload plan says you've got marking commitments, as hundreds of people that come back. It's not very many people that can do what we do. But we separated

 Participant L

Yeah, maybe we think like the idea of that signing up and people wanting to learn like imagine if the system was the trust was almost like when an act when the the educators, it's hard to know what you've

done year one, but year one could be whatever, like, it's just showing that knowledge. One could be six months, year one could be three years and you wouldn't call it year one be like, are you ready to move on to the next stage? And it's just this, this flowing thing. So someone could go out, you know what? I'm going to get the knowledge within six months. You gotta Yes, but because it has to be monetized in this business. But like, just I will learn a degree. And I'm like, Yes, completely you're showcasing all of that not just someone could come in and again, like you bring in some people or sessions then you have that like, can they be a sessional? No, they can't, they haven't got a degree and then they come in actually the amount of like experience 100% You can beat it. You just day one, you can actually have a degree because you have got all of that knowledge. Everything is so Have a system. Thanks. But yeah,

Participant T

that's where I'm at. At the moment. That's the reason for the most recent blog, you know, and they don't read them. They publish them. And they don't read the fine print is every single oppression opposition that we know that we find because no shit, give us an assessment and we'll find the loopholes within the assessment to do something completely different, because that's the beauty of creativity, yes, the wonder of it all. But it's a frustration to the system. And that's why you're not given certain texts, and then you go certain places. So now the London School of Arts have gone Participant T, we're going to step away because we want to actually examine your work, because your work is really valuable. And I'm like, Oh, that's nice. Thanks. No one said that here. So it's like, Oh, okay. So there is a position of understanding. So I went and got them on my own accord a community of practice, you're not associated with these individuals, because it creates a radicaParticipant Lation and not a negative one, not like, Oh, I'm gonna suddenly, but you start to become rebellious. You're like, Oh, hold on. And she gives me this, this book, which is like, Oh, hold on. This tells me that 1000s of people have done what I'm doing. But their universities have accepted it. No, no, hold on. Don't give him that information. Be quiet, little boy. And then there's another person who saying, oh, like, hold on, there's a rebellious nature to what research needs to do. There is a point at a PhD level where you can take it all to the driver. There is that point?

Participant L

Yeah, you can you can basically just say, I want to be examined. Yes. But I have to pass this thing called an upgrade. And the upgrade is that they want me to give them 6000 structured secular words, and ignore all of the artistic output that's gone on, play, everything isn't valuable. They just want these two documents, one contextualising why I'm talking about nurses, while clearly because you don't fucking understand. You know, it's in the press. Why I'm talking about nurses. And then you've got another thing, which is like, why would you choose art? Why wouldn't I choose art as an expression? So I've then got to contextualise that, to allow them to validate everything else? And I'm a bit like, not sure.

Participant L

picking, picking up on kind of what you know what was just said it, it partly is it's a business, it's militarising its commerciaParticipant Lation of commodification of degrees, students are now coming in thinking I'm paying for this degree, my family are paying for this degree. And so I need a result at the end of it. Whereas when I was had the luxury of not paying for a degree, actually, some of my friends didn't get their degree at the end of it. But it didn't hold them back. They learned more from it by trying, trying and failing and tryingnow so I had a student he's come through, he's in his like, fifth year, you know, it's taken him a lot of time, he's a completely different person to the person I saw in the first year, he's got value, he's got skill, but he he is struggling in other areas, for whatever reason, but him as a persons come on so much. Now, if he doesn't get it all together and submit all of his assessments as reassessments at the last possible point, you know, then he's going to come away from five years, with nothing, possibly a certificate. But you know, he's also going to be like, 50 grand in debt. And I feel really bad about that, you know, if he wasn't going to lose all of that money, I would say that the time has been a value, he has learned, he has grown, he is coming out a different person, he's got a job. He's, you know, fulfilling what he wants to do. But I feel like I've been complicit in costing this guy 50 grand, you know, it's bad.

Participant W

I think on a kind of like an individual kind of level when I'm thinking about, you know, my teaching and what I'm trying to do for my students, I think on an individual basis, you can kind of you can make yourself as relatable and approachable and, you know, prepared to work the students as much as you possibly can or want to, but at the same point, I think it's not what you just said, you're all He's gonna then mentaParticipant Ling it. Yeah, exactly. You can always make the adjustments.

Participant T

Reasonable adjustments, don't fucking talk to me about reasonable to, to who exactly?

Participant S

It feeds back into the structure. And we're kind of like, well, actually, if we just didn't have those

Participant T

Anyone's define what reasonable is? No,

Participant S

Because I've been, I've also been challenging alternative assessment. Why is it an alternative assessment? If that's the learning objective? If I can hit the learning objective, they can current students do any sort of assessment type they like,

Participant T

You know, think about like your your boy who it was a joy to have him there. At the play right now, he's been through how many years of secular. And, you know, in a significant amount of that, and this is me, you know, making assumptions because I don't know him well enough to know, but I do. Now, how would I know that story, because the trauma that is associated with his learning journey is a trauma that's lived out. So you know, the reality of the position that he's in. So when he came into my position of consciousness, the reason he locked in was because that was the first time that he had been spoken to as the true self. They go, Well, then, what's the fucking point of education? The philosophical aspect doesn't exist. We talk about structural realities, right? We talk about organisational building bricks to get to a point of a fucking certificate if you're lucky. So I was conscious of coming today, because I'm not in a good place in terms of my position as an academic and Miss institution for a good number of reasons. But the reality is, that's a great place to be at, because there's a section in one of the books that says, Keep asking the system questions, what's going to happen is the neurodiverse are going to disappear at one end of the system. And then academia is going to be left with AI, which will outperform it. And we will be disappearing off doing the things that it can't do. And everyone will be like, Oh, shit, we intellect. Yeah, these aren't actually this isn't intelligence. This is just repatriation of knowledge. Oh, no joke, my little boy who's neurodiverse? It took him two days. All his homework, done, chat. GPT. Bosh, and like, that's not cheating the system that's just being smart. Yeah. Like, he's just going to Bosch in his homework. And he's like, just tell me another paragraph, please. about photosynthesis. Yeah, that seems pretty good. Although learning there is

Participant S

Even three years ago, my little one was doing better creative writing and locked down. And she was at school because she was just asking Alexa how to spell words. She was writing the story, but she was dictating it in rather than to handwrite it.

Participant A

I'm trying to avoid at work. Yeah. Oh, and this is the thing. We don't facilitate that alternative way. And because the system like everyone has said, he's not prepared to facilitate that alternative way. It doesn't matter how alternative we are as individuals, because the system is not going to ever recognise it. So yeah

Participant L

I might destabilise stuff we might have to because I could I, you know, I did this. I did an essay in AI, I did it paragraph by paragraph exactly as you described it past that essay. And there's absolutely no way I could have discovered that in some way. You know, whatever I feel about it. It definitely was good enough.

Participant S

So, so weird, late, not weirdly, but in a way I could be quite positive for us. neurodiverse, because we're gonna have to look at assessing outside of

Participant W

The funny thing is, is if you do that, you basically made the education system within that school more accessible to everyone. Yeah. Like even for physical disabilities. If you make it accessible to all those who do not have like a generic walking method, then everyone can access it. So you know, if you're doing that in the neuro diverse kind of sense,

Participant T

Where you invite that in, and then you just ensure that everyone that comes in is essentially, like, it sounds weird. But the poem The butterfly farmer is it is a conversational narrative with the education system that I was having with myself. And it was like, first to emerge like so there's a position within that poem, which is like, they're the values that I would expect if it was positioned as an unconditional love of education. Like that's what I would want, because it was a conversation that I had with my granddad. He was the only one that listened to me because we would talk walk between me him and the dog and Moss was more company than any human you know so I couldn't understand why I was building these relationships and he had with the education system that I was having with myself and it was like first to emerge like so there's a position within that poem which is like they're the values that I would expect if it was positioned as an unconditional love of education, like that's what I would want. Because it was a conversation I had with my granddad, who was the only one that listened to me, because we would talk between me, him and the dog, and Moss was more company than any human you know. So I couldn't understand why I was building these relationships and he helped me. He was like you won't be understood and I'm like but I want to be, and he goes no, you don't, you don't want to be understood. The moment you become understood, you have cut off part of what you naturally aggravate within the system.

Participant A

It's almost like a level of masking to be understood by a normal person. You have to kind of cut that person down so that person feels comfortable receiving what it is that you're trying to.

Participant S

I actually resent the word masking now because I actually think that by labelling it as masking, you're implying that these children are deliberately behaving in a certain way to fit in.

