
**AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF AN OFFICIAL DIAGNOSIS AND
LABEL OF 'DYSLEXIA' ON PUPILS' SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-
ESTEEM: A SOCIOLOGICAL CASE STUDY INVOLVING PUPILS IN
GRAHAMSTOWN.**

THESIS

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to develop an understanding of how Grahamstown teenagers are affected by the label 'dyslexia'; by providing a space in which their feelings about being labelled dyslexic and their experiences can be voiced. Historically much international and local research has focussed on causation and remediation of dyslexia and has neglected the social aspects of the diagnosis. Causation and remediation are categories which form part of the medical or educational models. A social model of dyslexia needs to be applied. Due to the paucity of South African literature on the social experiences of dyslexic teenagers, this research thesis aims to add to the body of knowledge and hopefully provide an avenue for more research within the context of Sociology. This is a micro study, situated in Grahamstown Eastern Cape, South Africa, and the author recognizes that responses cannot be generalized to the greater dyslexic population. All human environments consist of objects which are given meaning through social interaction. Meaning is central to human behaviour and therefore explains the ways in which humans conduct their lives based on these meanings. For this reason George Herbert Mead's (1934) and Herbert Blumers (1969) symbolic interactionist positions have framed the theoretical approach to this research. Qualitative methods of interviewing provide an opportunity for dyslexic individuals to discuss the meaning dyslexia gives to them, from their perspective and in their own words. The following conclusions have been arrived at: Educational psychologists in Grahamstown are reticent to diagnose individuals as dyslexic. This lack of identification hinders early intervention which can be very detrimental to individuals struggling with reading, writing and spelling as well as the associated co-morbid conditions of dyslexia. Teenagers who have had early diagnosis and intervention with support structures in place identify with their dyslexic identity more positively as they are able to make sense of their struggles of a dyslexic nature.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Reading involves engaging in conversation through the written word. Literacy involves the way humans convey messages, using symbols which represent meanings we want to impart. I invite you to engage in this conversation with me as I take you through a journey of discovery into the world of a few dyslexic individuals in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The condition of dyslexia will be the sole focus of this research. The reason for this is that it is one of the most misunderstood and contentious of learning difficulties, specifically in South Africa. Furthermore it is a syndrome that is complicated by multiple co-morbid conditions which are discussed at length in Chapter Two. Often these co-morbid conditions detract from the diagnosis of dyslexia which results in late diagnosis. Shaywitz (2003) and Mortimore (2008) suggest that late diagnosis is problematic as this hinders early intervention. Late identification makes successful intervention challenging and is problematic for dyslexic individuals as their brains take longer to process words when reading writing and spelling, see Chapter Three for a neuro-scientific explanation.

A vast body of international literature exists which indicates the need for early identification and intervention programmes for dyslexia, which is a life-long condition (Konur 2006, Lawrence et al 1999). Burden (2005:2) believes that there is:

“an increasing body of evidence to show that children with difficulties of a dyslexic nature are at particular risk of developing distorted or damaged self-concepts as a result of their marginalized status, particularly if the specific nature of their difficulties is not recognized at an early stage in their school careers.”

Furthermore, Burden feels that if dyslexic individuals are neither identified nor assisted to deal with their difficulties, it can affect their self-image negatively and this negativity will persist throughout their adult life. According to Glazzard (2010:64) the struggle with reading, writing and spelling affects self-esteem. The notion of factors that affect self-esteem and self-worth of dyslexic individuals will be investigated in this thesis. In the interests of not adding to the self-esteem of individuals negatively I have tried not to use the label “dyslexics”, because the individual is more than his/her difficulty. However, often it was necessary in order to clarify my writing.

1.2 Field of the research

The field of Research is the Sociology of Education and the title of the thesis is: An analysis of the impact of an official diagnosis and label of 'Dyslexia' on pupils' self-concept and self-esteem: a sociological case study involving pupils in Grahamstown.

1.3 Context of the research

Literature on dyslexia has historically focussed on causes and remediation (Robert Burden (2005)). A gap exists in the literature with regard to the social effects or consequences of having dyslexia in a strongly academic environment with an emphasis on literacy. Even more so the voices of dyslexic individuals have not been heard. Burden strongly encourages research that presents the situation from a dyslexic individual's perspective. This thesis was inspired by the words of George Kelly, as cited by Burden (2005:15): "If you want to find out what somebody thinks or feels about something, why not ask them?"

This thesis focuses on the social aspect of dyslexia and whether the diagnosis and label is helpful or not to a small sample of Grahamstown teenagers who have been diagnosed dyslexic. Grahamstown is a small city situated in the Eastern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. It is historically well known for providing quality education within the private (independent) schools as well as the public (state) schools. Schools that were known as 'previously disadvantaged' under the apartheid regime are still disadvantaged in terms of resources within the new democratic South Africa. Both Riddick (2000) and Macdonald (2009) believe that a *social model of dyslexia* as a disability would be beneficial because it provides a sociological context as well as an opportunity for the disabling barriers of dyslexic individuals to be recognized. Disabling barriers and social-class are closely linked as Macdonald (2009:347) argues that: "social-class positioning and institutional discrimination (in the form of disabling barriers) shape the experiences of people living with this condition." The idea of class and race influencing the social and educational experiences of South African children, specifically with dyslexia is explored more fully in Chapter Five.

Shawyitz (2003) states that spoken language involves far less effort compared to writing and reading, the latter two being acquired skills. This research is interested in dyslexic children

who, despite their learning difficulty, are expected to fit into the mainstream South African education system. Glazzard (2010:63) and Humphrey (2003:130) show that the dyslexic child creates perceptions of himself/herself in relation to the experiences and environments in which he/she develops. Dyslexia is often understood as a hidden disability, and according to Burns & Bell (2010) the reason for this is that the condition is misunderstood by society.

George Herbert Mead's and Herbert Blumers' Symbolic Interactionist theory has been applied to this study. This theoretical position seeks to understand the individual within the social environment (Mead 1934, Ziehl 1994, Mendelsohn 1994). Symbolic interactionism will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four. Most importantly, the theory provides a social understanding of experiences because the focus is on the way the individual creates meaning for him/herself based on the level of interaction with other members of society. Dyslexic individuals create meaning for themselves based on their day to day interactions with peers at school. Individuals interpret or define others' behaviour through social interaction (Ziehl 1994). Social meaning is attributed to people through labels. It is assumed that these labels may carry stigma, which can influence the way others relate to the labelled individual, as well as create an expectation of how these individuals should behave (Ziehl 1994). Riddick (2000:653) argues that stigmatization can also occur in the absence of labelling, so it should not be assumed that stigmatization is always a result of labelling or that labelling always leads to stigmatisation.

Labelling can have both positive and negative implications for dyslexic individuals (Macdonald 2009:273, Riddick 2000:654). On a positive level a reason is offered for their difficulties, whilst on a negative level, dyslexic individuals feel resentment and isolation (Glazzard 2010, Taylor et al 2010:191). Indeed, Engelbrecht et al (1990) feel that a label is only useful if it provides specific intervention programmes. This is not evident in mainstream South African education. This research investigates whether people living with dyslexia find the label helpful or not, and the social implications of having being labelled as dyslexic.

1.4 Aims of the Research

Given that symbolic interactionists focus strongly on the experiences of the individual within their social context, this study proposes to explore the meanings which individuals give to dyslexia, specifically in providing an opportunity for the views of children to express their

experiences of being different. The central focus of this thesis is to explore the dyslexic child's perceptions of self and the experiences that shape this perception. Peripheral foci include understanding the parents' perspectives, as well as exploring teachers and educational psychologists' perspectives on dyslexia.

1.5 Methods, procedures and techniques

Qualitative research methods with interviewing as the main technique are discussed at length in Chapter Five. This discussion aims to highlight the effectiveness of this type of method in understanding dyslexic individuals' perspectives. Much of the interviewing style is based on Dr Robert Burden's (2005) interviews which involve obtaining demographic data, assessing feelings of depression, learned helplessness and feelings of being understood. These assessments assisted myself as the researcher to understand how these individuals feel about being dyslexic and findings contradicted the assumptions made about these individuals experiences in the early stages of research.

The dyslexic participants ranged in age from thirteen (the youngest) to eighteen (the oldest). Five participants responded to the invitation to be interviewed and all five participants' information has been used in this research thesis. The intention of the research - to understand how they feel about being dyslexic, particularly within their educational environment - was made clear to participants. In order to abide by the ethical considerations of research that is, to do no harm, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the interview process clarified. In addition, permission was obtained from the parents to interview their children, as well as from the dyslexic individuals themselves. Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity was given and therefore pseudonyms are used for both the participants and the school to which they are affiliated. Additionally educational psychologists and remedial teachers attached to the schools were not mentioned by name. An offer of counselling was made should the participants feel distressed at any time during or after the interview. However, no counselling was requested and no evidence of distress or unease was reported either during or post interview.

1.6 Chapter by Chapter

Chapter One provides the introduction to this research thesis and addresses the paucity of literature that exists within the South African context on the social experiences of dyslexic children.

Chapter Two offers a historical overview of dyslexia and how the difficulty with reading, writing and spelling came to be recognised as a difficulty with common defining features. Three different definitions are discussed; the British Dyslexic Association's definition in 1987 (Reid (1998)), the Orton Society's 1994 definition (Thompson & Gilchrest 1997), and the International Dyslexic Association's definition cited in Taylor, Hume & Welsch (2010). There are many and varied definitions and each definition highlights different aspects of dyslexia that are experienced in varying degrees along a continuum. In addition, the condition of dyslexia is complicated by co-morbid conditions, one of which is attention deficit difficulties (ADD/ADHD). Co-morbidities add to the frustration of the dyslexic individual. Furthermore, local South African psychologists are reticent to assign the label of dyslexia.

Chapter Three aims to contextualize dyslexia as a difficulty by providing international and local literature to this effect. The work of some of the most prevalent and pertinent authors in the field is discussed, including Dr Sally Shaywitz, Prof Roderick Nicolson and Dr Angela Fawcett, Ronald Davis and Dr Robert Burden. In addition, three main causal theories of developmental dyslexia are discussed; the Phonological Deficit Theory, the Auditory Processing Theory and the Magnocellular Deficit Theory. These are causal theories however and Burden (2005) believes that much of the focus on dyslexia has been on the causes and remediation of dyslexia, whilst a lack of literature exists on the social consequences of the condition. Burden describes the importance of a dyslexic identity for dyslexic individuals, one that provides an opportunity for support and a reason for their difficulties.

Chapter Four proceeds with a comprehensive overview of the main theoretical model utilised in this thesis, namely Symbolic Interactionism. The different aspects of symbolic interactionism are explained based on George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer's discussion on the meaning of symbols and how social interaction affects the way individuals attach

meaning to things. For dyslexic individuals, the meaning of dyslexia and the requirements of a literate society fashion the way they perceive themselves. This experience, however, is notably relevant to the context in which the experience is interpreted.

Chapter Five offers insight into the local schools in Grahamstown, and the historical significance of race and class within a South African context. Although South Africa has been a democracy since 1994, the issues of race and class continue to influence the social and educational experiences of all individuals. This chapter outlines the methods used in the research and describes how Burden's (2005:29) multifaceted approach highlights the social and educational experiences of dyslexic individuals.

Chapter Six introduces each of the five participants; Jack (16), Wade (15), Matthew (15), Candice (18) and Kelly (13). It is important to understand the individual contexts in which these teenagers are situated, as this provides a deeper understanding of the themes which emerge from their narratives. A history of difficulties and interventions is described, as well as the home environment, homework and classroom experiences. Further to this the coping mechanisms these dyslexic individuals employ are discussed. This provides a background to understanding the emergent themes discussed in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Seven reveals the results of interviews with five dyslexic participants from Grahamstown schools. By means of narratives, the individual perspectives on their dyslexia of the five participants are described. Common metaphors are discussed, as is how each individual relates to being dyslexic and how they feel about being dyslexic.

This final chapter (Eight) provides a summary of this thesis by drawing together the various discussions. Although these findings cannot be generalized to the greater South African dyslexic population, they do provide a voice for dyslexic individuals to be heard. The resulting themes also provide an opportunity to address the difficulties dyslexic individuals have within their school environments, and therefore look towards providing a way forward for early identification and practical and intentional intervention.

Chapter 2: Introducing Dyslexia

2.1 Historical Overview

Literacy¹ is one of the milestones that every human individual in society is supposed to strive toward and be able to achieve. It serves as one of the main forms of communication in contemporary societies. Understandably, an assumed historical link exists between intelligence and the ability to read, write and spell (Pollock & Waller, 1994). This assumption, however, is contested by Sally Shaywitz (2003:49-50) as she reminds us that reading is not natural, whereas speaking as a form of communication is natural and easily learnt by most healthy human children with no neurological or physiological impairments. Reading requires a skill that must be learned through a process of converting written symbols that have linguistic meaning and represent a recognizable ‘phonetic code’. If this were not so, then written language would be a meaningless representation of random circles, lines and marks. In order to read, the reader must be able to decode and understand the specific written code that is represented in a specific language. Individuals who are not able to perform the task of decoding words in written form and reading them appropriately are sometimes referred to as dyslexic. Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that relates to literacy.

The word ‘dyslexia’ is derived from the Greek ‘dys’ meaning ‘difficulty’ and ‘lexis’ from the root word meaning language. According to Philomena Ott (1997:1-5) the reference to language implies that dyslexia encompasses more than just a failure to read. The first description of dyslexia was as early as 1672 where Thomas Willis makes mention of young men who were “late in learning to read.” Kussmaul, a German physician, referred to dyslexia as “word-blindness” in 1877, when examining a stroke patient who had a complete text-blindness, although all other brain functioning such as sight, speech and intellectual functioning appeared normal. In 1895 a British ophthalmologist from Glasgow, James Hinshelwood, linked word blindness and visual memory when a patient became unable to read words, yet maintained his ability to read numbers without error (Thomson and Gilchrest, 1997:4). For Hinshelwood this proved that the word-blindness was congenital in origin as the patient’s visual sight was not impaired but his memory for letters had been lost (Shaywitz 2003, Selikowitz 1998). This type of dyslexia is known as *acquired dyslexia* and usually occurs due to brain trauma.

¹ Literacy in this thesis refers to the ability to read and write and use language proficiently.

However the focus of this research is *developmental dyslexia*, which is defined as the inability to acquire reading skills (Pneuman 2009). Reading, writing and spelling are difficult skills for the dyslexic individual to achieve. The skills do not come naturally but require huge effort on behalf of the dyslexic individual, more effort than is required for most people to learn to read. Individuals with undiagnosed dyslexia often go through life struggling to understand why the skills of reading, writing and spelling seemingly come so easily to their peers and yet seem to escape them. Literacy skills are extremely difficult for the dyslexic child to attain because it is a “complex problem that has its roots in the very basic brain systems that allow man (sic) to understand and express language” (Shaywitz, 2003:5). The term dyslexia will be used throughout the thesis to refer to developmental dyslexia unless otherwise stated.

2.2 Defining Dyslexia

Three main definitions of developmental dyslexia will be discussed to highlight the various ways in which the learning difficulty has been defined and classified. No consensus exists between theorists as to which definition to adopt. Pneuman (2009:9) reveals that although contestation exists over causal factors, intervention strategies and treatment, many researchers currently agree that dyslexia is a language disorder. Tilly Mortimore (2008:63) feels that a wide range of co-existing conditions contribute to the difficulty in defining dyslexia, as does the many causal factors which include genetics, environment, brain damage, cerebral dominance failure and information processing deficits which are attributed to the disorder. She cites Uta Frith (2007) as saying that no consensus currently exists for explaining dyslexia from a biological or neuropsychological standpoint. Prior to this however, Shaywitz (2003) provided a neuro-scientific explanation by examining how the brain reads. Using MRI brain imaging technology she revealed that it is possible to see that dyslexic individuals use different parts of their brain to process the written word, compared to able readers.