Participant A

You're suggesting that the complicity is actually a deception.

Participant S

And some of these children aren't even realising what they're doing. It's not a mask they're choosing to put on. It's maybe just a different persona that they do.

Participant A

I think the only reason why I say it's masking is because I do it with my deafness and I've always done it with my deafness. And when people talk to me and go and I tell them I'm deaf and I never would have guessed well, because I deliberately didn't tell you. I deliberately avoided that conversation because it's just going to be you asking me. Well, you don't look deaf, you don't act, you don't sound like. I don't need to go into the whole ins and outs of my deafness from when I was born, and I think that's the only reason why I kind of latched on to that term, because I don't just do it with my dyslexia, I know I do it with my ADHD, I know I do it with my deafness as well. So when people talk about masking, the only reason whilst I think it's a very negative term, I don't know for me to have that kind of compartmentalisation of this is not a good thing for me. When I do this, I'm exhausted. When I do this, it knackers me. When I do this, I get very stressed, you know, and I suppose I have that term in my mind because I have that negative.

Participant A

I don't know why, but it's kind of it's a prohibiting of yourself.

Participant L

Yeah, I have to kind of new parts of myself.

Participant S

And it isn't interesting that maybe 30 years ago it was considered a positive thing. Yeah, it's a positive thing that I don't know that. I knew that when I was doing waitressing I had to talk in a certain way compared with how I might talk to my kids.

It's a silent exactly what the use of this, you know to get a better tip, I would go good afternoon, blah, blah, blah blah. That was seems a positive thing now, but now if you saw a neurodiverse person doing that, it would be like, oh well, look, they have to act to be able to get a job as a waiter. They have to act to take on this.

Participant L

That's so bad, isn't it? That's a bad thing. You have to act like a different person to actually get anywhere.

Participant S

Because I saw a comment the other day about stimming. It's like when does it become a stim, you know? Because actually, it's perceived is it yeah. What's stimming? So stimming is a repetitive habit that they say that neurodiverse people do to give them comfort and you just love the self-regulation tool.

Participant A

Yeah, okay. So I do it a lot and I tend to tear up the skin around my nails. So that would be because it's like nail bite in hair to it like little actions.

Participant L

But weirdly you do it repetitively. If you were, if you considered yourself to be neurotypical and you were still chewing your fingernails?

Participant A

Because we're identifying, self-identifying comfortably with neurodiverse. Now, anything we do is then considered a symbol of our decolo rather than just going. All kids go through a phase of chewing their fingernails, maybe, or all kids go through a phase of swinging on their chairs when they're bored, or whatever.

Participant W

So it's an instant memory of falling, when I was about 12, into the back of the table. But yeah, and I've been paying attention for it actually eventually but yeah, I couldn't sit. Still, I mean, there'll always be. I've always got a kind of pragmatic approach to the position we're in at the moment and I don't think it's of no value to change how we assess as much as possible. But I think it's recognising the structures that are in the way. I've got a module. I wish I'd changed the assessment. I'm kicking myself for not changing it. It's going to take me two years in mind and we'll revalidate it to change the damn thing. I mean that should be easier to do for a start, but I don't want my students to have to produce that essay anymore. I want to give them an option of however they want to produce that information handed over. I'll look at a film, I'll listen to a poem, whatever it is, but I want that information. However, I can't now do that because the process is in place.

Participant S

It's meeting the learning objectives, no problem Well well that one talks to me, because actually what I want to try and do it's probably not as radical as Participant T wants, but what I'd want to try and do, to try and make some changes is actually to say exactly that. And we have some courses where course directors are comfortable, are happy, modulators are happy to go. This is the learning objective, this is

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the menu of ten ways that a student could meet that learning objective and they will choose to submit in that way and I suspect some of the resistance will not be because the students can't do it, it will be nervousness of academics to go. Well, I can mark an essay. Really recently I don't know how to mark a film.

Participant T

Turn it in when it comes to having a nasty other issue. I mean I've put an element of choice in there. I wish I'd been bold enough to put more choice and then to work out the criteria. That's fine, I can do that. That's not a hard thing to do because it's to do with learning objectives. So in that way I think the more that we can do that, the more that we can encourage that, the more that we can show successful models of that where students may otherwise be not doing well in similar models.

Participant W

I mean, I find it all quite, I find just trust from above being weird. I think I sort of meant touching it earlier, but that thing of If I think sort of when I had the meeting with Julie and I forgot my name again Florence, apologies, just that thing of just, if I think it's 4,000 word equivalent, then it is.

Participant L

You see, we do that a lot in film.

Participant S

Like, and I really am like, open to if I can tell that you've put time and effort in.

Participant W

Trust us to know.

Participant A

Yeah, like completely, and so I'm really open with a lot of my assessments.

Participant L

Do you think that a lot of the like kind of pushback that you get from higher up the chain is because there aren't, like neurodivergent people maybe up the chain a bit more? There's a lot of neurodivergent people up the chain that aren't diagnosed or actually acknowledging that they're neurodiverse, and that's part of the challenge, because I think you actually had someone higher in the chain. There was actually yeah, no, this is a thing that matters to me, because I am one of these people.

Participant S

Well, the two people that you just discussed. They've never come out to me as neurodivergent, but I

think it's when you can see it in others Well knowing their family and everything else.

And what's interesting is when I had the conversation with them about it being a time allocation. So rather than it being a 4,000 word essay, a student needs to spend 20 hours working on this. The challenge that I would have, like Participant T said earlier, if I'm feeling hyper-focused I could do that in 10 hours, but if at that time I'm not feeling very hyper-focused, it might take me 40 hours to do it. So my 20 hours is not the same as your 20 hours. It's not the same as your 20 hours.

Participant W

And obviously time of day is different as well, so you might do 20 hours work in 10 minutes in the first three hours of the day.

Participant L

I wrote my PhD in six weeks.

Participant A

Wow, that's amazing.

Participant L

I had 10 years to do it in. I've done it in six weeks. I'm not all the research stuff like that, but do you know what I mean In terms of that hyper-focusing? That's when it came in, that's when it kicked in.

Participant S

So could a middle ground? Participant T won't like this, but could a middle ground be if we can't have a new school, we do it as in. You have an end date. That's what I'd like for Participant T to be for a bit.

You have an end date and you know to get through the level. If you want to get through the level, if you choose to get through the level, you need to have demonstrated that you've got these things, these things, and you just, by this end date, can demonstrate that by producing interpretive dance. I don't know. You know a storytelling, a piece of art, an essay, because there are students that do want to do essays. There are students that want to have the structure that know they want to have. They'll come to you how many academic students have I got to have?

Participant A

Oddly, I was that student which always makes people feel really good. I loved exams and I quite like writing essays. I can do them, they just kiss boring.

Participant T

I'll probably end up being complicit again. I'll probably end up doing whatever it is they want me to do.

Participant S

Yeah, M likes exams. Weirdly, they're not easy for him, but he likes them because it's quiet in the room, so there's no distraction and it's a time block as well.

Participant W

He can get totally immersed into it.

Participant S

He can get totally, particularly essay writing, get totally sucked in.

Participant W

Yeah, I got all but one minute left. I told the story of my stars. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I did yeah, so I wasn't particularly good at exams.

Participant S

And yet, weirdly, he's been told for years that obviously he would struggle with exams and that essay writing would be hard for him. So, that's been hard for me because everybody's told me it's hard for me. Yeah, there's a lot of that as well.

Participant W

I mean photography did. When I was working photography, I said what's the deadline for this module here? And I saw the same. Sorry, it's all the same. All the modules same deadline. Hold on both assessments. Yeah, it's all the same. Photography when Karen was there I don't know if they're still doing it had the same deadline for every single piece of working semester one and every single piece of working semester two.

Participant S

They're not allowed to do that now, and I'll tell you what their students submitted and they didn't freak out and they were all right now.

Participant W

they needed guidance. Okay, it's probably not a great idea for you to bunch everything up now, because now you've got problems you might need to spend some more time with your practice Like product management almost, and not product, they're project management.

Participant S

But yeah, but in a way like if that's my deadline, that's my deadline.

Participant A

I haven't got to remember which deadlines, which deadline is which piece of work We've gone from having that to changing this year, and it's interesting because I thought it would be way better having the staggered approach. It's not is it, but it's not because, they did remember the date and I'd probably spend more time in class going like okay this is like allocate, do this kind of thing.

Participant L

And now you're asking you're going like call.

Participant A

I've got two days to do this assignment and I've got 12 weeks to do this assignment and it has definitely shifted.

Participant W

Well, you're asking a person that's neurodiverse, then balance, you're providing them a module system that isn't in order, then you're giving them dates that are in order, then you're giving them assessments that are sort of different equivalents and all of that all kind of not in order as well. I'm not spending most of my time writing out the dates in chronological order for students who just cannot do it in any other way?

Participant L

Because for me, I need that to actually be able to plan what I'm actually doing and teaching. So that has been an absolute godsend for me. But yeah, when you're writing in dates just randomly in the hand, you're like what am I even writing about anymore?

Participant S

Yeah, so you could do that. You could have an end date. You could say to some students if you want to submit early, do yes. If you want to submit this piece as soon as we've taught it, you just freshen your mind, do that and submit it. You can do. And then the assessment period.

Participant L

If it was actually here's two weeks, get it within these two weeks. It doesn't matter when it starts in May the 1st and it ends on May the 20th.

Participant A

Go with that bit of I don't know, spending most of your time checking someone's social media.

Participant L

It just sounds like, and then it doesn't matter if they're late, because that is your window.

Participant S

But that actually was what originally started.

Participant L

Right.

Participant S

And that's the trouble, isn't it? You start out with good intentions, with a semesterisation, and then suddenly, because certain things don't work, we then change it, and then we get a patchwork where it doesn't work for anybody.

Participant L

Mm. Because it just sounds like all the issues. Ultimately, if we are going to try and improve flexibility higher up the chain, it just sounds like it's going to meet a lot of.

Participant S

It's crazy, but it isn't all universities, it is very much, you know, looking I don't know if you'll go, but looking at other universities for maths now it is, you know, like Lancaster. You can do any degree there but you can go and do modules in anything. So if you go into physics you can do a module in fine art in the first year Were you sitting out here.

Participant L

Yeah, so, when I was here, I took history and French in my first year.

Participant A

Yeah, all right. I think my biggest issue really is we're starting to really improve the kind of resources and support services for the students and we're not actually tallying it up with the system that we've already got in place. We're not tallying it, I mean, even in the sense. I think in the last discussion and I said my biggest problem is is when I was a student here I had all this support and I always like kind of knew that I was in a safe space. And since becoming a member of the team here, I know that I'm still in a safe space because I'm still with familiar people. But I have that kind of I've lost that sense of support.

Like, if I'm now panicking, it's like I now go to my line manager for everything and she's probably getting really sick of it, but she's so nice Like Joey's, just like oh yeah, she's my pat as well, so she's sitting at my worst time, so that's really helped me, like having a line manager.

That was She'll just keep going, but that's the thing, it's just one of those.

Participant S

But we are relying upon people like that in paths. I mean, I've never been so lonely in a workplace in my life.

Participant W

It was really, really going into that office space and you're kind of away from everyone else and I just think just having support carried over from the kind of student level to the staff level, even just something like that, that's a bit more obvious to me.

Participant L

And we've got a terrible situation at the moment with a student disciplinary. There is nothing for us, nothing at all. There's nothing to help us. The thing is balance so far in favour of the student as to be ludicrous. I'm a very fair person. This is ludicrous and there is nothing there. There's nothing that feels as nothing there to help you if you're really struggling and stuff like that. There's just more of a case of this is what you've got to do. The language used by the administration services is baffling, quite frankly.

Participant A

Yeah, I can't read a lot of the stuff that comes out from them. I don't really understand what they're talking about. The amount of times I've gone to Joe and Joe's gone oh, have you seen the scene?

Participant L

And I've gone.

Participant T

Yeah, but I didn't quite understand what it was about and I thought initially it was because I was new and it was like all these acronyms of things and I was like I know nothing. But even now there's a couple of people essentially that yeah, but even now I'm six months in and I'm still kind of like there are things that come out and I'm like like we would be expected to kind of reword this stuff for the students so they can understand it.

I think at the very least they should be kind of rewording stuff. You're not just so, You're not just doing that. I'll just delete it, I'll just leave it unread, just whatever.

Participant W

You can't. I've got no idea what you're talking about.

Participant A

I would start. I'm like I'm three lines in and I'm like no. Yeah, it'll come back if it's important. That's what I think, boomerang delete.

Participant W

That's a fair point. It will come back if it's important.

Participant A

That's what I'd do, whoop, and then, if it comes back, I'll yeah, it's got to pay attention to it. We try and read it and no, it's still gonna read it.

Participant L

But I just thought I'm just gonna have a conversation with someone. Yeah, I just think that's just the biggest disparity for me personally.

Participant S

We don't have any reasonable adjustments. No.

Participant T

I know I'm not meant to be dyslexic and I definitely, definitely, definitely shouldn't have ADHD.

Participant A

No, yeah, that's a fair point. I think the only thing I actually requested as a reasonable adjustment was some headphones so I can listen with the laptop and my hearing aids and stuff. And they were like, oh no, you'd have to source these yourself, we don't provide it from HR or IT or whatever. But Joe was like, oh, don't worry, there's spare headphones in the tech office, you can have them.

Participant T

And I was like, okay, the tech office is supplying all of our neurodiverse and additional needs. But it's just.

Participant A

It's even things like that. It was like it was to me that was such a minor thing to request and yet I had to go and source it myself.

Participant T

That's a tiny thing to request, yeah that's what I mean.

Participant L

I wasn't.

Participant A

They had to disable you in order to do it anyway. So I had to go back to the DSA recently. I don't understand.

Participant S

Oh God, don't get me started on DSA.

Participant T

So I didn't really understand what it was there for. So I was like made to be disabled? So I was like put through this kind of phrases of assessment and like yeah, and then they contacted me and I was like this is what I want and they're like no, no, no, no. you can't have what you want, we don't want to support that, but what we can do and like they've done that so many times now like it just seems like well, just trying to replace things that they haven't actually spoken to you about is pretty insulting. You know like it's. You know it's like rocking up to you. Know you go home and you find someone's in your house cooking you a meal that you did and you get the fuck out of my house.

Participant A

You're not helping me, you just make me out. How did you get in?

Participant A

So there's a reality to where I know that I should be grateful, and there's a reality to the position of privilege.

Participant T

You should be grateful. It should never be. You should be grateful. This is what you deserve. This is what you should have. Because this is another mindset that I have been living in for so long, when someone goes oh, I'm going to help you, oh, thank you, I'm so grateful that you helped me, not that my disability is my fault, but even whole reframing, like you said, that you've had to reframe a lot of things yourself to understand that actually it's not you that's wrong. No, so you should never feel grateful when someone gives you an adjustment?

Participant T

Well, the problem is you don't have self-worth, so the reality is it's only when I'd completed one of the outputs that I'd done did I reaParticipant Le that I had value, and it was only at that point that then I looked at the system. And that's not a good thing, you know, because then you're like oh thanks for doing me a favor, right. Then you look back and yeah, it's not, yeah, it's not, it's not good, but it is like you say, it's like it's the system that you're within. So you can kind of like, but that's why I wrote that blog about the Weddell seal, because they get really scarred faces and I was like, why do they get so like damaged and stuff? Because it was like they choose to go to this very northerly part, furthest away they can possibly get from everybody. I so understand the Weddell seal and they go underneath and they have a lovely time because there's no predators, so they can just, they can just chill there, like in Weddell heaven, right, with their other mates like you know what I mean and we eat clams together and we're having a lovely time. But I have to take a breath and you know, and they die slightly like earlier because they're so high they have to keep their ice hulls open, so they choose to live less years than their counterparts, right. But when they do take their head above water, there's normally a polar bear there, because obviously they can get hold of them and drag them out and that's what it's like. That's the only way I could create a metaphor that helps people understand how it feels, because you're fine until you take a breath amongst others, and then they're like scar, and that's why I've then looked back historically and that's where the trauma resides in history. So you have to then unpick all of those moments where you were made to leave a classroom because you asked a question or you know, like all of those times where you didn't form a relationship or a friendship because you didn't really understand it. You were like well, I want to be your friend, but I don't really like you know. And I'd say well, now I'd say awful things, like I just don't find you physically attractive, because I didn't understand like the normality of what you would say in those situations, and I'd be worried and anxious, so I'd drink, and then the drink would allow me my frontal lobe to wake up, and then I'd be like, so I'd say things, and now I look back and I'm like, fuck's sake, man, like that would have been limited significantly. There would have been the hedonism. I wouldn't have necessarily gone down the route of tracing multiple types of recreational drugs, because I would have had a better understanding of dopamine, less happiness, like happiness that was derived by being around people that understood me, so just constant. And so then you're like fuck man, is that what all of the rest are going to do? Yeah, they are. That's unacceptable. We can't have a society that feeds people into criminality because they're not understood. That's the reality of the system of justice. That's the reality of what we're talking about. All this guy that's going to come out with a fucking certificate if he's lucky in 50 grand a debt Fuck the education system. Then I don't want a fucking PhD. They can shove it up, their arse, I'll take my M fill. They can fucking upgrade themselves because they need to Fuck them all Bored of it. I know that there's literature out there that proves I'm right, but they won't even listen to that because it's not referenced properly. They wanted a fucking reference list and I gave them a virtual reality of my mind. And they still want a fucking reference list. It's a binary piece of paper with black and white on it and I gave them media, film, animation, link, visual and actually a thing linked to every single citation in order so they could track it in the Jungian

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Tree of Life. What the fuck else do they want To fit?