Gavin Reid (1998:2) provides a definition of dyslexia put forward by the British Dyslexic Association in 1987:

“Dyslexia is a complex neurological condition which is constitutional in origin. The symptoms may affect many areas of learning and function, and may be described as a specific difficulty in reading, spelling and written language. One or more of these areas may be affected. Numeracy, notational skills (music), motor function and organizational skills may be involved. However, it is particularly related to mastering written language, although oral language may be affected to some degree.”

The main focus of this definition is on the lexical difficulties, however it broadens the idea of difficulty by including numeracy and musical difficulties. The definition does not provide sufficient information about the different facets of dyslexia or its possible causes. This could open up the definition to misinterpretation. Further, the definition does not reveal the varying degrees of dyslexia that cause the learning difficulty to become a contentious issue. Miles, (in Thompson and Gilchrist, 1997: 5) in an article entitled “Can there be a single definition of dyslexia?”, argued that dyslexia “cannot be summed up in a single concept” as there are too many variants to consider and the confusion created by these different aspects affects both the type of research that is conducted and the research outcomes. Therefore Miles proposes a description of dyslexia rather than a definition.

Rawson (in Thompson and Gilchrist, 1997:6) is of the opinion that it is a difficult concept to pin down, one that varies depending on the field of research as well as the audience. Definitions are however necessary, as they provide a base on which to build research. Furthermore, they furnish details that enable identification of the difficulty.

In the United states a physician, Dr Samuel Orton, was able to expand on the narrow definition of dyslexia as a ‘reading problem’ to include a more comprehensive view of it as a ‘syndrome’. He highlighted symptoms specific to the dyslexic child such as “reversal of letters, syllables and words, left-right confusion and mixed lateral dominance, and associated them with a functional brain disorder” (Thompson and Gilchrist, 1997:4). Orton’s contribution highlighted dyslexia as a specific learning disorder from a medical and educational perspective, and provided a basis for practical management and recognition of the disorder. The Orton Society provides an international forum for dyslexic studies and adopted the following definition in 1994:

“Dyslexia is a neurologically based, often familial, disorder which interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. Varying in degrees of severity, it is manifested by difficulties in receptive and expressive language, including phonological processing, in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and sometimes arithmetic. Dyslexia is not the result of lack of motivation, sensory impairment, inadequate instructional or environmental opportunities, or other limiting conditions, but may occur together with these conditions. Although dyslexia is life-long, individuals with dyslexia frequently respond successfully to timely and appropriate intervention”.

(Cited in Thompson and Gilchrist, 1997:5)

This definition proved extremely helpful in providing information not only on dyslexia as a disorder in the processing of language, but in providing an idea of the causes “*familial*”; that it occurs along a continuum - “*degrees of severity*”; includes the possibility of co-existing conditions such as dyscalculia - “*sometimes arithmetic*”; and dispels the common notions held by others of laziness, stupidity and negative social or educational influences. It also offered some degree of hope in the sense that if dyslexia is identified and early intervention is initiated, there exists the possibility for some measure of successful intervention. However, in saying this, such a long, all-encompassing definition is cumbersome as one tends to get lost in the explanation of it. Perhaps it would have been more effective to have a slightly shorter definition which is more to the point, and then a list or description of common identifying factors.

The International Dyslexia Association describes dyslexia as:

“A specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

(Taylor, Hume & Welsch, 2010:193)

This definition by the International Dyslexia Association Board specifically outlines origin, difficulties (although not the co-morbid conditions), deficit in application of phonological language components and the inability of the individual to perform to the expectations of a literate society despite their relative intelligence. However, it lacks the identifiable symptoms necessary for it to be used as an operational research definition.

Although the definitions cited above provide an explanation of the ways in which dyslexia has been classified, they also reveal an underlying discrepancy amongst researchers. This division, according to Susan Pneuman (2009), is particularly evident in contemporary research on dyslexia as new terminology is introduced in an effort to seek out identifiable factors that will enable dyslexia to be measured and classified. Pneuman (2009:11) cites King as arguing that new terminology such as “visual, auditory and fine motor processing disorder” and “specific learning disorder, or specific language disorder” are too vague and therefore unhelpful. However, Shaywitz (2003:24) contends that historical and contemporary

accounts of dyslexia provide “indisputable evidence of the unchanging and enduring nature of the characteristics of dyslexia.” Despite the debate surrounding the defining of dyslexia, Margret Snowling (1998:4) believes that it is possible to “arrive at a coherent definition of dyslexia that is theoretically motivated and of clinical utility.” To do this, however, it will be necessary to take a developmental perspective into account. This perspective must acknowledge that “as a consequence of developmental interactions and compensatory processes,” the action of individuals with dyslexia will develop and change over time (Snowling, 1998:4).

Consequently, developmental dyslexia can be recognized as a life-long reading, spelling and writing disorder that is complex in nature, and changes over time. It affects children and adults who possess the ability and motivation considered necessary to perform intellectually. Common identifying factors are that it runs in families, is experienced in varying degrees of severity, has co-existing conditions such as dyscalculia, dyspraxia, and dysgraphia, ADD or ADHD and can be limiting, in that it affects the literate functioning of the individual within a society that has literate expectancies.

2.3 Dyslexia a Specific Learning Difficulty

Having gained an understanding of various ways that dyslexia is defined we can see that the acquisition of literacy is not a simple process. Rather it is interactive and reciprocal and requires a specific set of skills. Reid (1998:10) describes these skills as “*word attack skills*” which require the recognition of letters and the way they blend together, and the ability to identify individual sound in spoken words known as an “*awareness of phonemes*” and “*word recognition*” involving patterns and memory. In addition to these skills, an awareness of the written word in print form needs to be established. Reid further describes the four parts to processing the written word. Firstly an “orthographic processor (which) is responsible for the sequencing of the letters in a word” and the “phonological processor (which is responsible) for matching those letters to the letter sound”, then the “meaning processor (which) relates to the reader’s knowledge of word meaning” and, lastly, the “context processor which provides an overview of the meaning of the text” (Reid, 1998:10). We can therefore see that reading involves attaining linguistic, visual and auditory skills, that it is a learned process and that some children learn these skills more easily and efficiently than others.

Children who struggle to attain these skills are usually classified or diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty – Dyslexia. Selikowitz (1998:4) defines a specific learning difficulty

(SLD) as “an unexpected and unexplained condition, occurring in a child of average or above average intelligence, characterized by a significant delay in one or more areas of learning.” There are many different learning disabilities that can hinder learning; vision and hearing defects, motor handicaps and emotional disturbances. This research, however, will focus on dyslexia, a specific learning difficulty, and will exclude all other recognized causes of poor academic achievements such as those mentioned above. SLD with reference to dyslexia is defined by Pumphrey and Reason (in Thompson and Gilchrist 1997:12) as: “organizing or learning deficiencies which restrict the student’s competencies in information processing, in motor skills and working memory, so causing limitations in some or all of the skills of speech, reading, spelling, writing, essay writing, numeracy and behavior”. This definition denotes the specificity of learning difficulty but, as has already been established, it is not sufficient in its explanation of dyslexia.

2.4 Causes of Dyslexia

According to Burden (2005) causation and remediation have been the sole focus of research reports and research papers. Much has been hypothesized regarding the causes of dyslexia, both acquired and developmental, and many methods developed to remediate dyslexic individuals. This however is not the focus of this research and will therefore not be expanded upon in great detail. There is widespread agreement amongst researchers that dyslexia runs in families i.e. it is familial (Shaywitz 2003, Burden 2005, Mortimore 2008). Although there is no specific dyslexic gene that has been identified, Shaywitz (2003:99,100) contends that it is carried as a genetic trait. Shaywitz further notes that the genetic roots of dyslexia should provide a clue to reading problems. Parents or siblings with dyslexia usually increase the probability of dyslexia within families. In her research she found that approximately one-quarter and one-half of the children born to a dyslexic parent will also be dyslexic. This shows that if one child in a family is dyslexic, almost half of his or her sisters and brothers are also likely to be dyslexic. Parents are often only diagnosed once their children have been diagnosed with dyslexia, and they recognize similar signs and symptoms from their own childhood learning difficulties.

2.5 Dyslexia as a continuum

Ott (1997:12) describes dyslexia as existing along a continuum with varying degrees of severity. While some dyslexic individuals experience very severe symptoms some are more moderate and others experience only mild symptoms of dyslexia. This is usually established

according to the reading age of the individual. Pneuman (2009:18) highlights the difficulties in assessing dyslexic individuals using IQ tests alone. She suggests that a battery of tests should be conducted which include understanding dyslexia for its own sake, i.e. is the deficit due to low processing speed or is the deficit due to a deficit in phonology? Snowling (cited by Pneuman 2009) believes that phonological processing tasks are independent of IQ. Reading age and IQ are strongly linked. All dyslexic individuals' reading abilities reflect at least one year below their chronological age, however statistics vary between research papers and from individual to individual. According to Thompson and Gilchrist (1997:5) variations also occur within the degrees of dyslexia, such as between the reading age and spelling age of severe, moderate or mild dyslexic individuals. Pumphrey (in Thompson and Gilchrist 1997:12) suggests that these categories and discrepancies are at the core of arguments regarding the prevalence of dyslexia. Pumphrey furthermore concludes that this discrepancy most likely contributes to a lack of consensus regarding who fits into the category of dyslexic and who does not. Non-recognition also skews the statistics of the prevalence of dyslexia within a population.

2.6 Prevalence of Dyslexia

Shaywitz (2003:29) believes that only a crude estimate of the prevalence of dyslexia can be ascertained. The reason for this is that there is an "apparent large-scale under-identification of reading-disabled children." This is a concern for Shaywitz as when identification occurs too late (after third grade), it is more difficult to remediate. This is due to the plasticity of the brain. As Shaywitz (2003:30) explains: "(e)arly identification is important because the brain is much more plastic in younger children and potentially more malleable for the rerouting of neural circuits." Within the United States an approximate 4.4 percent of children between the ages of six and twenty-one have been identified as having a reading problem (Shaywitz, 2003:29). This figure does not take into account the children who have not been identified and Shaywitz believes that one child in five in the United States may be affected by dyslexia to some degree.

Shaywitz (2003:31) however, cautions the acceptance of prevalence rates because "identification often depends on school procedures." Based on her research findings, discrepancies were revealed in 'school identified' reading disabled children versus the research representative sample. In addition, an assumption exists that more boys than girls are dyslexic (Ibid, 2003:31). Shaywitz cautions that this assumption may be biased. Population prevalence rate of developmental dyslexia is dependent on how dyslexia is defined, but

Pneuman (2009) asserts that the most commonly reported figure is around 5 to 20 percent of the population. According to Shaywitz (2003:31) a further presumption, that dyslexia only affects those who speak alphabetic languages as opposed to logographic languages such as Chinese and Japanese, has been “proven false”. Dyslexia is a global phenomenon and Shaywitz (2003:31) believes that the global prevalence rates for dyslexia have been commensurate; “clearly, dyslexia knows no boundaries, neither geographic nor ethnic nor intellectual”.

2.7 Co-morbid conditions

Dyslexic individuals typically exhibit a number of co-morbid conditions. What this means is that, in addition to having dyslexic difficulties, other conditions which also hinder learning are present and exacerbate the problem. Tilly Mortimore (2008:66) recognizes that each dyslexic individual experiences different strengths and weaknesses within different areas of the condition. These areas may involve “memory, sequencing, concepts of time, orientation, left-right confusion, automaticity and managing simultaneous activities” (Mortimore, 2008:66). Automaticity refers to the fluency of reading and the ability to cope with simultaneous mental tasks (Mortimore, 2008:69). The most relevant co-existing conditions that will be discussed here are dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, ADD and ADHD (Davis 2010, Mortimore, 2008).

2.7.1 Dyspraxia is a controversial term that is defined by the Dyspraxia Foundation as “an impairment or immaturity of the organization of movement. Associated with this, there may be problems of language, perception and thought.” (Mortimore, 2008:75). Ron Davis (2010:59) discusses dyspraxia as a condition sometimes associated with dyslexia that refers to the difficulties with co-ordination and movement i.e. a chronic type of clumsiness most commonly considered as an auditory deficit. He further notes that distortions in the sense of balance and movement can cause disorientation in the brain which then results in clumsiness. For Davis (2010:59) “all dyslexics will, from time to time, experience some degree of dyspraxia because of disorientation.” He believes that through the use of a symbol mastery programme he has devised, discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, dyspraxia can be resolved. Another form of dyspraxia is verbal dyspraxia, which is neurological in origin and defined by Mortimore (2008:75) as “a speech production disorder, possibly related to damage to Broca’s area of the brain, characterized by difficulty processing sound sequences and inability to organize and produce longer words or utterances”. This often results in frustration

for dyslexic individuals as they struggle to find the right words to express themselves adequately.

2.7.2 Dyscalculia, another co-morbid condition, is also known as acalculia and it refers to problems with mathematics, especially the ability to learn grade appropriate mathematics. Davis (2010:41) relates this problem to the “time-sense distortions that are common among dyslexic children”. He is of the opinion that these distortions occur together with visual, auditory and motion distortions which affect dyslexic children’s sense of time. In his experience dyslexic children who suffer from dyscalculia struggle with time, sequence and order. This affects their simple counting, understanding of days of the week, months of the year or any concept that is sequential. Furthermore the proper place or position of things that need to be ordered is affected. Mortimore (2008:67) concurs as she explains that the problem faced by children who experience difficulties with sequencing are not limited to the order of things such as letters in the alphabet, or counting numbers in order. They usually have very little concept of days of the week such as Monday to Sunday, and dyslexics’ lives depend on activities that are organized within the week, rather than what day it is. To this end even remembering a sequence of different instructions is a complicated task for a dyslexic individual.

2.7.3 Dysgraphia or agraphia is the condition that exists when a dyslexic individual has a problem with writing (Davis, 2010:45). Davis notes that poor writing is sometimes developed by the dyslexic child to conceal spelling errors or due to disorientation when the child is first learning the skill of writing. Furthermore Davis (2010:48) states that diagonal lines are difficult for a dyslexic individual to see, and many of the written symbols contain diagonal lines, such as “A, M, N, W, V and X. Davis provides a re-orientation method called “Symbol Mastery” that claims to improve the dyslexic and related co-morbid conditions such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. This method will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

2.7.4 ADD and ADHD

Attention Deficit Disorder or ADD is one of the conditions that has gained significant popularity recently and often co-exists with dyslexia. This disorder, according to Davis (2010:52), is a medical disorder that “prevents a person from maintaining attention”. In addition “hyperactivity” can be added to this disorder which is then known as **ADHD** or **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**. Germano, Gagliano and Curatolo (2010:475)

note that ADHD “is characterized by excessive activity, short attention span and impulsivity” and is seen to be a highly prevalent, co-morbid condition associated with dyslexia. Mortimore (2008:76) further notes that when a child exhibits a combination of ADHD and dyslexia it often results in severe learning problems that often produce secondary problems such as low self-esteem, linked to low academic achievement and associated behavioral problems. Davis (2010:53) contests the idea of “attention deficit” as he feels that attention and concentration are linked to the disorientation that dyslexic children experience. In his opinion non-dyslexic children arrive at school having learnt to concentrate, whereas dyslexic children have not, because they keep their attention on more than one thing at a time. For this reason Davis proposes his symbol mastery and re-orientation programmes work for dyslexia and its co-morbidities. Generally there is consensus amongst researchers that a strong link between ADHD and dyslexia does exist (Mortimore, 2008, Germano et al, 2010, Shaywitz, 2005).