Participant S

in the system.

Participant T

No, I've done that. I've been complicit. If they want me to, I will do it and I'm telling you that I'll hand them back their fucking PhD. When he hands it to me in the cathedral, that will be the most satisfying thing he can give it to me and I'll go have it back, you asshole, because it's worth fuck all isn't it? Because I've been complicit all the way up until that honour what's that honouring them? There's a system. It doesn't honour me, but they won't allow me to tell them anything. It's like I'm trying to tell you. I'm trying to tell you things.

Participant T

I'm trying to tell you things at the basis of knowledge, they would find I mean, I'm going back to Socrates, but that it's spoken anyway, and media is a form of speaking, isn't it? It's spoken. That's what they value. They value live speech, because live speech can't be misinterpreted. In the same way, when you present someone information and knowledge in a media package, I think that you're providing a very similar thing.

Participant S

Which is where the whole system is now changing, because people have got their own voice through social media. They can actually you know, celebrities can actually or whoever can actually say, can give their story across. So it can't be manipulated or changed or a headline and stuff.

Participant T

But the system still works on the repatriation of knowledge associated by other people of privilege, recognising and validating your work so that it is then part of a system that is a research and knowledge exchange which is dead at the point of publishing. That's pointless. That theses, as they are now, are read five times. They are read by the supervisors and the examiners and that's it. I'm not interested in that. I've already. I know that I've done what I need to do anyway because I did the table of consciousness. I did it one night. I said have my fucking mind, have a little look at that for a minute and then walk into my mind that I constructed two pieces of music and I constructed a table that represented me and I knew that I had done it and I sat there at that table and I thought it doesn't matter now. But that's just made me more punk, because now I'm like I've done it for me. That felt good.

Participant S

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Well, don't do it then.

Participant T

Interesting point of view. What do you think the university will say about that?

Participant S

We've just haven't completed it.

Participant T

Oh right, so you reckon they'll just be, they'll honor all the way up to the point where I walk away. The sad thing is is that I made the sort of slightly jovial conversation in an email of like someone misinterpreted my email. The linear thinkers that are associated with my supervision misinterpreted an email where I said I would probably give up unless and they just saw he's giving up Right and they were happy there was a very swift response. There's not such swift response when you start asking questions or changing systems. So do they do want you to give up? I think they do. I think they would rather it if I was just to go away. And you know I really love Jonathan, but he's got on a horse and he's like what the fuck am I on Right because he's now galloping across going? I didn't fucking. I didn't sign up for this and he wants it to stop right and Christy just wants to structure it. And then they've gone the stupidly. They've said go and find a community of practice. So I did and I went to find Brighton and I went to find London and they've both gone. Well, this work is really valid Bring it there then? I'm like oh take it there.

Participant S

How do you?

Participant T

do that. You can't lift anything, man you could ask them if they'll take it. You could Try to set it over.

Participant A

That's where the imposter kicks in, isn't it? That's the reality of it.

Participant T

You're being the same position as now, whether you do it or not. If it doesn't, if it's not successful. You know it's the same position you're in now, but at least you know If they're telling you there's value in it, it's worth asking.

Participant T

Well, they've both stepped away because they want to examine it. So in the last meeting we had, which

was just me getting to know them and they are really celebrated artists in their own right she wants me to go down to Stratford and put my art in their new, like a new university building right to go and present there. I just don't understand any of it. I don't get any of the stuff. I just get angry. Now I want to be good, I do genuinely, and I've got one piece of work. That is what they want, but then I just want to give them a piece of shit.

Participant L

No, I've been there, I've been there, I've completely been there.

Participant T

Yeah, so I've written one that they'll like, which is contextual and it's got a reference list right. And then I've got another one that's got fuck all, and I want them to accept both at this upgrade. Yeah and that's the only bit. It's like we can talk all we want, but the reality is structure yeah. Like you, can exist within it.

Participant S

Yeah.

Participant T

As like a polymer for an amoeba. You can kind of work your way around and meet other friendly bacteria, but the reality is there's a systemic sepsis. So how do we make all the amoebas stronger than the system? Then yes, both strokes.

Participant S

Another school.

Participant T

It's both strokes.

Participant T

Gotta fucking take it out and get it funded and start something completely different. I think that's what I want to do Philanthropically. That's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to find someone that will go easy, bit mental, but do you know what actually?

Participant S

So it's like an HE version of homeschooling.

Participant T

It would be a space. It would be a space that could be accessed. I'm going to go and visit one because they like the wandering lamb and they like the EFOS. So I am going to go and visit one which is like a, like it's I'm not quite sure what it is, but anyway they're nice people. So I'm going to go and see them.

Participant S

Is it Ripple Down? Is it where Sam's girl is?

Participant T

No, no, and I'm going to go and see a lady now about five years, five years festival of just doing weird stuff, and so I'm trying. But the reality is the system. I don't know now how to go back and you know, and part of me just doesn't want to now I don't want to be complicit anymore. Why?

Participant S

So taking it full circle. Really we should. Our students should be saying this to us If we're producing critical thinking students and we're helping them grow like your lad, that poor sod is going to have done five years. But but not poor sod because if he's learned from it, aren't we doing a better job? If by the end of the third year they're kind of going, I don't really care if I get my degree or not.

Participant L

They do If you give them the assessment document, the material and the opportunity right. So when we do nursing and social justice, we tell them set a point of understanding your point of privilege and your point of opposition and how you would become an activist or an advocate. Like 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%, they'll tell us because they're safe and they're in a position of trust. That's why I've written trust, true love. Yeah, that's the basis of all of my research. That's essentially my method of trademark moving forward right and stuff that other people can utiParticipant Le, you know, and say, oh yeah, I remember that bloke, he was a bit weird but right and I'm sure that that's beneficial. But the reality is we don't give those spaces because we don't want to hear what they've got to say, because those positions are rebellious and if you give them any, they're going against a very system that is monetized and structured in a very set way.

Participant T

Look at Ginsburg, look at the beatnik community.

Participant L

You know that anything that becomes countercultural look at the punky it has to have a finite beginning and end.

Participant S

The Frankfurt school.

Participant T

Anything has to be structured around like well, we let it live for a little while, and that's what I feel like I am now. I feel like I'm partly kind of paid for, like, and that's why I wrote the poem poetry monkey like, wheel him out, like. So it feels like they, like they want me, but I've got symbols on my hands and they're hurting, but I'm still there to clap for them when they need me to, and it's like it's just uncomfortable and it's just difficult, isn't it to find?

Participant L

and I think that's how the students feel they feel like I was asked to be an examiner for PhDs and MAs and I said I don't have the criteria you have here to be an examiner. I can see it, I can read what the criteria is and I don't have it and I know we really need you to fill out the form. All right, I fill out the form. So fill out the form and it comes back, goes to the panel, comes back. You can't be a supervisor because you don't have the right criteria. Yeah, no fine, we were in agreement about that, actually, but okay, this happens three times. The last time I said to the person asking, I said I cannot do it. I need to have done some publishing.

Participant A

They don't accept all of this stuff now, whether we want it or not, they don't accept it so I can't be it.

Participant L

We really need you to be a supervisor for this student. He's put you down the supervisor he wants you. Can you put the thing in? I put the form in. I get another email back. We did discuss this round the panel. I just don't discuss my application. I didn't want to put in anyway, I look like an idiot and you're not successful. However, we are going to allow you to supervise this one student. I was like I'll hang on a minute, so not only am I not one, I don't have any value as one. I can't be one. I'm not you're gonna be made into one but I'm also one for the purposes of filling a gap that you don't have, because you want the student. That's nuts. I'd have you as my examiner though it's not going to happen until I do some stuff that they want me to do.

Participant T

That's what I mean it's same as Sam Bailey. He couldn't have someone as an examiner because they were like the world's best improvisational musician, but they didn't have a PhD. Yeah, come on so who knows?

Participant L

right filling gaps and closing gaps. I feel like I bet we've probably written quite similar words and I bet

they're quite similar to what vision 2030 is yeah, but I bet, like having attended some of those things, I got really annoyed at how it was sort of their vision, different people's, and I didn't feel that they really understood the word. Like it was marketing and it was kind of box ticking and then really when one of the ones yeah, I went to again like off record.

Participant W

I'm like well, I know me on my own cup Alison had said like oh, this is all the work I've done to improve NSS scores, was like I don't think you've done it, like what have you done to improve it, and I thought I was really kind of like that's like don't take that you've done anything. Do we want to improve the scores or do we want to improve the actual student experience? Yeah, genuinely the student experience or do we want to improve this data? Because if you improve one, the other will follow along, but you really don't have to worry about it.

Participant S

You just want to mess up the data.

Participant T

Yeah, yeah, yeah, just thinking like it's a shame that these conversations and being realistic with it, like yeah, you can find the word because people have said it and then gone, that will look great on the flyer, but do you understand? And then is those kind of like, actually, in order to do that word, don't just say we're honest, showcase how you're like, do make a change. And I just didn't believe it.

Participant T

So yeah, and that's why I think we can all do it at an individual level, because we understand the trauma that has created us and we try so hard to kind of make sure that we're not letting anyone kind of you know care, so to speak, suffer that same kind of experience but that's why I said it's when you start moving up the chain and when you start looking at okay, so we have assessment deadlines, and it's kind of like, well, how much flexibility can you actually give? Oh, none. So you need to go and go into yet another system to get a procedure put into place and it's just, you know, as someone who just kind of like with my ADHD, it's kind of like, unless I've got a list of things that I need to specifically go and do you, someone says you need to do that and there's loads of little things to do. I don't know where to start. You know the paralysis fixing. I'm like you know what I'll just do without it's a school bully system as well.

Participant W

You get bullied when you're younger, and then you bully when you're older, and I think that there's a lot of people that have gone through the difficulty of getting their degree or their PhD, whatever it is. Now

they've got there. Now they're at that point they're the worst they want the people that are coming through it feel the pain, the pain that's not pain, doesn't give you pain.

Participant T

Yeah, trauma doesn't actually do that, doesn't auParticipant Tatically make you a stronger person, because it depends on the individual going through damage at that time yeah, that's the thing. Like you just said, it's the damage. We've not come out of the trauma like better people, like more balanced. We've only come out of the trauma or got past some of the trauma because we have take, we've acknowledged that ourselves and we've gone okay. So how do I avoid doing? This again. It's like a cycle. It's like Groundhog Day of Trauma. I do need to leave it within the next sort of six months at the moment.

Participant W

It's interesting you say that the word trauma and stuff, though, because I think mine I think I mentioned before is that reaParticipant Lation that I'm dyslexic and, interestingly, all of my year twos keep going and your hundred percent ADHD as well. I've never been tested for anything, I've never found out and I like, rather than trauma, I definitely would say mine's an awakening, yeah, this kind of thing and then reaParticipant Ling I think you said before that that's why your slides a little way and that's and kind of going like fully, like committing to that this is a hundred percent my superpower and things like. So all of a sudden I feel a bit twitchy. In classroom again, there's seats with roller wheels and people kind of almost like, like I've seen them kind of like be five minutes and we're gonna start skating around the thing and like and I genuinely loving in this room now, love the light, like yeah, but mine. Mine is like I think of the stuff that happened in the past, yeah, and I got like, yeah, that was a bit shit, yeah, but there is a really good awake, like I'm really enjoying yeah it and like. There is something where I'm enjoying being mischievous. I'm enjoying playing with the assessments, I'm enjoying making it fair. People like and yeah, the mischievous kind of awakening is like that's the rebellious researcher.

Participant T

Yeah, that's what you're doing. You're just moving towards that point of being able to have the conversation where you've like you've worked out what what their answer is going to be. That's what frustrates someone who feels like they can get you into corner. As you've already answered the question that are about to ask, you say you're about to ask that don't you know like what matrix.

Participant A

I think also it's learning how to work with those parts of yourself yeah, kind of got that oh yeah so that's how I work my dyslexia, that's how I work my deficit and that's how I work my ADHD. Once you start kind of making those connections, then you can start to feel a little more confident in yourself and the way you do so. Yeah, so your mischievous side does come out, because you get a little bit playful you

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know, because I am a bit of a. Now we're well into production time I've taken just get on chair and I just wheel myself around the room. But you know, I can be silly, I can be free, because I don't feel that I have to be anything else, because I can just be the playful side of me. But I think that's from literally just becoming more. Like you said, it's an awakening, it's the cycle of learning how you work with yourself. I think my biggest kind of trauma experiences have come from, in effect, trying to proactively be against those parts of myself, so hiding my deafness or masking and all that sort of stuff, putting on an act, you know so that I found is actually made it worse in some situations. So yeah, I think like going back to the original question, I just think, yeah, it's all well and great because we can all do this at a personal level and like on a one-to-one basis, and you know, and when you've got a cohort of like 20 students, it's you know, it's all well and good, you can have those chats. But then, like I said, this is why I don't understand when the university is really punting the whole well-being thing and you're like, yeah, it's all well and good, but you don't. It's like when you said, showcase it. Then I mean, if you don't offer these sorts of things at a high level for your master's PhD students, in the same way as you do your undergrad, or even for your staff, I don't think that it keeps that continuity. And I think, especially someone who was a student moving into being a master's student and then a member of staff, once I got out of that undergrad, the support was so incredibly patchy, which is what frustrates me.

Participant S

To go full circle, the reason I'm really anti reasonable adjustments, alternative assessment or whatever is they leave here and then it goes exactly you know, and so I was sorry. Even if you're dyslexic, you cannot have typos in a press release. So actually I'm not doing you any favours by not marking you down for that, but what I am gonna do is I'm gonna teach you how is it dyslexic?

Participant A

and you start teaching the students like your coping strategies for certain things.

Participant S

So yeah, no I think that's really cool, because we don't as much we'd like to.

Participant A

We don't live in a society or a structure that allows for it funny enough, I think, because of our difficulties meeting deadlines and time and all that sort of stuff and learning, we develop these structures out within ourselves. So I think it's almost like we then teach our students how to do it like okay, so you have this deadline.

Participant A

Being ADHD and dyslexic myself, this is what I do things that I think when you're diagnosed as an

adult because you didn't have any of that you have to rethink your entire life.

Participant L

That's the thing that really freaked me out. I was like, oh my god yeah, it's like you know.

Participant S

I've just been told by I's school that, oh, because she's dyslexic, she'll get extra time on exams. Actually she won't. Guaranteed you'll do another screening in year 9 and if she's, if she's reading fast enough, you won't give her the extra time, because I've been this with the eldest. So stop giving her extra time now, because if to take it away in year 9 is more dangerous, than I was going to have it. But what she should be getting is rest breaks for her islands, which actually is more useful that she can put her pen down and in fact M has been told for A levels and put his pen down. He can leave the room, go walk around the field with someone, come back and have a rest break. That's more useful than extra time because actually in a work environment if you're writing a report, nobody says sit at that desk and write it. They go. The deadline is next week if you need to go and walk around the field and have a coffee you do it. Yeah, if you need to go and step outside, you do it. If you decide that you want to dictate it in the car driving home, you do it.

Participant A

So we're actually but that's the deadline. Just make sure it's done by then. So actually by saying to children see if we're now in a half, we can almost let them have a will awakening by saying you don't need a diagnosis, you don't need a learning support plan.

Participant S

What you need to do is spend three years working out where you work best what your superpowers are and using those to your best ability to get what you need out of this degree. Yeah, and that what you need out of this degree is not necessarily a first. Just currently, again relating to the kids but currently, you know, M is on for a B at art A level and I'm going to a capable of an A and he says, yeah, but I don't want to spend all the time in the art room just painting, not talking to anyone, because that's what I did for GCSE. I want to be out with my mates at lunchtime, chatting to people, having a laugh, climbing trees and and you know, and I'm like, actually that's what you want. An education is to come out as a one all rounded individual with friends and with a support network.

Participant W

Then a really good portfolio that when I'm isolated you can't talk to anyone. I think big in doing the

graphics and stuff being our portfolio, sort of a portfolio based, helps because you're you know when it's essays you go, no one's gonna read this, so you have to like that first is so important because no one's gonna read what you think about, but with art, you could go yeah, this gets you a first. Yeah, however, if you don't do the documentation, that you won't get the first, but you could have a portfolio still. So, because I talk about that, with this, you like, it's not, it's not do or die with your degree.