2.8. Labelling and Stigmatization

The significance of a label can have both positive and negative implications according to Jonathan Glazzard (2010) and Barbara Riddick (2000). On a positive level a reason is offered for the learning difficulties encountered, however, dyslexic individuals can feel resentment and isolation which reveals negative implications (Glazzard 2010) & (Taylor et al 2010). There is much debate between researchers as to whether the label ‘dyslexia’ is helpful or harmful to the individual who has been labeled. Barbara Riddick (2000:653) feels that there is more to it than just positive or negative implications. She feels that the context in which the label is attached is most important as is deconstructing the many different aspects that contribute to the labeling process.

Riddick also raises the idea of stigma attached to the label of dyslexia. She cites Gallagher’s 1976 summary of the positive and negative outcomes of a label such as dyslexia:

Positive aspects of the label dyslexia:

- Diagnosis of dyslexia enables suitable intervention and treatment.
- Diagnosis can further research and increase understanding of the disorder thereby contributing to preventative measures and intervention strategies.
- Diagnosis provides opportunity to seek help and access necessary resources and assistance.

Negative aspects of the label dyslexia:

- Providing a label without an intervention or relative support.
- Providing a label as a means of controlling social hierarchy groups.
- Providing a label that asserts blame on the individual and does not address the bigger problem within the system.

Riddick (2000:653)

Riddick (2000:654) feels that educationalists on the whole tend to believe that labeling produces negative results and proves harmful to the individual because of the stigma associated with the label. She recognizes that while labels may simplify intervention methods, they can however cause negative experiences for the individual labeled as dyslexic. Dyslexia is experienced along a continuum, with some individuals being slightly dyslexic whilst others are severely so. Due to the polarisation of individual experiences, it is difficult to assess how a slightly dyslexic person would feel about being labeled within the category of “special needs”, especially when their dyslexia is not very severe (Riddick, 2000:663). It can be argued, however, that by not attaching the label ‘dyslexia’ and evading the issue by applying the term “special education need”, the specific needs of the dyslexic individual are ignored. Riddick (2000:664) sees this evasive behaviour as meeting the educationalists’ requirements, but not addressing the needs of the dyslexic individual. She feels that power should not be placed in the hands of the ‘professional’. Her reasons include that dyslexia is not a difficulty that only affects school, but every area of dyslexics’ lives, throughout their lives, and these difficulties “span a wide range of situations” (Riddick, 2000:664). Riddick believes that the term ‘dyslexia’ for the dyslexic is an enabling one. The reason for this is that it gives dyslexics access to assistance and support. Furthermore, she feels that it provides an opportunity to identify with “a culture of dyslexia” which empowers rather than debilitates dyslexic individuals (Riddick, 2000:664).

Although labeling has led to stigma in the past, Riddick (2000:654) cautions against automatically assuming this will be the case. Stigma can result without the presence of an “official label.” She feels that people need to be seen as individuals before they are defined by their label. This can be done if the label has positive rather than negative connotations. The label can be private or public. At a private level the label helps dyslexics to understand their difficulties. Some of the individuals in Riddick’s research did not want their diagnosis

publicly known, as Riddick (2000:658) states in “in both Riddick (1996) and the Riddick et al, (1997) study it was found that the majority of adults and children with dyslexia found the label helpful at a private level”. The reason for this secrecy was that they felt that people outside of their immediate circle of influence would not understand and would ridicule them (Riddick, 2000:658). Some adults were able to come to terms with their difficulties for the first time because of the label, the reason being that they were able to reframe their earlier learning difficulties (Riddick, 2000:664) and this had positive implications for the context of their lives. Critical to this discussion is whether the label increases or decreases dyslexic individuals’ experiences of stigmatisation. If dyslexia is misunderstood and society is ill informed then the stigma could increase. Riddick reminds us that it is assumed that formal labels reduce stigma. However, with no official label, informal labeling takes place (Riddick, 2000:661). This can result in negative consequences for the dyslexic person where informal labels such as: - *lazy, stupid, slow, careless* are assigned to the person with dyslexia. It can therefore be assumed that informal labeling, that provides no solution to the difficulty, can increase associated stigma. For hidden disabilities a formal label provides a positive use of labeling, because it provides an explanation for why certain behaviours exist in dyslexic individuals. Riddick (2000:665) believes that this explanation, in the form of a formal label, acts as a buffer to the dyslexic individual in a literate society. Indeed, Engelbrecht et al (1990) feel that a label is only useful if it provides specific intervention programs. This is not evident in South African mainstream state education at the present time

Riddick (2000:654) feels that the context in which the label is given also affects the way the label is interpreted. She cites Goffman’s (1968) perspective on the differences between a noticeable disability (usually physical in nature) and a hidden disability (such as illiteracy) (Riddick, 2000:657). In Goffman’s opinion, the noticeable disability usually stigmatizes the individual immediately. However, the hidden disability only becomes stigmatized once the disability has been discovered. Burns & Bell (2010:530) feel that dyslexia is referred to as a hidden disability because it is a condition that is misunderstood by society. They (Burns & Bell 2010:531) believe that to understand an impairment, society needs to be willing to see evidence and acknowledge that the impairment exists. This is often not the case for dyslexics. Riddick notes that dyslexic children are usually more able to identify other dyslexics because of their willingness to do so and because of their understanding of the condition. For Riddick (2001:223) and Riddick (2000:664) dyslexia demonstrates a “social model of disability”; she states that “before mass literacy dyslexia was not a widespread problem and it is societal

changes that have created dyslexia.” Riddick (2000) therefore concludes that hidden disabilities such as dyslexia need to be proved as a disability before they can legitimately challenge the society that is creating it.

Another trend amongst educationalists with regard to labeling and categorization is to be ambiguous about the actual disability and generalize the category, for example the concept of Special Education Needs (SEN). Burns & Bell (2010:532) argue that the reason for this generalization is to attempt to de-stigmatize individuals with learning difficulties. However, Riddick feels that this trend has been counterproductive. Both Riddick (2000:656) and Shaywitz (2000:30) consider that this generalization has led to misdiagnoses and resulted in incorrect intervention strategies, at age specific times in dyslexics’ lives. The negative effects of a label pale in comparison to the destruction misdiagnosis can result in.

Riddick (2000:656) cites information from Riddick’s (1995, 1996) studies that discovered that “half the parents in her study were offered solely environmental explanations such as moving school to account for the marked difficulties their children were having in learning to read and write. These children were all later clearly identified as having dyslexia, and many of these children went through considerable distress and unhappiness because their difficulties were not correctly identified and addressed sooner.” This provides an example of the disastrous consequences misdiagnosis can produce. Dyslexic children were incorrectly assessed during their reading formative years. We can see therefore that not acknowledging dyslexia can have harmful consequences. Furthermore, through provision of a very broad, all inclusive label, specific intervention cannot be applied. When individuals with varying needs are lumped together under an umbrella description like SEN, specific needs are not met. Riddick (2000:664) ultimately feels that dyslexia challenges the way literacy is taught and assessed on a practical level at school. Moreover, Riddick (2000) believes that the condition of dyslexia challenges the assumptions that literacy skills are linked to intelligence and the ability to learn.

2.9 Intelligence and Dyslexia

According to Pneuman (2009) there is much debate amongst researchers as to ways in which intelligence is measured. She provides an interesting account of researchers changing perspectives and theories of intelligence over the years. Initially, the Binet-Simon Intelligence test was developed in 1916 as an attempt to measure the intellectual capacity of French children who were not performing academically in schools (Pneuman, 2009:14). This

test included measuring mental ability and intelligent behaviour by using a calculation of mental age and chronological age. This resulted in the intelligence quotient or IQ. Various researches such as Terman, Spearman, and Wechsler added different intelligence areas to the test in an attempt to improve its accuracy. According to Pneuman (2009:16) the Wechsler intelligence scale is the most widely used IQ test today. There is a drawback to measuring intelligence when attaching mental age to chronological age, because mental age is assumed to level off during adolescence. Pneuman (2009:18) however concludes that “IQ reflects the level of performance on a group of tasks and should occur in the context of broader assessments. Although not a perfect measurement of cognitive and processing abilities, IQ is considered a consistent and reliable measurement”. The question remains, if reading ability and intelligence are linked then is the intelligence test an accurate test for dyslexic individuals?

Mike Anderson (2008:120,121) argues that developmental disorders such as dyslexia need a theoretical model that specifically addresses the cognitive area of the dysfunction. Anderson (2008:120) relates this to the theory of association he uses when explaining autism. His reasoning is due to unknown factors that need to be taken into account when assessing intelligence specific to a developmental disorder. Anderson (2008:126) proposes that an association between disorders exist, rather than disassociation. He cites the example that few mentally retarded people have autism and yet autism has a strong association with mental retardation (Anderson, 2008:126). Anderson (2008:126) believes that single cause theories that explain learning or developmental disorders are not sufficient because they need to take association into account. Anderson therefore believes that the deficits that dyslexia produces within the dyslexic individual, including co-morbidities, need to be taken into account when assessing intelligence. It is reasonable to assume therefore that the intelligence of dyslexic individuals cannot be measured without taking this association into account. This means that with developmental disorders such as dyslexia it is important to include a deficit hypothesis and not assume reliability of an IQ test in this instance.

2.10 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter attempted to introduce the reader to the concept of dyslexia, by providing a historical account of the existence of dyslexia and the various ways in which the difficulty has been defined. A brief description of the causes of dyslexia was entertained as well as the understanding that different dyslexic individuals experience their dyslexia in different ways, with some being severely dyslexic and others not as badly affected. This also

links to the co-morbid conditions which may influence the individual experience of dyslexia as well as a discussion on the prevalence in population groups and the presumed higher ratio of boys to girls. The issue of whether the label dyslexia is helpful or not, and whether it causes stigmatization or not, adds to our understanding of it as a hidden disability. Intelligence and its impact on dyslexia was briefly discussed in order to highlight the difference between being characterized as being a “slow reader” versus being a “dyslexic reader” which is linked to IQ. The next chapter will provide a context for the research through discussion on international perspectives of dyslexia as well as discussion based on the perspectives of different authors.

Chapter 3: Contextualizing Dyslexia

3.1 International and Local perspectives

Dyslexia is recognized as a life-long condition. A vast body of international literature indicates the need for early identification and intervention programmes to be established (Konur 2006, Lawrence & Carter 1985). This process is usually driven by organisations that promote the dyslexic cause, for example the British Dyslexic Association (BDA), established in 1972, and the Scottish Dyslexic Association, established in 1989 (Ott, 1997:7 & 11). In response to an estimated two percent of the Australian population being affected by dyslexia, the Australian Dyslexic Association was established in 2002 (ADA.org). However there is little information available regarding a dyslexia association in South Africa.

Sharon Gerken (Private correspondence 2011), a Davis² dyslexic facilitator, revealed that a South African Dyslexic Association was to be established. Indeed, in July 2013, a non-profit company called the Red Apple Dyslexic Association was launched. The fact that this organisation has so recently been established demonstrates the degree to which dyslexia has gone unrecognized as a real learning difficulty in South Africa. The United States, Australia and many European countries have established criteria within their educational policies to cater for children with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and other special needs (McPhillips & Shevlin 2009:63, Nugent 2008:190, Macdonald 2009:271, Burns & Bell 2010:53, Humphrey 2003:133). In the United Kingdom, the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act recognized dyslexia as a disability (Dale & Taylor, 2001:997). In Ireland and Scotland implementation of special reading schools as well as reading units which support mainstream schools were provided. Further assistance in the United Kingdom, in the form of support teachers within mainstream schools, has been implemented. These support teachers provide further assistance to dyslexic learners.

A vast amount of international literature on dyslexia is available as the condition is recognized as a barrier to learning. This thesis, however, allows for only a very brief overview of literature pertaining to the social aspect of dyslexia and related themes. Burns & Bell (2010:536) provide insights into the difficulties faced by Finnish and English teachers

² “For nearly three decades the Davis Dyslexia Correction Program has helped hundreds of thousands of dyslexic adults and children learn to read, write and study efficiently using a unique approach that begins with an understanding of how dyslexic’s think – in pictures rather than in words. Focussing on the distinctive learning style that is shared by most people with dyslexia, *The Gift of Dyslexia* provides the practical skills that remove the obstacles to learning and leads students of all ages to the fullest expression of their innate gifts – and to success in every aspect” (Davis, 2010).

who themselves have dyslexia, viewing dyslexia as a hidden disability. Burns & Bell note that teachers need support, acceptance and inclusion. Riddick (2000) discusses issues of labelling and stigma in relation to dyslexia in the United Kingdom. McPhillips & Shevlin (2009:64,68) evaluate Irish primary schools' teaching methods in relation to their expectations for children with dyslexia, and what the term "inclusion" means in practice, as well as its effect on self-esteem. Nugent (2008:190) further challenges the "inclusion" debate by allowing the voices of parents and children who attend special schools and reading units to be heard. Her findings include examples of dyslexic children being victimized (in the form of bullying, isolation and exclusion) in mainstream situations, which she believes affects their academic and social progress (Nugent, 2008:202). Glazzard (2010) and Humphrey (2003) evaluate the self-esteem of children in the United Kingdom who have dyslexia. Humphrey (2003:130) specifically looks at the role teachers and peers have in fostering a positive sense of self in pupils with dyslexia.

Although a paucity of South African literature exists in relation to the social aspects of dyslexia, a South African study was done by Rene Engelbrecht in 2005 on the effect of the Davis (2003) Programme on the reading ability and psychological functioning of children. This will be discussed more fully later in this chapter (see 3.5.1). Further to this, a thesis written by Henderson (2009) discusses the linguistic face management strategies of dyslexic adults and how these individuals maintain a positive face in social settings. It is evident from the material discussed that predominantly psychological and linguistic research standpoints have been adopted. However, South African research seems to be lacking in the area of how the dyslexic individual perceives himself/herself in relation to peers and within the context of mainstream education. This research therefore aims to add to the body of knowledge by drawing on published literature and understanding, from a sociological perspective, the experiences and self-perceptions of learners diagnosed with dyslexia in Grahamstown.