Participant L

Yeah, because you've got a first in art. They have a base on your portfolio, so I can.

Participant S

I can give them that confidence and have that as an honest chat, but I can see how humanities and I can see in my LinkedIn profile now the kids that that are doing better career wise whatever we think a better career wise is but that are working in interesting jobs and actually a changing jobs quite quickly I can see, yeah, weren't necessarily those that. No, all of them did get first sometimes, but it was really only in the third year when they suddenly had the confidence in the awakening to do you think?

Participant W

yeah.

Participant S

I'm thinking of like are you probably Olivia, you know, and Katie and people?

Participant W

yeah, yeah, janet Williams is like a researcher for TikTok and doing really well, yeah, at school. I, a lot of the people I went to school with, who were not academic, are on ridiculous paying jobs and they wait Even myself.

Participant A

I came out of school with average GCSEs, but when I came to uni I was like, yeah, I'm getting that first. I was kind of like competing with my sister. She got a 2-1, so I must get a better degree and that's competition kept my drive going. But I left here with the first and when I started my foundation year, my intention was to go into industry as a graphic designer, and obviously I'm not a graphic designer. I'm now teaching in digital media, which was a complete change in the trajectory that I ever intended, because I'd never gone. Oh yeah, I'm going to be a teacher. That was never my plan, and yet people would tell me throughout the course of my life oh yeah, you're really good at teaching. You seem to have this kind of knack for people and I might be about. I hate people, I hate kids, I don't want to talk to anyone, leave me alone. So when I came here and I think this is where I think uni is far more important for the growth of the person rather than just the academic output, because, whilst, yes, I did this,

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academic output I've got the first that's, the certificate in itself is not important to me. It's everything else that I did and I learned while I was here, and that is what has made me the academic that I am now.

Participant L

But unfortunately, because of the money attached to it, it's not thought of like that, is it?

Participant S

No, it's like what you said. When degrees were free, obviously, the thinking around degrees was obviously slightly different. So you could do the degree, not get the certificate, but still have learned something and developed from the experience. And that's the problem, isn't it? Now that we have such a massive field attached to three years at uni, it's just a shame. So people can't even think of it as a personal development thing anymore. This is a career path plan. This is what I've got to do at the end.

Participant L

I need to hold their first up on Instagram. That's what. Around that time of year they would come out on Instagram, the ones they got first, do they? Yeah, the ones that don't contact me alone that they haven't got a first Stop putting on Instagram.

Participant S

I got 2-2 and I cried I got 2-

Participant L

I was one mark off of 2-1. One person in our year got a first 90 students. Yeah, it used to be, I think, much rarer, but I think that was wrong. I think it should have been more achievable. I think they had it wrong when I was at uni. It's going to be interesting going around.

Participant S

It's going to be interesting going around open days because Matt's went to an open thing at the uni last week and he came back with a part of, came back with three prospectuses and they were all courses that I'd already researched and knew that they were right for him.

Participant W

Yeah.

Participant S

And I went why don't you pick up those three? He said, oh, because I went and asked questions about if I want to do art but I want to do something else, can I do it with you? Can I do filmmaking, can I do creative writing or whatever. And I was like, right, OK, so when I go to this university open days, I'm

going to ask the academics what they're interested in, what they're researching. And I said why are you going to ask that? He said because you've told me so many times about people that are really not passionate about what they teach because, they're not interested in themselves. Yeah, he said I'm so fed up with having teachers that don't care I have some teachers that are really good because they're really passionate about the subject, and others that don't really seem to care, don't really seem to care.

Participant L

Teach something if you don't care about it. That amazes me when I see people.

Participant W

And I'm like, how are you doing it so dry and just so boring? Even if it's just within, even if you have to prep it for that one thing, you're never going to touch it again. You have to care in that moment.

Participant L

It has to matter to what, the context of what you're doing, so you have to care about it. Yeah, definitely, I've seen radio law.

Participant W

It's the driest like oh, it was horrendous information, but you have to care about it. You have to tell them it as if it's your most important thing, because in that moment it is your most important thing. That matters a lot more, actually, than if I was providing them with so much dense information. I'd rather provide them with less, but get some of them interested in it to be honest you have to care about what we're teaching about.

Participant S

So I've got to be careful, haven't I, about what I put forward, Because what I found interesting what Participant T was saying is having done a doctorate in education. There was a lot of. What he discussed was exactly what we discussed as part of the doctorate of education. Part of what he was saying is exactly what Lynn Rebelle will say as our director of research for the faculty why we run it, why we educate us, what we're doing, how we're challenging it and we should be challenging what we're doing. So part of me feels that he's feeling like that because of who he's surrounded by, that if he had other supervisors that might be prepared to push the system on his behalf more.

Participant L

Yeah, you can really mess up If you've got somebody that hasn't taken some unusual ones through. They can get very anxious and they're being told from people above as well, yeah, and this is what I was

saying.

Participant A

You then come up against a system, and the system can only provide you with so much, and it's not telling you oh actually, in a special case, you can actually do XYZ.

Participant L

If he was being supervised by someone like maybe Andy Birtwitz or Lord Famster? Well, that's Andy or Famster he was like right, look at these corrections.

Participant S

He said you don't have to do that one, look at how they've said it.

Participant A

So let's ignore that one now, because Chris Palin for me he was my supervisor but he also taught me on the digital media course, so I was very familiar with him. But what I needed from him was I needed someone who was hard enough with me to go right, I can see you're flying around up here with your ADHD. I need to pin you down to this chapter, pin you down to this paragraph. So when my corrections came back was check your spelling and grammar, because I didn't tell anyone I was dyslexic, I was absolutely. He was like this is the best corrections one I've seen for a while. All I have to do is add a little paragraph about someone else and then just check my spelling and grammar and I was like result for someone who's massively dyslexic.

Participant W

So I think part of the argument and part of the reason I'm doing this work is, if we have a community of people, a we can support each other when we're feeling isolated and. B we can challenge the system independently.

Participant S

No, and I think probably part of Participant T's frustration is because it is an individual kind of going up against an organisation. He probably feels like a David and Goliath situation.

Participant L

Yeah, and part of it is the process of doing a PhD. There are moments when, at the time, you want to kill everyone. That's in your way Throw it away, burn it so part of it is that, but part of it isn't that and part of it is that, if the knowledge and the information is there, there's no set thing that tells you what a

PhD has to be. There really, really isn't. So you have to be really canon in your viva and you have to have really good supervisors that will direct you in the right way. For the best one in the world. They may not have that experience yet. That really takes experience to get to.

Participant S

I think we are finished we'll meet again soon to review the podcast and some of us are off to present at the Medway conference. Thanks again everyone.

Appendix 3 Ethics Form

Researcher	Mrs Sarah O'Hara
Student ID	OHA14093192
Category	Postgraduate Research Student
Supervisor	Dr Ruth Sanz Sabido
Project	Superpower not disability - using the voice of the dyslexic academic to challenge the stereotyping of dyslexia within HE
Faculty	Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education
School	School Of Humanities And Education Studies
Current status	Waiting for more information

Ethics application

Personal details

Applicant name

Mrs S O'Hara

Status

Postgraduate Researcher

Faculty

[Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education](#)

School/Team

[School Of Humanities And Education Studies](#)

CCCU email address

s.ohara204@canterbury.ac.uk

Are you the principal researcher?

Yes

Course Type

[Doctorate In Education](#)

Study level

[PhD](#)

Name of CCCU academic supervisor/tutor

Dr Ruth Sanz Sabido, Mrs Danna Valkanova

Email address of CCCU supervisor/tutor

ruth.sanz-sabido@canterbury.ac.uk, yordanka.valkanova@canterbury.ac.uk

Project details

Project title

Superpower not disability - using the voice of the dyslexic academic to challenge the stereotyping of dyslexia within HE

Estimated start date of data collection

01 Jun 2021

Estimated end date of data collection

01 Dec 2022

Estimated end date of project

31 Mar 2024

Does your project involve human participants?

Yes

Does your project involve interaction with animals?

No

Does your project involve the processing of data not in the public domain?

Yes

Will the study involve participants who may lack capacity to consent or are at risk of losing capacity to consent as defined by the Mental Capacity Act 2005?

No

Will the study involve recruitment of participants through the NHS?

No

Will the study involve participants (Children or Adults) who are currently users of social services including those in care settings who are funded by social services or staff of social services departments?

No

Project summary

Briefly explain the purpose and intended outcomes of your project.