3.2 A Cognitive Neuroscientific approach

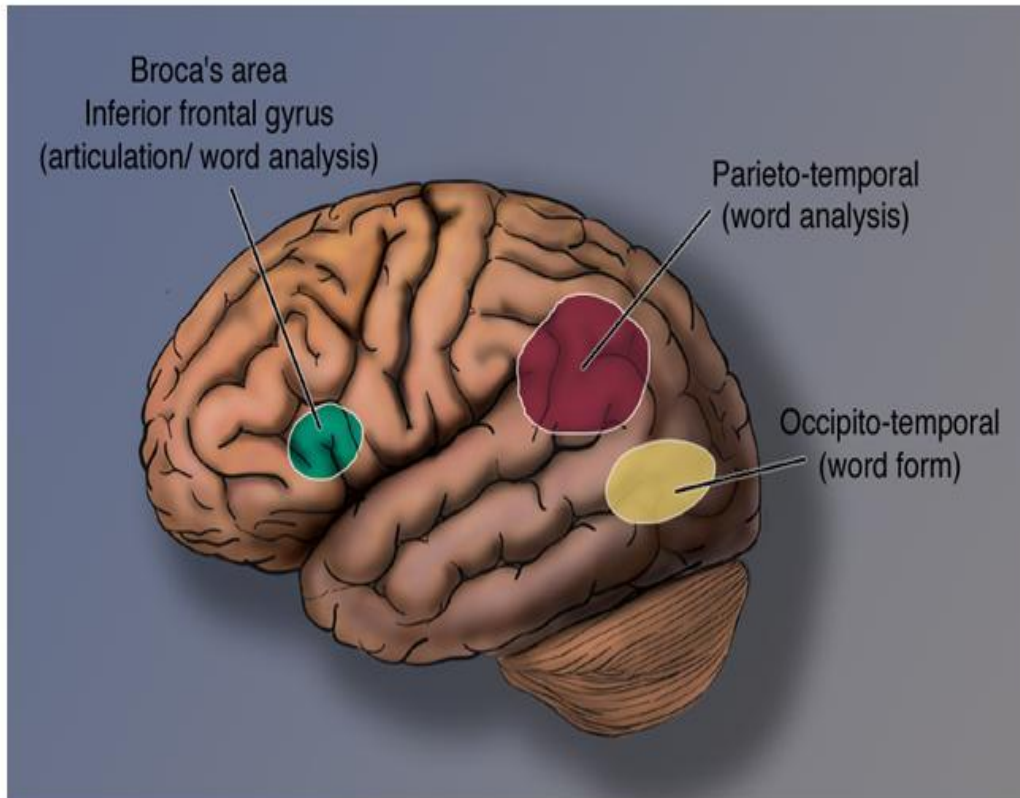
Sally Shaywitz (2003) provides a modern medical understanding of dyslexia by offering a science-based programme for reading problems in *Overcoming Dyslexia*. Shaywitz gives a historical overview of the brain and brain function, acknowledging that only in the past decade have scientists begun to understand the complexities of the brain. The invention of the CT (Computed Tomography) scan enabled neuroscientists to study the anatomy and structure of the brain. However, an understanding of how the brain functions only became possible in the late nineteen eighties. The Positron Emission Tomography (PET) used

radioactive compounds injected into the bloodstream which made it possible to see the working brain, however, according to Shaywitz (2003:69) this procedure proved to be too invasive and costly. Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) provided the breakthrough in technology that neuroscientists needed to view the workings of the brain in a non-invasive way. Shaywitz (2003) believes that one of the greatest fears dyslexic individuals experience is that their brains have an abnormal structure. Her research findings revealed that dyslexic individuals are extremely relieved and reassured when they see a scanned image of their brain and it shows normal structure.

Brain image scanning enabled the mapping of the neural circuitry necessary for reading. Shaywitz (2003:77) discovered an interesting sex difference in brain organization for language. Neuroscientists discovered that men consistently use their left inferior frontal gyrus when sounding out words, whereas women activate both left and right areas (Shaywitz, 2003:77). Both men and women use the same region - the frontal gyrus - for reading. Imaging studies have shown that at least three neural pathways are used for reading. The beginner slower reading pathway and the skilled quicker reading pathways are different. Most importantly Shaywitz (2003:78) reveals that brain scanning technology has provided a breakthrough, in that it has proven that dyslexic readers and able readers worldwide use different brain pathways to read. Most reading occurs in the posterior reading system in the back of the brain (the occipito-temporal region, used by skilled readers – see image below). Broca's area (inferior frontal gyrus) is used for articulation and slow word analysis whereas the parieto-temporal region is where the word analysis of novice readers takes place (See Neural Systems for Reading, Shaywitz, 2003:78).

Shaywitz (2003:78) shows, through neural pathway mapping, that skilled readers' brains are activated at the back of the brain when reading. This activation identified a strong link between reading skill and reliance on the word form area which occurs in the occipito-temporal area.

Neural Systems for Reading



© Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia*, 2003

This enabled the differences in dyslexic reading brain patterns to be understood more fully because, contrastingly, dyslexic readers show an under-activation of neural pathways in the back of the brain when reading. Activation occurs mostly in the inferior frontal gyrus in the dyslexic brain. Shaywitz (2003:81) feels that this reveals a “fault in the system” of dyslexic readers. Consequently, dyslexic readers have initial trouble analyzing words and transforming letters into sounds, and even as they mature as individuals, this same pattern persists. This causes them to remain slow and not very fluent readers over the course of their lifetimes. According to brain imaging, all readers, of all ages, who demonstrate the ability to read, reveal strong patterns developing in the back of the brain. In contrast, dyslexic readers show an increased activation in the frontal region – Broca’s area. This shows that they are trying to compensate for the disruption in the back of the brain as they struggle to read – using Broca’s

area to effectively ‘sound out the words’ to process them. Shaywitz (2003:82) mentions that this is a “universal signature” and is true of all dyslexics, in all languages and of all ages.

Abigail Marshall (1998) offers a critique of Shaywitz’s (1998) brain imaging study by challenging the so-called scientific approach to dyslexic reading. In her opinion the candidates that were used in the study were poor readers with low IQ scores. Marshall believes that true dyslexic readers have above average intelligence as opposed to poor readers with below average intelligences who exhibit general learning problems. She feels that the 1998 study done by Shaywitz was more a study of readers versus non-readers and not about dyslexic readers. She argued that “(t)o me, this would be like comparing a group of beginners in a dance class with a group of professional dancers as they do the rhumba, and then deciding that the beginners have something wrong with their feet” (Marshall, 1998:2). It has been established that dyslexic people use a different part of their brain to read, but Marshall feels that this is not a functional disruption or glitch in the brain as Shaywitz observes, but rather a more imaginative and creative process that occurs within the dyslexic brain.

Although Marshall is critical of Shaywitz’s 1998 study, this thesis acknowledges the overwhelming and compelling evidence that Shaywitz has presented throughout her research. Brain imaging science has provided proof that dyslexia is a neurobiological problem and that a glitch in the wiring of a dyslexic brain prevents the brain from reading in the normal way. Shaywitz (2003:82) maintains that this “glitch” exists prior to the dyslexic individual learning to read and that it is not as a result of years of poor reading. Additionally, she maintains that it is a condition that persists over a lifetime.

It is evident that dyslexic individuals use different parts of their brain to compensate for their reading difficulties. Shaywitz (2003) feels that research has shown that it is possible for dyslexics to improve their word recognition. However, they are not able to increase the speed or fluency of reading to the degree that able readers read. So reading does not become automatic, but always presents as a “chore” for the dyslexic reader. Shaywitz (2003) contends that there is mounting evidence that early intervention may be able to assist the dyslexic reader to increase in fluency and word recognition during reading formative years. She states that “after more than a century of frustration, it has now been shown that the brain can be rewired and that struggling children can become skilled readers” (Shaywitz, 2003:86).

For Shaywitz (2003:87-89), dyslexia should no longer be dismissed as a hidden disability because, through brain imaging, concrete proof has been provided that a physiological

reading difficulty does exist. She feels that ignorance and lack of recognition are the greatest stumbling blocks for dyslexic children in reaching their full potential. Shaywitz (2003), through the use of brain imaging, provides a convincing discussion from a scientific perspective illuminating a once hidden difficulty. This discovery has contributed to providing concrete evidence that dyslexic children and adults use different parts of their brains to read, which explains their difficulty in doing so. Her book places emphasis on early intervention. For adult dyslexic individuals whose neural pathways for reading have been established and coping mechanisms entrenched, this approach may not be helpful. However, Shaywitz has provided the keys that give hope to dyslexic readers who are struggling. She also provides ammunition to the dyslexic reader which enables a response to all those who assume that dyslexic readers are lazy, stupid and uninterested.

3.3 A Psychological Causal Perspective

Angela Fawcett, an Emeritus professor at the University of Swansea, is recognized as a leading international researcher into dyslexia and other developmental disabilities. Her approach includes cognitive development, educational screening for dyslexia, intervention programmes and developmental cognitive neuroscience. In search of the causes of dyslexia, Fawcett's focus areas include developmental dyslexia and the cerebellar deficit hypothesis (CHD), which considers the possibility that a cerebellar impairment within the brain is the root cause of dyslexia (Nicolson & Fawcett, 1999:155).

Roderick Nicolson and Angela Fawcett designed a research programme spanning a ten year period in which they examined "symptoms consistent with faulty skill automatization even in the gross motor skill of balance" as well as the "severe and persistent problems of phonological skill, processing speed, balance and motor skill" (Nicolson & Fawcett 1999:156). Automatization relates to the skill of fluency. Nicolson and Fawcett (1999) attempt an approach that will support a coherent explanation that fits in with current ideas but also provides an alternate framework of explanation. According to Frith (cited in Nicolson & Fawcett 1999:157) there are three major current causal explanations of dyslexia: "phonological deficit, rapid temporal processing deficit and cerebellar impairment."

Deficits in the temporal processing of the brain can account for the difficulties experienced by dyslexics, as this deficit affects the neuroanatomical irregularities and the specific phonological abilities required to process words cognitively. This in essence affects the dyslexic reader's ability to distinguish one word from another. Through their research

Nicolson & Fawcett (1999:170) have been able to highlight a causal link between deficits in the cerebellum and learning and working memory. They identified areas such as balance impairment, motor skill impairment (which leads to writing difficulties), articulatory skill (which impacts phonological awareness, word recognition and therefore reading) and problems with automatising skill and knowledge (affecting spelling and word recognition).

3.4 Main Causal Theories

There are three main causal theories of developmental dyslexia that will be discussed in this thesis. They are the phonological deficit theory, the auditory processing deficit theory and the magnocellular deficit theory. Multiple theories exist, most with a focus on causation and therefore remediation.

3.4.1 Phonological Deficit Theory

Reid, Szcerbinski, Iskierka-Kasperek and Hansen (2007:2) provide an accurate account of the central claim of phonological deficit theory in dyslexic individuals. This claim refers to the specific difficulty that dyslexic individuals have with representation, namely in the understanding and processing of the symbol represented, which refers to recognizing the changes of speech sounds known as phonemes in a progressive manner (Reid et al 2007:2). Phonological awareness involves being able to analyze, blend and manipulate the sound structure of words. An example of this would be being able to recognize the difference between *bright*, *fright*, *site* and *might*. It further involves the ability to remember digits in succession, words and nameable visual stimuli such as nouns like ball, desk and chair. This includes repetition of words (rhyme and non-rhyme) and naming speed (Ibid, 2007:2). Recoding and spelling form part of the awareness of phonemes and is tested when unfamiliar non-words are used such as *tegwob*, *nolcrid*, *trolb* and *prab* (Correspondence Jan Knoetze, 2011).

Snowling (1998:5) attributes dyslexia to a core phonological deficit which she feels provides the most logical explanation for reading deficits. Her theory provides evidence that phonological processing difficulties in dyslexia are life-long and differ in severity within individuals. According to Snowling (1998:6), research consistently reveals “problems with phonological awareness and limitations of verbal short-term memory”. She posits that dyslexics also have problems with long term verbal learning and the ability to retrieve information from long-term memory. Tests using rapid naming and object naming tasks reveal this problem. Furthermore, Snowling (1998:4) believes that the phonological deficit

hypothesis takes into account the different manifestations of dyslexia seen across a lifespan. Fowler (cited in Marshall, Snowling and Bailey, 2001:925) believes that phonological representations are paramount for the development of reading ability. Phonological representations refer to the structures within words and the way that they sound. In addition, Marshall et al. (2001:925) feel that a “deficit at the level of phonological representation will therefore have a detrimental effect on a child’s development and use of fine-grained mappings between orthographic and phonological codes in learning to read”. This means that if the reader has impaired phonological skills, the basic level of reading such as non-word repetition and verbal short term memory will be affected. Furthermore, Marshall et al (2001) confirm that research in this area has shown that a phonological impairment exists in dyslexic individuals.

Snowling (1998:8) however, provides three limitations of this model. Firstly, testing for the phonological deficit reveals that it is an age related process and is often linked to IQ and naming task development. According to Snowling (1998:8) assumptions about the existence of a “gold standard” which refers to a supreme example against which something is measured must be questioned. Is such a standard plausible? Secondly, dyslexics are able to compensate for their lack of decoding by using comprehension (Ibid, 1998:8). Therefore, it is questionable that an assumed link between phonology and decoding exists, because dyslexics may be using other skills to decode. Thirdly, it should be acknowledged that co-morbid disorders such as visual problems, auditory problems and hyperactivity may contribute to the variation found between dyslexic individuals (Ibid, 1998:8). Snowling consequently acknowledges that the phonological deficit hypothesis is not cut and dried. Further to this Blomert and Willems (2010:314), through the use of a Dutch study, questioned the link between phonological awareness deficit and reading failure. This revealed a discrepancy between English and Dutch orthography. Orthography is a method of spelling used in a particular language. Blomert and Willems (2010) connected processing difficulties to orthography and this relates to the structure of language.

3.4.2. Auditory Processing Theory

According to Marshall et al (2001:926) rapid auditory processing refers to “the ability to process rapidly arriving sequences of auditory stimuli.” Tallal (cited in Marshall et al 2001:927) proposed a theory that a deficit in rapid auditory processing exists in children with dyslexia. Furthermore, this deficit affects speech perception which represses the development of language and literacy. In an attempt to link auditory processing and phonological

processing, Tallal (1980), (cited in Marshall et al 2001:926), used Auditory Repetition Task (ART), which measures rapid auditory processing to test reading impaired and dyslexic children's ability to process verbal and non-verbal responses. Tallal found a strong correlation between the two processors. According to studies done by Marshall et al (2001:928) however, this correlation is contested. Marshall et al (2001) tested the hypothesis that a relationship between phonological skills and rapid auditory processing exists. Based on evidence from their study they believe that there is no direct link between phonological processing and rapid auditory processing. Instead, they found that a moderate relationship between phonological abilities and single-word reading exists and that, consequently, that performance continues to improve with age. For Marshall et al (2001:938) this highlights the fact that phonological skills continue to develop after the acquisition of literacy. However, they do suggest that the strategic and cognitive demands involved in tasks of rapid auditory processing should be examined more fully in further research.

A study using fMRI scanning was used by Gaab, Gabrieli, Deutsch, Tallal and Temple in 2007 to test the neural correlates of rapid auditory processing in children with developmental dyslexia. Tallal's purpose (in Gaab et al. 2007:306) was to discover if any disruptions occurred during this process before and after remediation. Using non-linguistic auditory stimuli, the researchers proposed that the auditory temporal processing deficit would recognize minute changes in auditory information and that this would interfere with the phonological ability to process language which would in turn affect reading. Although remediation revealed improvement in the rapid auditory processing abilities, a direct link between remediation and improvement was not established. The findings rather suggest that developmental dyslexia affects the ability of the brain to respond to rapid auditory non-verbal sounds, which in turn is supposed to affect language and reading skills, both pre and post remediation (Gaab et al, 2007:307). A critique of this hypothesis is offered by Gibson, Hogben and Fletcher (2006:621-624) who dispute the 2004 auditory temporal deficit theory that Tallal proposed on the grounds that most dyslexics do not display auditory or visual deficits. Moreover, Tallal reasoned that co-morbid conditions should be considered as the cause of reading and language impairment (Gibson et al 2006:639).

3.4.3. Magnocellular Deficit Theory

The magnocellular deficit hypothesis offers a neurobiological basis for dyslexia. Visio-motor control is an important function within this theory and is controlled by the visual magnocellular system which is located in the cerebellum. According to Stein (2001:12) this

system is responsible for timing visual events especially when reading. Only within the visual system do the “magnocellular neurons that time visual events and track moving targets form a clearly distinct and separate system.” (Stein 2001:26). As the eyes move across the page they rely on signals which are sensitive to the visual system to bring the eyes back to target. Good magnocellular function is needed to provide these signals, stabilize the eyes and fixate on a word during reading. Furthermore, increasing motion sensitivity is required to aid the development of orthographic skills (Stein, 2001:19).

Both visual perception and binocular stability (using both eyes) are important for reading. In some cases monocular occlusion, which refers to covering one eye, provides the stability the eyes need to improve reading (Stein, 2001:21). Reid et al. (2007) refer to Stein et al (2001) as stating that dyslexic individuals often complain about text size being too small. Furthermore, dyslexic individuals complain that the letters move around on the page making it difficult to read. This provides an example of why dyslexics experience severe motion sensitivity and binocular instability. Reid et al. (2007:2) distinguish between the visual magnocellular system (linked to sight) and the auditory magnocellular system (linked to sound) according to specialization. The visual magnocellular system “specializes in processing fast visual temporal information, whereas the auditory magnocellular system specializes in processing fast auditory temporal information” (Reid et al., 2007:2).

Stein (2001) believes that the damaged magnocells, which are part of the cerebellum, are hereditary and affect binocular fixation. Furthermore, the inner speech for sounding out words is influenced by a deficit in the magnocells. As confirmed by Martin and Lovegrove’s study (cited in Stein 2001:17), flicker sensitivity and spatial contrast revealed that dyslexics had diminished sensitivity compared to the experimental controls. This led them to speculate that an impairment in the visual magnocellular system existed in dyslexic brains. Stein (2001:17) suggests that a more reliable way of testing this hypothesis would be to test the dyslexic individual’s sensitivity to visual motion, reasoning that magnocellular cells and central processing occur in the central cortex which processes visual motion and is found to be consistently impaired in dyslexic brains. Reid et al. (2006:17) cite three main types of evidence that support the hypothesis of an impaired visual magnocellular system: they are, firstly, an “unsteady binocular fixation” (which is an inability to use both eyes to focus at the same time); secondly, “reduced motion sensitivity” (this refers to the inability to move the eyes across the page as required for reading); and thirdly “reduced contrast sensitivity”(which indicates the difficulty of distinguishing between differences, for example ‘p’ and ‘b’).

For Stein (2001:18), autopsy examination of dyslexic brains offers the most vigorous evidence that the magnocellular system does not develop normally. These studies show that displacement of neuron growth and disordered magnocellular regions of the brain were discovered in these post mortem brains. Research on foetal development reveals that these areas of the brain should have developed normally at around four month's gestation within the womb. The disordered pattern and growth discovered in post mortem adult dyslexic brains proves that this is not the case for dyslexics. Further agreement is provided by Fawcett, Nicholson and Dean's work on the cerebellar deficit hypothesis wherein Reid et al (2006:3) explain that Fawcett et al. have proposed a link between cerebellar impairment, phonological processing and reading and spelling problems. Fawcett et al concur that the cerebellum and its systems influence dyslexia.

Stein (2001:27) views the cerebellum as the brain's "autopilot" because its function is "specifically for automatic preprogrammed timing of muscle contractions and for optimizing motor performance." As the cerebellum receives heavy magnocellular activity from the motor centers of the brain, as well as from the sensory organs, Stein links cerebellar functioning to reading. For Stein (2001:27), the cerebellum can be viewed as the most important part of the magnocellular timing system in and of the brain because it receives and produces timed responses. Stein agrees with Fawcett et al's work in regard to cerebellar tasks and its relation to the magnocellular system. Stein (2001:31) offers a positive contribution to the deficit theory in that he speculates that the inefficiency of the magnocellular system may result in an increased efficiency in the parvocellular system. The parvocellular system is responsible for stronger visual connections in the dyslexic brain. Although not proven, he feels that this could account for the more holistic talents amongst dyslexics and their way of problem solving that does not fit into the conventional linear, small scale thinking. It could also provide an explanation for the talents displayed by many dyslexics in the fields of art, invention and entrepreneurship.

An overview of the main causal theories in relation to developmental dyslexia has been presented because these are the most recognized and popular theoretical stances. However, for social researchers, causal theories need to be supplemented by adding the experiences of dyslexia. Davis (2010) takes a more pragmatic approach to dyslexia by proposing a method of intervention.

3.5 Re-orientation and Symbol Mastery

“When someone masters something, it becomes a part of that person. It becomes part of the individual’s thought and creative process. It adds the quality of its essence to all subsequent thought and creativity of the individual” (Davis 2010:258).

In 2003, Ronald Davis, an engineer who is himself dyslexic, developed an intervention Programme for dyslexics. Davis believes that dyslexia is a self-created condition and views it as a gift rather than a curse. In an attempt to understand his own dyslexia, and in response to the lack of effective intervention Programme available, his Programme focused on re-orientation and symbol mastery. Davis (2010:8) sees dyslexia as “a product of thought – a special way of reacting to the feeling of confusion.” For him, the dyslexic brain uses non-verbal thought instead of lineal verbal thought. In his opinion non-verbal thought is more creative, it works more quickly and views thoughts in pictures. Davis (2010:11) feels that when a dyslexic person reads s/he is “composing a mental picture by adding the meaning or image of the meaning – of each new word as it is encountered”.

Davis provides an example of words that represent pictures that are easy for the dyslexic person to read because s/he is able to picture the word. Words such as ‘horse’, ‘brown’, and ‘jumped’ are easy to associate to a word because they have a picture attached to them (Davis, 2010:12). However, words that have no picture such as ‘a’, ‘and’, ‘any’, ‘they’ are more difficult to read and therefore the meaning of the word is lost. For Davis, these non-picture words cause confusion and disorientation in the dyslexic reader’s mind. Davis (2010:13) defines disorientation as being “the perception of the symbols that gets altered and becomes distorted so that reading or writing is difficult or impossible”. Alternately Davis defines orientation as “knowing where you are in relation to your environment” (Davis 2010:14).

Davis (2010:15) therefore proposes a method that involves a re-orientation of mental pictures and thought patterns. He does this through the use of a visual point called “the mind’s eye.” Davis believes that dyslexic individuals frequently become disorientated without being aware of it, and that this disorientation occurs on a subconscious level and allows the dyslexic to perceive the environment on a multidimensional level. He feels that his methods allow dyslexic individuals to correct this disorientation internally instead of just providing a coping mechanism.

There are two hundred *trigger words*³ that Davis (2010:252-254) discusses that cause disorientation for most dyslexic individuals. He believes that if these words can be mastered, with meaning and definitions attached to them, then the reading speed and comprehension of dyslexic individuals can be significantly improved. For Davis (2010:39) a “written word is nothing more than a symbol composed of one or more alphabet symbols”. A word written on paper therefore is only one representation of the word, it does not hint at the way it sounds or what it means. Davis (2010:217) posits that once a word is mastered using the “symbol mastery” technique he has devised, then all three parts of the word can be understood by the dyslexic reader. He believes that the inability to think with trigger words is what causes disorientation. Once dyslexics have formed mental pictures for each of the trigger words that trip them up then these words will no longer cause disorientation. In this way Davis (2010:219) believes that the learning disability would have effectively been eliminated as the trigger words no longer cause confusion and disorientation.

Davis has been criticized by some academics for not having any researched or documented case studies which prove that his re-orientation programmes work. His critics claim that his methods have no basis in the neurocognitive nature of reading which in their opinion reveals no efficacy. However, an evaluation of Davis’ methods was done by Pfeiffer, Davis, Kellogg, Hern, McLaughlin and Curry in 2001, to determine the benefits of Davis learning strategies. This research involved working with ‘at risk’ first graders. Pfeiffer et al (2001:2) worked with eighty six children using the Davis methods to master one hundred sight words. The control group did not use the Davis methods. The research concluded that early intervention is critical (Pfeiffer et al, 2001:4). Furthermore, the earlier the intervention begins the more chance of success; “it takes four times as much assistance to improve a child’s reading skills if help is offered in fourth grade versus starting help in mid-kindergarten” (Pfeiffer et al, 2001:4) In addition, the “wait and fail” method where the child must first fail before they are able to access support is detrimental to the child and costly to the state (Pfeiffer et al, 2001:4). Various Davis methods were used in the study in 1994 and it was discovered that students on the Davis Programme showed “significantly higher accuracy on tests of basic sight word recognition.” (Pfeiffer et al, 2001:13). Furthermore, follow-up data provided the most convincing evidence of the effectiveness of the Programme, because three years later these ‘at risk’ children who had participated in the Davis Learning Programme did not need extra help in the form of special services (Pfeiffer et al, 2001:14). Davis methods are producing

³ See Appendix 1 for a list of trigger words.

results and dyslexic individuals of different ages and nationalities are finding that through the application of the Davis methods they can learn to read more easily. A local example of this is a research paper produced by Rene Engelbrecht (2005) who researched the effect of the Ron Davis Programme on South African, Afrikaans speaking children.

3.5.1 A South African Case Study

Engelbrecht's (2005) study focused on the psychological functioning of children who have been on the Davis Programme. Engelbrecht worked with twenty Afrikaans speaking children in grades 5 to 7 who attended a special needs school in Cape Town. These children had been diagnosed with a reading difficulty but had above average IQs. The research Engelbrecht (2005) conducted made use of a control group, with no interventions offered, and an experimental group. The Davis methods of symbol mastery and re-orientation were introduced to the experimental group. The results were then compared. Engelbrecht designed an evaluation of the process through the means of a psychological questionnaire. These questionnaires were administered to parents and educators at different points in the Programme. Furthermore, follow-up tests were administered to the children twelve weeks later. The results revealed that the experimental group showed improvement in 12 of the 17 subtests. The control group had also improved in some of the subtests. However, an overall improvement of 10 subtests in the experimental group was shown. Follow-up tests revealed that improvement had been maintained even though the majority of participants had not followed through with the Programme on their own. The psychological benefits were positive. Engelbrecht (2005) felt that this research study proved that Davis techniques or methods had positive effects on the reading and spelling of participants. In addition, positive effects on the psychological functioning of the experimental group were also maintained (Engelbrecht, 2005:56).

3.6 Seeking a dyslexic identity

Burden (2005:1) comments on the fact that there is little research conducted with regards to examining the dyslexic individual's feelings about being dyslexic. He maintains that most research papers focus on causes and remediation of dyslexia and not the social aspects associated with the difficulty. Burden asserts that a certain disregard exists for the human side of dyslexia and he feels that it is an "unjustifiably neglected area of research" (Burden, 2005:1). Furthermore, Burden (2005:1) uses the word "bedevilled" to explain the torment that confounds individuals who experience difficulties of a dyslexic nature. Research that focuses

on understanding the dyslexic's needs would be beneficial as it would provide a platform for educators, parents and assessors to assist dyslexics⁴ in coming to terms with their difficulty.

Burden (2005:1) holds the view that the expectation for all humans to reach the same developmental goals within a similar time period is problematic. The child with difficulties in certain areas cannot reach these goals, especially if s/he has hidden disabilities like dyslexia. In this instance Burden feels that the self-esteem of struggling individuals will be affected. He proposes that much research has proven that early childhood experiences shape internal attitudes toward self as well as place in the world/society. Furthermore, he argues that an increasing body of evidence has revealed that dyslexic children are at risk if their difficulties are not identified at an early stage, making them more prone to damaged issues of self (Burden, 2005:2). Social and cultural contexts as well as relationships with significant others all have an influence on the sense of identity which affects self-concept and self-esteem.

Burden (2005:16) argues for a socio-cultural theoretical approach which views knowledge as constructed within social contexts. This approach offers respite to the dyslexic individual as it recognizes that the social and educational focus of literacy as a requirement is particular to this time period. This being the case, it indicates that society's literate requirements may be open to change. Burden (2005:17) highlights the link between social constructionism and symbolic interactionism because "interactionists also argue that the sense of self is continually refined in later life and acts as a basis for thought and behaviour." Furthermore, Burden (2005:17) states that motivational theorists provide a complementary approach to socio-cultural and symbolic interactionism by emphasizing the individual's attitudes, self-concept and sense of agency which in turn influence motivation. Burden expands on the idea of motivation by explaining that external factors such as the expectations of parents and teachers, as well as the amount of support provided to the individual and the influence of peers' attitudes, all play a part in influencing motivation (Burden, 2005:17-21).

For Burden (2005:21), self-efficacy theory provides insight into the individual's capabilities. Burden (2005:21) states that our "beliefs about our capabilities help determine what we do with them." Burden (2005:20) cites Rotter's (1954) social learning theory "which refers to a person's beliefs about their control over life events." He feels that it is not only skills and knowledge but individual belief that determines success or failure. People who internalize

⁴ Burden, (2005:3) discusses that it is important to keep in mind that when referring to "dyslexics" it is just a form of "convenient shorthand" to refer to these individuals, who have difficulties of a dyslexic nature. It is by no means an attempt to label or stigmatize them.

their feelings about life experiences take personal responsibility for circumstances. Conversely, people who externalize these experiences blame circumstances for their predicament (Burden 2005:21). Dyslexics suffer from specific learning difficulties. This should indicate that they are capable of learning in other areas. Self-efficacy theory suggests that:

“academically unsuccessful dyslexics are likely to be lacking in confidence about their capabilities for becoming successfully literate, will choose to avoid tasks involving reading and or/writing, will be inclined to expend less effort on such tasks, to lack resilience, and to be more vulnerable to stress and anxiety in academic situations” (Burden 2005:23).

Burden’s (2005) work is the most relevant to my research because it focuses on the specific aspects of dyslexia that I wish to focus on i.e. what does it feel like to be dyslexic for a dyslexic person, and how do these feelings affect their self-concept and self-esteem. Burden (2005:29-38) provides assessment tools with specific questions formulated for a semi-structured interview that address issues such as academic self-concept and sense of agency. His Dyslexia Identity Scale (DIS) measures self-efficacy/locus of control, learned helplessness, depression items and feelings of being misunderstood. In addition, Burden’s (2005:37) ‘all about me’ instrument measures other self-concept items through open ended questioning. Burden’s measures will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5. Permission⁵ has been obtained from Dr. Robert Burden personally to use and adapt these questions to suit the purpose of this research. Burden’s (2005:38) research subjects were from schools which specifically catered for dyslexic students. This enabled them to draw comparisons between how they felt in mainstream education and in a specific school that catered to their needs. This will not be possible in this study as all the candidates are enrolled in mainstream educational institutions, given that no special needs schools exist in Grahamstown.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter takes a contextual approach to dyslexia by providing a broad outline of both international and local perspectives. Furthermore, it has acknowledged the medically scientific approach to understanding dyslexia by highlighting how the brain reads. This perspective provides concrete evidence that dyslexia does exist and challenges those who may have questioned its existence in the past. Fawcett’s psychological causal perspective sheds light on the link between the cerebellum (in the brain) and learning, as well as how it

⁵ See Appendix 4

affects working memory. Due to these causal links an understanding that dyslexia is more than just a reading problem is acknowledged. It provides an explanation of why balance, writing, articulation, spelling and word recognition are affected. The theories described in this chapter represent three of the main causal explanations available in the literature. The phonological deficit theory is the most widely accepted causal theory as this has to do with recognition of the sounds of words represented on paper. However, the deficit in auditory processing as a theory seems to be linked to the ability to process words phonologically. Furthermore, the magnocellular deficit theory also provides evidence that visual and auditory processing, which are required for fluent reading, are also impaired in dyslexic brains. Therefore a multifaceted theoretical approach may be needed to develop the phenomenon of developmental dyslexia because of its multi-dimensional nature.