The research considers the impact of lecturer identity upon the discourse around dyslexia in higher education considering whether the institutional perception of dyslexia might contradict the experience of dyslexic educators.

The research is being conducted as part of my doctorate work with the intention of shaping change within learning and teaching within higher education.

Briefly explain your methods, research design and data analysis in lay terms.

Research questions

Does the dyslexic label lead to a culture of disability and 'deficit' within universities?

How and why do we measure the success of dyslexic students in universities?

How can the voice of the dyslexic academic be used to reconstruct the label of dyslexia within higher education?

This research is justified on the following grounds:

Recent initiatives within higher education on inclusive learning and teaching. This is against a backdrop of higher education marketisation focused on performance metrics measured by student achievement. Students are classified by 'characteristics' such as recipients of DSA. Dyslexic students are labelled as disabled and 'struggling' and are referred for student support 'learning support plans'. This results in the ongoing stereotyping of dyslexia as being a deficit and weakness, a stereotype at odds with the experience of dyslexic academics who are themselves experienced educators. This research is important as it will challenge the construction of dyslexia in higher institutions.

Existing discussion around dyslexia in universities focuses on supporting the deficit and the learning difficulties. Current consideration of an inclusive curriculum has seen a move away from labelling. There is ongoing research on educator identity and the impact on the learner. This research relates to all three areas.

This research will build insight from both an institutional perspective and individual educator view to help shape the learning and teaching focused on individuals' strengths rather than their deficits. The intention is that this EdD research could help to deconstruct the negative labelling of dyslexia.

I will use a multi method approach considering the institutional framing of dyslexia within the university and the discourse around this, the intersectionality between the cultural construction of dyslexia and experiences of dyslexic academics. The multi method approach will allow for data to be collected stage at 1 to stimulate discussion at stage 2. The three-stage approach will incorporate:

Stage 1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

A review of the institutional literature including university policy statements and collateral such as information leaflets. This analysis will look at the language and cultural implications to allow me to develop a series of themes using key words and phrases which will be used as triggers for debate in stage 2. This research will include public facing information on university websites as well as internally facing information within CCCU.

Stage 2 Collective Memory Workshops

The second stage of the research will be 3-4 collective memory workshops with 4-5 dyslexic academics including the researcher. The researcher will be a participant rather than an observer. The workshops will use a collective approach of discussion with a mutual agreement on the outcomes. The prompts for the discussions will be the words that have been collated from stage 1 with a different theme being used for each workshop. The words will prompt narrative discussion and storytelling in a supportive group setting. The workshops will be videoed.

Stage 3 – Film screening

The final stage of the methodology will be a film showing of the content of the first 3 workshops at a faculty learning and teaching symposium. The audience feedback and questions will then be fed forward into the final collective memory workshop in which the participants will reflect on the words of their fellow teaching peers. This allows the researcher to see how the institution reacts to the reframing of the dyslexic label prior to the final data being collated.

Research will be desk-based content analyst of institutional documents and policies which will take place on campus in Canterbury. Group workshops will take place in locations in East Kent off campus to take participants away from the classroom environment.

Please indicate how you may disseminate the findings from your project.

Thesis/Dissertation Journal article Conference paper Internal communication(s)

Ethics & governance checklist

Does your project involve collecting and/or processing Personal Identifiable Information/personal data?

Yes

Does your project involve processing security-sensitive data?

No

Is this an externally funded project?

No

Will your research/any part of your research be carried out in a location outside of the UK?

No

Is the research taking place primarily within an organisation external to CCCU?

No

Does the study have the potential to impact on professional relationships?

Yes

Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent?

No

Does the project involve any patients and/or service users of a health and social care organisation?

No

Will the study require the co-operation of a 'gatekeeper' for initial access to any vulnerable groups or individuals to be recruited?

No

Will the study use deliberate deception?

No

Will the study involve discussion of, or collection of information on, topics of a sensitive nature personal to the participants?

Yes

Is it possible that criminal or other disclosures could be made by participants in the research that will require action?

No

Are drugs, placebos or other substances (including but not restricted to food substances, vitamins) to be administered to human or animal participants?

No

Does the study involve invasive or intrusive procedures, such as blood taking or muscle biopsy, from human or animal participants, or the storage of human tissue?

No

Is physiological stress, pain, or more than mild physical discomfort to humans or animals, beyond the risks encountered in normal life likely to result from the study?

No

Is it anticipated that there will be any discomfort or distress caused to participants and/or animals (as appropriate), the researcher or organisations as a result of this research?

No

Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?

No

Will financial inducements be offered to participants?

No

Human participants

Who are the participants?

The participants are fellow CCCU academics or those working in learning and teaching who are diagnosed or self-identify as being dyslexic.

How many participants will there be?

4-5

Please detail the rationale for the number of participants including if necessary a power calculation.

The collective memory workshop needs to be small and intimate enough for colleagues to be comfortable to share lived experiences but large enough for genuine discussion to take place. The same participants will attend all workshops.

What are the selection criteria for participants?

Working in an academic role within CCCU.

Diagnosed or self-identify as being dyslexic. Participants are already known to the researcher and have been involved in the discussions around the research and workshop proposal. There will be no general out for volunteers.

What will the participants be expected to do?

To take part in 3-4 workshops discussed lived experiences of dyslexia both from childhood and as a academic in a HE setting. They will agree to be filmed during the workshops and for the film to be shown at public events. Participants will be briefed on any potential impact on them both professionally and personally by appearing in the film as obviously there will be no anonymity.

Participants will also be invited to take part in the research seminars during the film screenings.

How will the participants be recruited?

The participants are all part of the researcher's professional network and have volunteered to take part in the research. The participants have taken part in discussions in helping frame the research proposal,

they are all open about their identity within their professional setting. They share similar life stories as the researcher.

Please upload any advertisement materials (i.e. posters, flyers etc).

Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without usual informed consent procedures having been implemented in advance?

No

How will you record consent?

Consent will be gained via email.

Please upload the consent materials.

How will participants be informed of the research project and what is required of them?

Via email.

Please upload the participant information materials.

Please describe any expected benefits to the research participant.

The research will allow participants to share the voice of this own experiences as being dyslexic and help to reframe the narrative within their workplace.

How will participants be debriefed following their participation in the research?

All participants will be invited to a 1to1 chat with researcher to allow them to discuss and have a debrief after each workshop. This will ensure participants feel supported should any challenging or upsetting topics are discussed in the workshops. As a mutually supportive collective group participants will be encouraged to support each other throughout the process. Participants will review the film output and be given the opportunity to edit or make changes to the output prior to public reviewing. They will be invited to be part of the film screening and research seminar discussion as part of the panel.

Please upload any debriefing materials.

How will individual participants be made aware of the results of the project?

This will be disseminated via the film and the research seminars.

Please detail the process for participant withdrawal and what is to be done with their data once consent is withdrawn.

Participants can withdraw at any point up to and including the third workshop - they will be consulted about any data collated up to that point and whether it can be included or not. They can request to withdraw from the project totally or to have any elements of the film removed.

CCCU participants

Will your study specifically target staff or student participants from a Faculty other than your own?

Yes

If yes, please select all relevant Faculties.

Faculty of Medicine, Health and Social Work

Will your project involve the recruitment of 100 (or more) CCCU student participants?

No

Professional relationships

Please provide details of the professional relationship that may be impacted.

Due to the nature of the discussions participants will be exposing memories in their professional environment which may have an impact on their relationships with their peers. All participants are open and comfortable to discuss their identity as dyslexics.

How will any potential impact on professional relationships be addressed?

Due to the collective nature of the work their fellow participants will offer support. Due to the discussion being linked to disability the participants also have support from the Staff Disability Support Network.

Sensitive and personal topics

Please list and explain how you will respond to participant discomfort due to topics of a sensitive nature personal to the participants.

Participants will be offered space, breaks, refreshments and calming practices such as sensory tools/mindfulness breaks should the discussions become too emotional. The workshops will have the same participants at every stage and the environment will be safe and inclusive. Participants will be invited to the film screening and will be offered collective/peer support from the group. Due to the nature of the group and the fact that we are all colleagues participants will be encouraged to talk to the researcher throughout the project and following every workshop.

Research materials & additional information

Please upload any research materials or tools e.g. surveys, interview questions, focus group guidelines.

Please provide details of any other ethical issues that you think are relevant to your project that have not been covered elsewhere within this application.

The workshop themes and words are to be developed from the discourse analysis, the materials will be a series or words prompts and symbols rather than structured questions. As such there is no list of questions to be agreed in advance.