Davis (2010) provides us with a practical approach through his re-orientation and symbol mastery programme and Engelbrecht's 2005 study brings both the effectiveness of the Davis dyslexia programme to light as well as providing local (South African) application. Burden (2005) expands on the need for a dyslexic identity and the importance of research in this area. He maintains that, although there has been an increase in information about dyslexia in recent years, the dyslexic individual's life experiences and perceptions of self in relation to others and their social environments have been neglected (Burden 2005: IV). The next chapter will discuss different ways in which symbolic interactionism and a social understanding of dyslexia can be applied.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Chapter

4.1 Introduction to a Social Theoretical Model of Developmental Dyslexia

According to Sheldon Stryker (2007:1087) a theory is a set of ideas that provides the “imagery, assumptions and conceptions underpinning major contributions” within the discipline, and it establishes a perspective or provides a framework in which to develop a particular phenomenon. For this reason it is important to establish an understanding of the different theories surrounding developmental dyslexia. Most theories speculate around the issue of causes of dyslexia, in an effort to provide an explanation for its presence. Furthermore, the causal focus hopes to provide specific and effective remediation and/or intervention strategies. It must be noted that, as theories develop over time, different versions or additions tend to accumulate. Ramus and Ahissar (2012:105) confirm that multiple theories exist, revealing large inconsistencies which may be accounted for due to the wide range of deficits discovered across the spectrum of dyslexia. Although it is not possible to account for all current theories of dyslexia within this thesis, three main causal theories have been covered in Chapter Three. This chapter will focus on the social theory of dyslexia.

The application of George Herbert Mead’s theory of symbolic interactionism is central to this research, as is an understanding of theories of the self, such as identity theory, self-concept and self-esteem. Mead’s interactionist theory seeks to understand the individual within the social environment (Mead 1934, Ziehl 1994, Mendelsohn 1994, Neuman 2000). Puddephatt (2009) discusses Blumer’s (1969) notion of symbolic interactionism based on conscious construction of meaning. Most importantly Mead’s idea of social interaction will be discussed, with its focus on the way the individual creates meaning for him/herself based on the level of interaction with other members of society.

Dyslexic individuals create meaning for themselves based on day to day interactions with peers at school and within their social environments. Individuals will interpret or define others’ behaviour through social interaction (Ziehl 1994). According to Burden (2005:16), socio-cultural theory/social constructionism views knowledge as being constructed within the social contexts and environments in which one is situated, thus offering opportunity for change. Morris Rosenberg’s (1965) understanding of the self as a social product, as well as a social force, will add to the symbolic interactionist theoretical understanding and together they will provide a theoretical basis for this research. This thesis is most concerned with the social consequences of dyslexia and how it affects self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

Burden (2005:15) cites George Kelly as saying, “if you want to find out what somebody thinks or feels about something, why not ask them?” This is the intention of this thesis, to ask dyslexic individuals how they feel about their dyslexic identity.

4.2 Symbolic Interactionism

In order to understand the centrality of symbolic interactionism as a perspective and a framework, several concepts need to be explained and understood. These concepts are: the actor; the object; meaning; the act; joint action and reflection. George Herbert Mead, as cited by Herbert Blumer (1969:2), believes that symbolic interactionism rests on three premises; firstly, that humans act towards things based on meanings, secondly, that meaning arises out of social interaction with other humans and thirdly, that meanings are able to change through an interpretative process. In order to grasp the significance of these three premises the different concepts of symbolic interactionism need to be discussed. This discussion will demonstrate how symbolic interactionism can be used as a social model for explaining the self-concept of dyslexic individuals in relation to their environments.

4.2.1 The Actor

The actor is the human being who possesses a “self.” Blumer (1969) discusses the human as an ‘acting organism’ in addition to the nature of human action. To be an actor, humans need to possess a “self”, one that responds to another being on a symbolic level as well as on a non-symbolic level (Blumer, 1969:12). Social action therefore consists of two forms of action, symbolic and non-symbolic. Blumer (1969:65) highlights Mead’s analysis of the symbolic, referring to humans interpreting each other’s gestures and acting on the basis of meaning gained from this interpretation. On a non-symbolic level, humans respond directly to one another’s gestures. Social action would therefore involve the individual interpreting symbols and gestures and making a decision to act based on this interpretation. This action involves interpreting others actions as well as being able to indicate to others, through action, what his/her intentions are. In this way humans can be objects of their own action. As an object to himself, a human can act towards himself and others in the way that s/he perceives her/himself. According to Blumer (1969:12) the self can also become an object to her/himself, where the person can view her/himself “from the outside” that is, the person needs to see her/himself from the position of others in order to become a “self-object.”

Objects of self are formed through understanding and taking on a role; this role enables individuals to identify with and define themselves by becoming an acting organism. Blumer (1969:10) defines these roles as the following; mother, father, student, priest etc. Humans do not only interact with others as a 'self', they also interact with themselves as a 'self'. What this infers is that humans are able to address the 'self', (their own self) as if it were another person, through communication. This, according to Blumer, occurs in everyday interactions (Blumer, 1969:11). For example when a person is angry with her/himself, or talks to her/himself as a process of working things through, the self is treated as another; "that was so stupid of me, what was I thinking?" The nature of human action is both individual and collective. Humans interpret their world and then construct a response to it in the form of action. Blumer (1969:16) considers that while humans may do a terrible job at constructing action, it is imperative that they do so. He further considers that the activity of human beings must be viewed as "meeting a flow of situations in which they have to act, and that their action is built on the basis of what they note, how they assess and interpret what they note, and what kind of projected lines of action they map out" (Blumer, 1969:16). This involves a conscious thought through process, which occurs through interaction with the self and interaction with others, within the social world.

4.2.2 Objects

Humanity's worlds consist of things that can be referred to as objects. Blumer (1969:68) notes that humans' environments and worlds in which they live consist of objects around which actions are built. Blumer (1969:68) notes that objects, for Mead, are human constructs, not self-existing entities. Objects can be designated and referred to (ibid, 1969:68). Objects can be classified into three different groups:- "(a) physical objects such as chairs, trees or bicycles; (b) social objects, such as students, priests, a president, a mother, or a friend; and (c) abstract objects, such as moral principles, philosophical doctrines, or ideas such as justice, exploitation, or compassion" (Ibid, 1969:68).

Blumer (1969:68) highlights the following with regard to objects:-

- Notion of the object is constituted by the meaning attributed to it by a human.
- Meaning is not intrinsic to the object but comes from humans' interaction with it.

- All objects are social products formed and transferred through social interaction and definition.
- People act toward objects based on meaning.
- An object doesn't have to initiate a stimulated response, rather it can be a thought through response and therefore planned action is possible.

Blumer sees objects as things that are identifiable and which can signify the meaning that is attributed to it through human interaction (Ibid, 1969:10). Individuals bring meaning to objects, which is why objects can mean different things to different people. Blumer (1969:11) believes that the meaning of objects for a person “arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him (sic) by others with whom he (sic) interacts.” Therefore, if humans’ worlds are made up of objects that have meaning, and cause them to act based on this meaning, then it is reasonable to assume that understanding the behaviour or action of people necessitates an understanding of and ability to identify their world of objects (Ibid, 1969:11).

Objects are also socially created through common meaning. Objects are defined and interpreted and understood through and within social interaction. Meaning is therefore socially created and it has to be learned through a process of social interaction. Blumer (1969:69) further notes that humans are “seen as living in a world of meaningful objects – not in an environment of stimuli or self-contained entities.” This highlights the fact that the actions of humans towards objects are not knee-jerk responses, rather they are thought through processes. Blumer (1969:12) sums up interaction with objects in the following way: “(i)n short, from the standpoint of symbolic interactionism, human group life is a process in which objects are being created, affirmed, transferred and cast aside.” The world of objects therefore is socially produced, because meanings are devised through a process of social interaction. Blumer believes that it is important to identify objects in terms of the meaning that they have for members of a group, before the group can be understood. Furthermore, he advises that conduct towards the objects is open to change, as he states that “(t)he life and action of people necessarily change in line with the changes taking place in their world of objects” (Blumer, 1969:12).

4.2.3 Meaning

For symbolic interactionists, meaning is taken for granted, however meaning is central to human behaviour/action (Blumer, 1969:2). Consequently, Blumer (1969:2) believes that

sociologists, who attempt to attribute human behaviour to social position, status, class, race, gender or group affiliation, are simply reducing behaviour to the facts that produce them, rather than attempting to understand the meaning behind the action. Symbolic interactionism views meaning as having a different source, not from the objects makeup and not from psychological elements in a person, but rather from the meaning a person gives to the object/thing (Blumer, 1969:4). Symbolic interactionists therefore value the source of meaning, and this sets them apart from other explanations of human behaviour.

Herbert Blumer (1969:3) believes that there are two ways to account for the origin in meaning. Firstly, to regard meaning as “intrinsic to the thing that has it”: this is a realist approach in that it views meaning, not as a process, but as an entity which owes its existence to the object. Secondly, meaning is perceived through “sensations, feelings, ideas, memories, motives and attitudes,” therefore meaning is produced (Ibid, 1969:3). If meaning is produced, it can be viewed as a ‘social product’ because it is produced socially through interaction with others. Furthermore, symbolic interactionists view meaning as a “process of interpretation” (Blumer, 1969:5). The process of interpretation requires the individual to “engage in a conversation with (her/) himself,” as well as to interpret meaning in respect of environments or situations in which s/he finds her/himself. This means that meanings are negotiated through self-interaction and through a process of interpretation.

4.2.4 The Act

Human action is formed through a “process of self-interaction.” Blumer (1969:64). The act is a thought through process that is self-directed. This does not necessarily mean that it is a noble or a beneficial act. According to Blumer (1969:64) in order for an individual to act s/he must do the following: “identify what (s/)he wants, establish an objective or goal, map out a prospective line of behaviour, note and interpret the actions of others, size up the situation, check (her/)himself at this point, figure out what to do at other points, and frequently spur (her/)himself on in the face of dragging dispositions or discouraging settings.” This understanding reveals that symbolic interaction views human action as a thought through process with many different aspects influencing the decision to act. For Blumer, (1969:65) the human is seen as “an active organism in (her/)his own right, not as a mere respondent to circumstances.” This, Blumer believes, challenges the traditional view of human action.

4.2.5 Joint Action/Social Action

Mead viewed joint action as a social act whereas Blumer (1969:70) prefers to use the term 'joint action' because it encompasses "a larger collective form of action." Joint action can be a transaction between two people or it can represent a huge organization or institution. Any transaction that brings people together toward a common goal, for example trade transactions, family life, games, sport and war, can be termed a joint action. Individuals have different roles within joint action so behaviour/conduct is not the same even though there is a common goal. According to Blumer (1969:71) "the essence of society lies in an on-going process of action – not in a posited structure of relations." No action renders structured relations between people meaningless. Action must be seen in terms of joint action, not as individual actions of participants. Each joint action has a history which is ordered, fixed and repetitive. The reason for this is because the joint action or activity is defined and identified by the participants.

Furthermore, joint action is open to change. Blumer (1969:72) notes that "self, act, social interaction, objects and joint action paint a picture of human society based on action." Blumer believes that Mead saw human society in the following way: "as a diversified social process in which people engaged in forming joint actions to deal with situations confronting them" (Ibid, 1969:72). This highlights the view of symbolic interactionists, that social action is a process of self-interaction, in which the self is fully engaged and actively participates, as well as joint action, and is not merely a response to the environment. Most importantly, Blumer (1969:73) proposes that from a research perspective, the study of social action needs to be taken into account from the position of the actor because action is:

"forged by the actor out of what he perceives, interprets, and judges; one would have to see the operating situation as the actor sees it, perceive objects as the actor perceives them, ascertain their meaning in terms of the meaning they have for the actor, and follow the actor's line of conduct as the actor organizes it – in short, one would have to take the role of the actor and see his world from his standpoint."

This is important to note when addressing how the dyslexic individual feels in a society that demands literate efficiency. The dyslexic individual is the actor, and from Blumer's perspective it is important to understand how the dyslexic's behaviour is influenced by the meaning s/he gives to her/his dyslexic condition. In a sense, to truly understand the dyslexic individual, it is necessary to take on the role of a dyslexic individual and try to see the world

from her/his point of view. This, Blumer notes, contrasts with the so-called 'objective' approach of being the detached, outside observer in the research process.

Blumer (1969:74) further notes that Mead challenged the concept of society as an established structure. Mead acknowledged that there are established structures within society, however these structures, in his view, do not determine human action. Mead believed that social action originated from human actions and not from the social structures themselves. Humans construct action, and group life is seen as a process of building joint actions. Society can be seen to consist of many interlinked social actions. The structure of education therefore demands literacy. This is interpreted by society and defined by modern society as important in order to succeed in life. The social structure of education, and therefore schooling, when applying Mead's perspective, does not determine the actor's/scholar's action. The scholar constructs action. Scholars, who are able to learn within the parameters that school sets out, participate with the act of learning. Dyslexic scholars would need to understand and interpret and redefine their experiences of struggle in this area of learning, and reflect on the requests of a societal system. This thesis attempts to understand the dyslexic perspective. Mead, as cited in Blumer (1969:79), also challenges the idea that common values hold a society together. In Mead's view, many different acts form joint action. This implies that society is held together for different reasons, not merely common values. These reasons could even be issues such as stress, duress and necessity. Blumer (1969:76) believes that the Meadian perspective on social action is a more realistic approach to human action.

4.2.6 The Self as a Process

The self is more than just an entity existing on its own. It can also be seen to be a way of being, fashioned by social interaction. Gregory Elliot (2001:18) discusses Mead's symbolic interactionist paradigm, whereby humans are viewed as being creators of meaning rather than just perceivers of meaning. Humans create meaning through the use of symbols. These symbols are constructed by individuals within a group and are applied to everyday life. They need to be socially negotiated in order to be meaningful. This suggests that meaning is subject to change. Mead sees the self as a process, a way of being rather than as just an entity. The process is symbolic interactionism. Symbols that have meaning for individuals and groups, and are constructed by those groups, can be socially negotiated. Elliot (2001:18, 19) expands on the idea of symbolic interactionism by highlighting Mead's idea of the conversation that takes place between the "I" and the "me". This conversation offers an interesting perspective on social actors and social negotiation. The "I" represents pure action.

It is impulsive and provides the energy to act freely. In contrast the “me” represents the multiple social roles to which behaviour has been attributed. The “me” informs the person of the meaning “others” would attach to the said behaviour.

Once an individual is stimulated and becomes aware of the need to act, various options present themselves to the “I”. This, in essence, provides the impulse to act. For Elliot (2001:19) the “me” monitors the behavioural options individuals have based on societal expectations. The internal goals of the individual need to be in line with societal expectations, this provides the direction to act. The decision to act is therefore an interactive one, based on social interaction and expectations as well as the internal dialogue of the individual. The reason that behaviour can be seen as a process is because it has the ability to change, based on the circumstances and environment. Peter Callero (2003:121) believes that the distinction between the “I” and the “me” provides the “core principle of a socially constructed self, namely the self as a joint accomplishment, neither completely determined by the social world nor pre-given at birth.” Callero believes that a broad understanding of the context is essential to understand self-meanings, self-images and self-concepts. Randall Collins (2011:161) cites a third part to Mead’s conception of the “I” and the “me” – that of the “generalized other.” For Collins (2011:161) the “I” is representative of the “self as action”, the “me” represents the “self-image”, and the “generalized other” relates to the “internalized social viewpoint or audience.” All of these ideas form part of this synthesis for determining social action. He feels that the terminology is entirely metaphorical, that ideas are mere symbols used to represent the different parts of the self and society and the way it is seen as a structured process. Most importantly, the self is seen as a process and can be seen as reflexive.

4.2.7 The Self as Reflexive

Meadian tradition views the self as reflexive. As Callero (2003:119) notes: “(f)or symbolic interactionists, the self is first and foremost a reflexive process of social interaction.” What this process implies is that humans have the unique ability to “become an object to one’s self”, that is, “to be both the subject and the object” (Callero, 2003:119). Blumer (1969:63) believes that a reflexive process involves “noting things and determining their significance for his line of action.” Reflexivity is learned through social experience. What this suggests is that humans learn, through experience in the social world, that they do have agency. They have the ability to be the object that is acted upon, but they may also choose to act. It is not an automatic response, but a thought through process of determination. Self-interaction and

interaction with the social world changes human behaviour from responsive to reflexive, and compels humans to construct action (Blumer, 1969:63).

Callero (2003:115) acknowledges a new trend in the sociological approach to the self, which places emphases on “power, reflexivity and social constructionism.” For Callero, contemporary theories of self should apply Foucault’s emphasis on the power relations which shape the self, as well as Mead’s position on agency. Furthermore, theory should acknowledge and apply the notion of contexts and resources which contribute to the social construction of self. Callero (2003:117) refers to Foucault’s view of the self as being shaped by specific historical discourse which is underpinned by power relations that “impose disciplinary practices on the body.” According to Foucault, as cited in Callero (2003:117), modern practices such as the use of surveillance technologies ‘dominate’ individuals and create self-regulating subjects. Elliot (2001) critiques Foucauldian tradition, which assumes that actors are mere subjects of discourse. He feels this assumption fails to recognize that modernity also brings possibility for individual choice. Unfortunately the scope of this thesis cannot embrace a discussion on Foucault’s ideas fully. Issues of the self are complex and can be seen as both a process and as reflexive.

4.3. Identity Theory

Stryker (2007:1083) believes that identity theory originates within a “structural symbolic interactionist” framework. A framework consists of theoretical concepts which explain a particular viewpoint. It supports the analysis of how meaning is attributed to dyslexia for a dyslexic individual in a literate world. The reason for this is that Stryker links social interaction to roles, which he attributes to influencing identities. A role is defined by Stryker (2007:1083) as “a set of behavioral expectations attached to a position in an organized set of social relationships”, whereas identity, which is also linked to roles, is a “self-concept that is defined as internalized role expectations attached to positions in organized sets of social relationships” (Stryker, 2007:1084). Social structure, both societal and institutional, can assist or repress an individual’s potential to enter into a particular role. This, according to Stryker, affects social interaction and identity. Examples of roles that produce identities are ‘student’, ‘scholar’, ‘wife/husband’, ‘mother/father’ or ‘brother/sister’. These roles exert certain expectations on individuals which they adhere to because of social requirements and internal acceptance of this identity. Multiple roles can be expected from individuals within a social setting and these are often hierarchically organized. For Stryker (2007:1092), the self “is in part a structure of identities” and these identities “vary in their salience and centrality.” Social

structure is paramount to the experiences individuals have in social life, because they frame particular experiences.

Stryker (2007:1084) defines social structure in this instance as the groups of people who are defined by similar interactions which are characteristic of the group to which they belong. The term identity is used in many disciplines, and accordingly needs to be understood within the context in which it is used. Identity, as discussed by Stryker (2007), refers to the role of an individual within society, which has been both internally and externally fashioned through associated expectations. For Stryker (2007:1088) the symbolic interactionist framework “assumes that human beings are actors and not simply reactors.” In other words, they have a form of choice within the social constraints in which they find themselves. Therefore, social action and interaction are defined by situations that are based on shared meanings. Stryker feels that traditional interactionists such as Mead understood that the self is a reflection of society. The basic constituents of symbolic interactionism for Stryker are based on the premise that a) society shapes the self and b) that the self shapes society. Stryker furthermore believes that a view of the self that reflects contemporary society should be expanded upon due to the many parts that contribute to the modern self. He states that a modern self must be seen as “multifaceted, composed of diverse parts that sometimes are independent of one another and sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes conflicting, as well as being organized in many ways” (Stryker, 2007:1091). Hence the self is not experienced in isolation but is a multifaceted construct that exists in multiple dimensions, which are not constant but changing within the environment and according to choice.

4.4 A combined approach

Elliot believes that Rosenberg’s ideas add value to the discussion of the self because he combines a social psychological and a symbolic interactionist approach to his study of the self. Elliot (2001:11, 15) cites Rosenberg’s idea of the self as being both an “entity” and a “process”. The self as an entity refers to the essence of the individual self, the basic natural traits that being human requires. The notion of humans being born with a clean slate implies that becoming human is created or produced. Socialization is the process in which becoming human is made possible, because humans do not exist within a void. Through social interaction humans learn what is expected of them and the way they should behave. Social structure (both micro and macro) provides the opportunity for humans to be trained to abide by the rules and enter into intended and expected social roles.

Elliot (2001:11) acknowledges that in 1965 Rosenberg's ideas were unique because he focused not only on the self in relation to social structures but also the "intra and inter personal" issues of the self. The self does not develop in a vacuum; rather it is influenced by social structures, one of the main influences being the family. As Elliot (2001) describes, it is within the family that a child learns a particular way of life, set of beliefs and ideologies, and with this knowledge learns to judge self and others. Individuals internalize ideas about self that are communicated by significant others and then, through social comparison, formulate new ideas about self. However, human nature is unpredictable and therefore opinions about the self can change. Significant others refer to family members but also to members of society that an individual feels they can trust. Although the opinions of significant others are important to the concept of self, individuals choose to accept or reject these influences. This indicates that individuals are selective in the information that influences their concept of self. For Rosenberg, (in Elliot 2001), self-worth is essentially influenced by the feeling that one is important to a significant other.

Rosenberg (in Elliot 2001) further explores self-objectification, wherein the self becomes the object. He discusses the reflexive nature of the self, stating that self-objectification can be considered as any processes that view the self as an object. When humans apply self-objectification they are adapting their independent ways in order to survive in society. This means that humans judge their own actions and behaviour according to what society expects, and adapt accordingly in order to survive. The self-objectification process enables individuals to monitor their own behavior or actions constantly as they practice self-surveillance. This idea relates to the entity part of Rosenberg's argument. Furthermore, the idea of surveillance ties in with the Foucauldian notion of power as discussed by Callero (2003) in the section on the self as reflexive above.

The discussion of the self as reflexive, the self as a process and the self as an entity and a process together, highlight the idea that human action is socially influenced rather than being innately intuitive or instinctive. We can see that a child's sense of self is influenced by and within the particular social context in which s/he finds him/herself. These influences are based on the perceptions which are formed through interaction with the social environment, as well as through interaction with others, particularly interaction with significant others. In addition, these perceptions are always open to change. The meaning that is created for the individual with dyslexia is based on perceptions of others. This means that the expectations of a literate society, which upholds reading, writing and spelling as an important social

practice, will affect dyslexic individuals because they are unable to adequately perform in this area of society. This holds a strong possibility of being associated with a negative concept of self, and could affect self-concept and self-esteem in dyslexics.

4.5 Theory of Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

Theory and research which has been developed around the issues of the self, specifically self-concept and self-esteem, indicate that these terms are used interchangeably to imply the same idea. This makes it difficult to replicate or even generalize studies. Additionally, issues pertaining to self-concept are multidimensional (Avramidis 2012, Burden 2008, Glazzard 2010 and Riddick et al, 1999). Burden feels that it would be more valuable to study a specific type of self-concept rather than trying to cover all of the different types of self. Avramidis (2012:422) describes the different dimensions of self as being on a global or general scale. Distinct dimensions of self-concept would be ‘academic’ self-concept or ‘social’ self-concept. Self-concept can be viewed as one’s mental image of self with its various strengths and weaknesses conceptualized in a particular way, depending on the environment in which one finds oneself. Academic self-concept is understood within the academic or education environment, social self-concept within a social environment (Avramidis, 2012:422). Burden (2008:189) defines self-concept as the “thoughts and feelings that people have about themselves in general but more specifically with regards to the task or activity under consideration.” Burden (2005) notes that a study in a specific area of self-concept, such as the academic self-concept of dyslexic children, compared to their non-dyslexic peers, would be more beneficial than a study on a non-specific, general concept of self. Burden (2008:190) assumes that it is a given that children with significant learning difficulties, not only in the dyslexic field, will most likely have a lower academic self-concept than those who do not. Burden (2008) further notes that this self-concept can change, for example, as the child/individual learns coping mechanisms and applies them, their self-concept (mental image of themselves) can improve.

Polychroni, Koukoura and Anagnostou (2006:417) regard self-esteem as a mediator between ability and achievement. This would indicate that the impression individuals have of themselves, i.e. their self-esteem, is created by a view they hold of themselves in relation to their abilities. Burden (2005:33) holds this as being based on perceptions of self, which are created based on feelings: “feelings about being understood by others”, “feelings about being confident about their future learning outcomes” and “feelings of helplessness or depression.” Glazzard (2010:64) concurs, noting that the struggle with reading, writing and spelling affects

self-esteem. The dyslexic child creates perceptions of self in relation to the experiences and environments in which s/he develops. If ability and achievement do not correlate, then low self-esteem will develop. Taylor et al (2010) believe that low self-esteem linked to feelings of inadequacy and frustration can lead to other developmental disorders such as behavioural disorders, depression and bullying. Low self-esteem is not only an individual problem but can also become a social problem. Riddick et al (1999) conducted a study that proved that dyslexic students experienced lower self-esteem and higher anxiety levels than the control group, and Hughes and Dawson (cited by Burden, 2008:188) obtained similar results in their study with adult dyslexics. Furthermore, Burden believes that self-esteem is influenced by self-image. Burden (2005:6) defines self-image as “the set of beliefs that we hold about various aspects of ourselves, how we look, how we get on with others.” These beliefs are fashioned in a social setting based on expectations and individual internal dialogues. The stronger these beliefs, the more impact they have on self-esteem.

Burden (2005:5) cites Robert Burn’s definition that self-concept is “best regarded as a dynamic complex of attitudes held toward themselves by each person.” This indicates that the feelings a person has about him/herself, and the importance s/he attaches to a particular task, will affect self-esteem if the task is important to the individual. For example, if a child perceives her/himself as a poor reader, but s/he is not particularly concerned about being a good reader, it will not affect her/his self-esteem. However, if s/he considers it important to be a good reader then her/his perception will affect her/his self-esteem negatively. In this view the meaning that the individual gives to the task is the cause of negative feelings of self-worth, as it affects the self-concept and self-esteem of the poor reader. Polychroni et al (2006:418) confirm that children with dyslexia recognized themselves as less competent in academic areas when comparing themselves to their peers, and this affects their academic self-concept negatively. However, these children exhibited confidence in visuo-spatial areas such as arts and crafts which has a positive influence on self-concept. Furthermore, the study by Polychroni et al showed that dyslexic children did not value reading as enjoyable or a necessary contribution to success at school. This was not surprising as reading attitudes are related to the perceptions of ability. It is reasonable to assume therefore that these children would have more negative perceptions of academic ability related to reading. Although the issues of self-esteem and self-concept are complex, this thesis will attempt to understand the academic and social self-esteem of dyslexic individuals and how the environment in which they have been socialized influences this process.

4.6 Conclusion

Although a vast number of theories on developmental dyslexia exist, most focus on the causation and remediation of dyslexia. Very little research on the self-concept of dyslexic children exists. This chapter has shown the centrality of symbolic interactionism as a perspective which allows for an understanding of the meaning that dyslexic individuals give to their dyslexic condition. The concepts of the actor, the object, meaning, the act, joint action and reflection have been examined, to highlight the underlying approach and applicability of symbolic interactionism as a theory. The self as a process, and the self as reflective, have also been explained to expand on Mead's idea of humans being able to see themselves as the 'other', and reflect on their experiences before choosing to act. This demonstrates the opportunity dyslexic individuals have to work through their difficulties, given the correct intervention and support. Theories of self-concept and self-esteem reveal how dyslexic individuals create meaning based on the feelings they have about themselves. If these feelings are positive, the likelihood of a less frustrating experience within the learning environment is possible. However, if the experience is negative, with no support, a negative outcome can be expected. Mead and Blumer provide an understanding of the self as a process and the self as reflexive. Rosenberg's contribution offers a combined approach, because he views the self as individual as well as a process of becoming a self that is moulded within society. Theories of self-concept and self-esteem have been used synonymously in available literature, however, it is important to keep in mind the context in which these issues of the self are explained when attempting to explain a dyslexic identity.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

It is important to understand the issues of race⁶ and class⁷ that continue to influence education in South Africa. This has been a legacy that has been historically recognized as having a continual influence on the social experience of South Africans and this chapter provides an outline of the way race and class have influenced education in South Africa. Although not the focus of this research, the relevance of the difficulty experienced by dyslexics within the school system is important to note. The reason for this is because economic access provides access to resources that can provide support. Without this access the difficulty can be exacerbated. The choice of qualitative method as well as the interpretivist paradigm and its relevance to the research will be discussed, as will data collection methods. The interview process informs the reader of the choice of participants, population sampling and interview questions and how and why Dr Robert Burden's (2005) interview methods have been applied to this research.

5.2 Race and Class and inclusive education in South Africa

In order for the methodology of this research to be clearly understood, a brief historical background of education in South Africa must be established. This short summary will provide a context in which to understand the background of Grahamstown education within the wider South African education milieu. Stacey Keizan and Norman Duncan (2010:465) determine that for many years South Africa's laws, policies and economic structures regulated social interaction along racial lines. Despite the formal abolition of apartheid in 1994, issues of race remain at the forefront of education in South Africa. According to Foster

⁶ Anthony Giddens (2006:485) believes that race is a complex concept. The reason for this is that scientists believe that humans cannot be easily separated into biologically different categories. "Racial differences, therefore, should be understood as physical variations singled out by the members of a community or society as socially significant" (Giddens, 2006:486). "Race can be understood as a set of social relationships which allow individuals and groups to be located, and various attributes or competencies assigned, on the basis of biologically grounded features. Racial distinctions are more than ways of describing human differences – they are also important factors in the reproduction of patterns of power and inequality within society" (Giddens, 2006:486).

⁷ Anthony Giddens (2006:300) provides the following definition to explain class "as a large-scale grouping of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the type of life-style they are able to lead. Ownership of wealth, together with occupation, are the chief bases of class differences".

(2005) (cited in Keizan and Duncan: 2010:465), “race and racism continues to determine the usage, occupation, and ownership of residential, recreational and educational spaces in South Africa.” This historical determination of space impacts the social and educational experiences of children at school. Stephen MacDonald (2009:349) concurs as he states that:

“(u)sing the Social model approach implies that there is deliberate shift of attention from ‘functional limitations’ to ‘problems caused by a disabling environment’. Furthermore, there has been a move to acknowledge the impact of a number of other social variables within this disabling environment. A sum of research has indicated that social variables such as social class, gender and ethnicity affect the production of disabling barriers” (Hernandes, 2005; Morris, 1996; Pffeiffer, 1991; Thomas, 2002; Vernon,1999).

MacDonald further notes that the literature cited indicates that social-class has the most significant effect on disabling barriers when it comes to learning.