Participants are agreeing and have volunteered (rather than being recruited) to take part in this research as part of a collective group. They are happy and want to freely share their experiences. They will be invited to join the researcher in the public screening to share their stories direct. This means the risk of misinterpreting or misrepresenting the respondent is removed. The researcher will not be transcribing or translating their experiences on their behalf. As such the participants will be part of the research dissemination process - attending research seminars and agreeing the final film edit. This does cause some risk for the researcher is any of the participants are unhappy during the process but the project is reliant upon the voice of the dyslexic academic being heard in an undiluted way.

Data protection

Will special category personal data be collected?

Yes

What types of personal data will be collected?

Disability data will be collected as this is relevant to discussion.

What is the lawful basis for the collection and processing of personal data?

Consent Vital interest

Please provide details of any arrangements in place to respond to individual requests for access to their personal data (Subject Access Requests).

The data will be self reported.

Will participants be able to withdraw consent at any stage of the research? If not, what is the cut-off date and the reasoning for this?

Consent can be withdrawn up to the point of the final workshop after which the film will be edited. Whilst this will have an impact on the whole project the trust needs to be maintained for the participants to feel they can be open and honest in their discussions. Should one of the participants withdraw the film proposal will be revisited with a talking heads process considered instead.

Therefore, film from the other participants can still be used.

What is the process for participant withdrawal?

Participants can email to request withdrawal from the process.

Who will have access to the personal data?

Due to the public screening of the film all participants disability status and discussions will be shown. The participants will give permission for this information to be shared.

Please provide details of any third parties involved in the collection or processing of personal data.

N/A

If relevant, have you ensured that all third party involvement in the processing of data is/or will be covered by a Data Sharing Agreement (with a data controller) or a Data Processing Agreement (with a data Processor)?

Not applicable

Will personal data be collected from or shared with parties outside of the UK?

No

Detail the additional safeguards that are in place to ensure the personal data is protected. This data will not be stored anywhere the disability flag is just known to the researcher. As the participants will have agreed to the screening of the film their will have given consent to their disability being declared.

Are you using social media/online forums to recruit participants? If so, how are you gaining informed consent?

N/A

Are you using social media/online forums as a source of data collection? If so, how have you ensured the security surrounding your use of personal data in social media/online activities? N/A

Are you undertaking any activities that could create privacy concerns for individuals due to personal intrusion? If so, please provide details of the activities and how the privacy concerns will be addressed to reduce the impact.

Film recordings will be made of the workshops, all participants know this and will consent to this. The participants will have given permission for the films to be screened both internally and as part of conference proceedings. Should the film be used externally outside of CCCU additional permission will be sort and gained by the participants.

Please provide details of the processes in place to ensure confidentiality.

Whilst the film will be edited by one of the participants it will be edited in agreement will all and not released without the full consent of all participants. The edit will be agreed through consultation of all participants. This means that the film will be not be edited or 'interpreted' by just the researcher but collectively by all participants.

Please detail the processes in place to check the dataset received or processed is, and will continue to be, relevant, adequate and not excessive.

The film will be edited and reviewed in full consultation with all participants.

Where and how will personal data be stored?

Not stored anywhere.

How are you ensuring that personal data is safely stored, processed and disposed of securely when no longer needed?

N/A

How long will personal data be kept/stored for after the project has completed and in what format will this be?

N/A

Research health & safety risk assessment

Have you completed a Research Health & Safety Risk Assessment form?

Yes

Has your supervisor reviewed your Research Health & Safety Risk Assessment form?

Yes

Has your Research Health & Safety Risk Assessment form been approved by the relevant Head of School/Department or delegated member of staff?

Yes

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Superpower not disability - using the voice of the dyslexic academic

to challenge the stereotyping of dyslexia within HE

Name of Researcher: *Sarah O'Hara*

Contact
details:

Address:

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education
Canterbury Christ Church University North
Holmes Road

Canterbury

Tel: *01227 927700 ex 2974*

Email: *Sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk*

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for
    the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2   I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recording.

1. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers
    will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University Research
    Privacy Notice

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw

my participation at any time, without giving a reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above project.

4. I agree for the resulting film to be shown at public screenings

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Name of person taking consent *(if different from researcher)*	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

Appendix 4 Participant Information

Superpower not disability - using the voice of the dyslexic academic to challenge the stereotyping of dyslexia within Higher Education.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by *Participant S O'Hara*.

Please refer to our Research Privacy Notice for more information on how we will use and store your personal data.

Background

The research being conducted as part of a Doctorate in Education and considers the impact of lecturer identity upon the discourse around dyslexia in higher education considering whether the institutional perception of dyslexia might contradict the experience of dyslexic educators.

The researcher will conduct an analysis of the language used within university webpages and publicly available information materials to consider the positioning of dyslexia within the institution. Following the analysis themes, words and symbols will be used as discussion points within a collective memory workshop setting. Collective memories are shared memories that have been experienced by individuals faced with the same social or emotional issue, in this case a diagnosis of dyslexia. The prompt for the sharing of the individual's memory will be themes established from the discourse analysis, but the collective nature of the workshop means that participants develop and manage the final discussion.

The collective memory workshops will be filmed and will form part of the final thesis. Following the first three workshops the initial film will be presented at research seminars to gain input from peers and colleagues. The input and feedback from the screening will form the themes and discussion points for the fourth workshop, which will also be filmed and will be included in the final film. The film will

be stored securely on a password protected area of vimeo or Youtube and will only be viewed in an environment for research purposes.

What will you be required to do?

a) Participants in this study will be required to attend three to four collective memory workshops with 3-4 other participants (including the researcher). You will be required to discuss with the other participants how your lived experience of dyslexia and your childhood memories have influenced your identity working in learning and teaching.

b) You will agree to be filmed throughout these workshops and for the final film to be shown in a public screening. As such your identity and life experiences will be revealed and discussed in your professional setting and within a wider environment.

c) Due to the sensitive nature of some of topics of discussion you asked to confirm you understand the confidential nature of the information and are committed to respecting it.

d) Any participant may request the deletion of any part of the film up to and including the first three workshops you are therefore agreeing to maintain the confidential nature of the discussion until all participants are mutually happy with the final film output.

To participate in this research you must:

- Employed in a learning and teaching position within Canterbury Christ Church University
- Be diagnosed or self-identify as being dyslexic

Procedures

You will be asked to take part in 3-4 workshops for one hour at a time over a year period to discuss your experiences, **dates and locations to be confirmed**. The workshops will be video recorded. The discussions will be collated into a film which will be presented as part of research seminars and learning and teaching events, you will be invited to attend and participate in the filming discussion. The film will also form part of the final thesis.

Feedback

All participants will be given the opportunity to contribute to the final editing of the film output and they will also be given an opportunity to review the final draft of the thesis. As part of a collective memory workshop the output will be a joint initiative agreed in consultation will all participants. The researcher is a participant rather than an observer and as such will take part in the process alongside you. Participants can review raw data from each of the workshops and request

deletion of any sections prior to the final collation of the film. Where possible you will be invited to attend the film showings and as such will be involved in the feedback and questions raised by peers in our own institution.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The following categories of personal data (as defined by the [General Data Protection](#) [Regulation](#) (GDPR)) will be processed:

- *Job role and disability (dyslexia is categorised as a disability).*

We have identified that the public interest in processing the personal data is:

- *This personal data is a crucial part of the research as it considers the intersectionality between the role of the academic and the label of disability.*
- Personal data will be used this data will be shared as part of the overview research. Data can only be accessed by, or shared with:
  - *This data will be shared internally within the learning and teaching environment and via research output. The film will be stored on a password protected secure web area such as vimeo or YouTube.*

The identified period for the retention of personal data for this project:

- *This will be retained throughout the project and for up to 5 years after the project.*
  If you would like to obtain further information related to how your personal data is processed for this project please contact Participant S O'Hara sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk .
  You can read further information regarding how the University processes your personal data for research purposes at the following link: Research Privacy Notice - https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx
  Dissemination of results
  The results of the study will be disseminated as part of the EdD thesis and will be published in the CCCU library. Elements of the research may form further journal articles and internal learning and teaching discussions.

  Process for withdrawing consent to participate

  You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this research project at any time up to the third workshop. After this time the film will be edited. You can withdraw without having to give a reason. To do this please email sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk to withdraw consent

and to confirm what elements of the visual recordings you are withdrawing from.

You may read further information on your rights relating to your personal data at the following link: Research Privacy Notice - https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx

Any questions? Please contact Participant SO'Hara Tel: 07792 861644 sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk

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