It is important to understand the history that ultimately influences the experiences of individuals at school in post-apartheid South Africa, and more specifically those of dyslexic individuals because, according to Mead’s symbolic interactionist perspective, it is within these spaces that meaning is created (Blumer, 1969:2). This meaning arises out of social interaction with others and it is important to determine who the ‘others’ are that influence this interpretative process. According to Carolissen, van Wyk and Pick-Cornelius (2012:39), popular discourse in post-1994 South Africa suggests that children are ‘born free’ and experience few impacts of the legislated inequity of apartheid South Africa. This suggestion, however, is contested by Keizan & Duncan (2010) who cite Dixon & Durreim (2003:20) as stating that it is “unrealistic to expect South Africa’s past not to continue to exert its influence on the present.” The apartheid South African regime was committed to socializing South Africans within their so called designated racial groups. This socialization particularly occurred within school institutions and affected school sports and all forms of social interaction (Keizan & Duncan: 2010:465). The space in which education is provided for affects the individual experience of education.

Jabulani Ngcobo and Nithi Muthukrishna (2011:357) believe that human geography is an important consideration when explaining children’s educational experiences. Within the context of human geography, “the notion of ‘geographies’ refers to a focus on detailed and

explicit attentiveness to everyday spatiality's in the lives of individuals and in social institutions" (Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011:358). This indicates that children's lived experiences are influenced by their everyday lived experiences within particular spaces such as home life, school life and social interactions. Consequently, lived experiences of children in South Africa are influenced by their socio-economic position. Considering South Africa's apartheid history of segregation, it is reasonable to assume that education that was once organized along racial lines was also organized along economic lines. The black majority were excluded from the so called white elitist education.⁸ Reasonably, children's experiences of education are based on racial and economic circumstances, which occupy a particular geographical space that is still segregated within South Africa today. This is important as these interactions within particular geographical spaces influence the behaviours of the actors and their objects, as has been discussed in Chapter Four. This social interaction also affects joint action, which is a larger form of collective action (Blumer, 1969:70). Geographical space therefore influences experiences.

Space is also central to the inclusion aspect of current South African education (Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011:359). Inclusion became a key process in reforming education in the 1990s. South Africa adopted an inclusive education policy which Ngcobo & Muthukrishna (2011:257) state is "framed within a human rights discourse." Inclusive education also seeks to provide "quality education for all children and youth regardless of differences in respect of race, class, culture, language, gender, ethnicity, ability/disability" (Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011:357). The policy of inclusive education in South Africa, according to Ngcobo & Muthukrishna (2011:358) "foregrounds key values of equality, social justice, human rights and a respect for diversity". Furthermore, they state that Education White Paper 6 "provides a framework for systematic change where the goal of the education system is to respond to the full range of barriers to learning and participation experienced by learners, including those that may arise from HIV/AIDS, language, disability, race, class, gender and socio economic status differences" (Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011:358). Although a policy of inclusion appears to be commendable, the question remains – is it feasible in a post-apartheid South Africa? Carolissen, van Wyk and Pick-Cornelius (2012:40) note that: "the dominant discourse about race in post-1994 South Africa foregrounds unifying concepts such as the

⁸ Not all white education was equal and elitist. Working class white education was better than most black (bantus) education but not truly elitist. Some black pupils received elitist education through private schooling.

rainbow nation, suggesting widespread debate about inclusion and accommodation of difference.” The idealistic notion of inclusive education may once again reflect the gap that exists between policy and practice.

Pretorius and Lemmer (1998:14) highlight the fact that the South African Constitution makes provision for education for all citizens in “Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act no 108, 1996” stating that “everyone has the right to 1) basic education, including adult basic education; and 2) to further education, which the State, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.” The Constitution further states that basic education must be “appropriate to the age and experience of the learner.” This implies flexibility, progressive development and target-specific education (Ibid, 1998:14). Furthermore, “the Constitution also provides for the right of individuals to establish and maintain, at their own expense, independent educational institutions, providing such institutions do not discriminate on the basis of race; are registered with the State; and maintain standards comparable to public educational institutions” (Pretorius & Lemmer, 1998:14). Independent educational institutions have a separate assessment board known as the Independent Examinations Board (IEB), which is accredited by Umalusi, a South African statutory body (IEB website, 2013). The IEB is a recognized player in the South African education landscape. It is committed to all aspects of learning and to providing an “alternate voice on curriculum and assessment matters” (IEB website, 2013). The IEB sees itself as a partner in South Africa’s education system.

Grahamstown has five schools that are viewed as elite or upper to middle class schools. The private or independent schools, which are funded by extremely high school fees, are equipped with many resources as well as a remedial teacher and educational psychologist. These schools are: Kingswood College, which is an independent co-educational school and has a junior and senior division; St Andrew’s College, an independent boys school (junior and senior) and Diocesan School for girls (junior and senior) an independent girl’s school. For the purpose of this research and to ensure anonymity DSG and St Andrews will be discussed as one school that is co-educational. These independent schools are economically well out of reach of most South Africans. There are fewer local school children who attend these schools and many of their learners come from other provinces within South Africa, or other countries.

School children at the independent schools in Grahamstown are divided along class lines due to their socio-economic position rather than along racial lines.

Former model C schools, which are now referred to as state schools, are funded by the government as well as by school fees paid by parents, and are managed by a governing body. Graeme College is a former model C (now state school) for boys (junior and senior) and Victoria Primary for Girls and Victoria Girls High School are both state schools. For the purpose of this research these two schools will be regarded as a joint school including boys and girls to ensure anonymity of schools and participants. PJ Olivier is a co-educational Afrikaans junior and senior school. These schools cater to the majority of children coming from middle class families. The integration of black children into former white-dominated schools has successfully occurred over the last nineteen years within Grahamstown state schools.

However, there are many previously disadvantaged schools that remain black only. These schools may have teachers who are white but they only have school children who are black. This proves the point of Dixon & Durreim (cited in Keizan & Duncan, 2010:465) that the past most certainly influences the present. Previously disadvantaged schools are completely government-funded; these schools do not charge school fees and are heavily overcrowded and under-resourced. For this reason middle class black parents do not want to send their children to these schools, rather wanting to send them to the state schools that were formally Model C Schools. As a result the poor⁹ who attend the previously disadvantaged township schools are mostly poorly educated. These individuals come from poverty stricken spaces or geographical areas of Grahamstown.

As a result of a discussion with Mr Mhani from the Department of Education on the 30th September 2013, the following information was gleaned about individuals from the previously disadvantaged areas. These children come from environments that do not provide for their basic human rights (Mhani, correspondence, 2013). Mhani contends: “How can a child learn if his stomach is not full and he has no clothes to wear and no roof over his head

⁹ The notion of ‘the poor’ reflects the economic status of individuals living below the breadline.

at night?” There are approximately twenty previously disadvantaged schools¹⁰ in Grahamstown (Correspondence ECDoE, Mhani, 2013). This is an approximate figure; while some of the schools are township schools, some are farm schools that are not even listed at the Eastern Cape Department of Education (DoE). It is possible that black children from the township schools are severely disadvantaged because none of the White Paper 6 Key values are provided for (Ngcobo & Muhukrishna, 2011:358). Through discussion with Mr Mhani (2013), it becomes apparent that these children from township schools are clearly experiencing barriers to learning, particularly due to the impact of HIV/AIDS which has resulted in many of these children being raised by their siblings or grandparents. Furthermore, barriers to learning in the form of language definitely apply in many cases, where Xhosa is the mother tongue and many of them cannot speak English, let alone learn in English. In addition, race, class, gender and disability are experienced by these children as barriers to learning. Economic status is the greatest barrier because if these children were able to afford basic needs such as food, shelter and warmth, then they would be in a position to be exposed to a better learning environment. In conversation with Mr Mhani (2013), he believes that the township teachers are doing their best, however he notes that even they are struggling with teaching the prescribed content as this has changed from when they were previously educated under the Bantu Education Apartheid regime. The disparities apparent between different categories of schools highlights just how much education in Grahamstown shapes the social worlds of the individuals being educated in the city. Most importantly, and the focus of this research, is the interpretation and meaning dyslexic individuals experience in mainstream education in Grahamstown.

5.3 Aims of research

The main aim of this research is to explore the dyslexic child’s perceptions of self and the experiences that shape her/him within a social and mainstream academic environment. Using in-depth interviews the life worlds of the participants and their particular contexts have been investigated. Secondary goals such as interviews with parents and discussions with remedial and educational psychologists were utilized to understand the contribution of significant others to these perceptions.

¹⁰ Schools that are considered to be previously disadvantaged due to the Apartheid regime are still disadvantaged schools under the new democracy. These schools are under resourced and overcrowded, non-fee paying schools that continue the legacy of being disadvantaged.

5.4 Type of research

5.4.1 Qualitative methods

Babbie and Mouton (2001:270 – 272) believe that qualitative research represents an idiographic understanding of social action, because it looks at individual case studies. Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting in order to understand the social actors within the environment in which they are situated. Furthermore qualitative research embraces the interactionist perspective of interpreting social action within the specific context in which the action is studied. This by implication means that data from one research context cannot be generalized to other research contexts. The goal therefore, is context specific i.e. within Grahamstown schools; the social actors are the dyslexic individuals, their peers, parents and significant others. The objective is to focus on the process dyslexic individuals employ to create meaning in relation to the difficulties they experience within a literate-focused society. This study does not aim to generalize the findings to the greater dyslexic population; rather its focus is on understanding the social action (dyslexic experience) within the specific educational context and lived experience of the social actor being interviewed.

Alan Bryman (1988:134) believes that qualitative research methods can provide a rich source of information that can often contribute to information that can later be used in quantitative questionnaires. Further to this, qualitative research emphasises dependable and credible trustworthiness based on the information researchers obtain from their participants. By contrast, Bryman (1988:142) notes that quantitative researchers stress objectivity. I have concluded that qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews, are best suited to this research because the aim of the research is to understand how dyslexic individuals feel about being dyslexic. Due to all the participants being diagnosed with dyslexia, they represent a non-probability sample which, according to Bryman (2001:70), is a purposive sampling method.

5.4.2 Research Paradigm

This research thesis will apply the interpretivist paradigm, which incorporates an interactionist approach. Babbie & Mouton (2001:53) argue that when generating knowledge about the social world of others, it is important for the research to attempt to see the world through the eyes of its participants. The epistemic implications for this approach therefore

depend on the ability of the researchers to experience reality in the same way that their participants do. William Neuman (2000:87) believes that qualitative methods should be used when applying an interpretivist paradigm to research. According to Neuman (2000:76) an interpretivist approach is associated with the symbolic interactionist school of thought. Symbolic interactionists such as George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer argued that individuals give meaning to the world by defining it and interpreting it in certain ways (Mendelsohn, 1994:147). The world therefore is never experienced directly, but always in relation to the meanings and ideas that humans give to it. Reality is experienced through the meanings individuals give to it. Mendelsohn (1994:149) suggests that Mead defined symbols as “gestures that possess meaning.” Symbols, according to Mendelsohn (1994:149), are a representation of culturally significant objects, such as spoken and written words, that have been given meaning. Symbols can also be reflected in pictures, images or anything that is culturally significant and gives meaning to situations. Symbols are interactive in that they derive meaning through social interaction. Given that symbolic interactionists focus strongly on the experiences of individuals within their social contexts, and given contemporary society’s focus on literacy, this thesis attempts to explore the meanings dyslexic individuals give to dyslexia. These will be explored through an analysis of narrative responses to specific in-depth questions, and interpretation of emerging themes. This interpretivist, symbolic interactionist approach specifically provides an opportunity for children to voice their experiences of being different.

5.5 Data Collection

5.5.1 Choice of Participants

During the first week of May 2013, an invitation to participate in research was emailed to Principals and Academic Heads of schools in Grahamstown (Appendix 3). This invitation was specifically aimed at individuals between the ages of nine and eighteen, who had been diagnosed with dyslexia. These letters were emailed to these former model C (now State) schools: Graeme College, Oatlands Primary, Victoria Primary, Victoria High School and PJ Olivier. One response was received from these letters to the State schools. Letters addressed to the Principals, Heads of Academia and Remedial Teachers were emailed to the Independent (private) Schools: Kingswood Junior School, Kingswood Senior School, Diocesan School for Girls (both junior and senior school) and St Andrews College (both

junior and senior school). Two responses were received from these Independent schools. In addition, letters were typed out and hand delivered to the following previously disadvantaged schools (Township schools): Ntaba Maria Combined School, Nombulelo Secondary School, Ntsika Secondary School, Mary Waters Secondary School, TEM Mrwetyana School, Andrew Moyake Public School (primary), George Dickerson Primary School and Good Shepherd Primary School. I received no responses from these Township schools. These letters were sent to a selection of schools in order to be as inclusive as possible.

On the 3rd and 10th of May an advertisement was put in the local Grocott's Mail Newspaper (Appendix 2). According to correspondence with Bowles (2013) this local newspaper distributes 2900 copies per week and fifty issues annually, and is read by a mixed readership. I received four responses to these two advertisements. Two responses were adult dyslexic individuals who were interested in my research. They were, however, not suited to the research as I had undertaken to interview children from nine to eighteen years old. Two responses were suitable candidates and came from the same independent school based in Grahamstown. In sum, one dyslexic participant responded through the headmaster to the letter sent to the state schools, two responses were received from the letter that I had sent to the Independent schools and a further two responses were received through the local newspaper - these two participants happened to come from independent schools in Grahamstown. In total, five suitable responses were received.

5.5.2 The Interview Method

Structured interviews were used to try to obtain as much information as possible from my research participants. Bernard and Ryan (2010:25) believe that structured interviews involve asking each participant identical questions. Burden (2005:29) agrees that structured interview styles, such as open ended questions, assist in understanding the participant's perspective more fully, through providing an opportunity for people to respond in their own words. Bernard and Ryan (2010:35) maintain that this form of interviewing can be useful "to discover people's attitudes and beliefs," as well as how their opinions are formed. Burden (2005:34) designed a Dyslexic Identity Scale (DIS) which measures a dyslexic individual's sense of agency in relation to feelings about the difficulties they experience. Burden (2005:33) believes that the feelings that are evoked through this type of questioning enables

the researcher to highlight areas according to themes of “being understood by others, about whether they felt confident and in control of their future learning outcomes, or whether, by contrast, they felt helpless to improve and even depressed because of this.” This type of scale is pertinent to this research because it explores issues of self, agency and the meaning of dyslexia for my dyslexic participants.

The DIS (Burden, 2005:29) represents a closed, fixed-response interview. Michael Patton (2002:349) describes this type of interview as one in which “(q)uestions and response categories are determined in advance. Responses are fixed; the respondent chooses from among these fixed responses”. There are strengths and weaknesses to this type of interviewing; strengths include simple data analysis, whereas weaknesses are reported as possibly distorting the participants responses as they cannot provide their own personal view (ibid, 2002:349). Burden believes that the use of different types of interviewing adds a rich, multi-faceted approach to knowledge production. Burden’s (2005) Dyslexic Identity Scale will be discussed more fully in section 5.5.4.

Burden (2005:29) suggests a “multi-faceted approach” to research that incorporates semi-structured, open-ended and sentence completion questions. This approach allows the researcher to ask questions that seek to understand how the dyslexic individual feels about being dyslexic in different ways. It also provides opportunity to understand the social experiences of being dyslexic. Permission to use and adapt the interview approaches was obtained from Dr Burden via email correspondence on the 16th of May 2013 (see Appendix 4).

The interview I conducted with my dyslexic participants contained three parts, a semi-structured interview, a Dyslexic Identity Scale (DIS) section and open-ended sentence completion questions adapted from Burden (2005:29-39). The initial intention was to conduct these interviews on three different occasions, however, time constraints and the difficulty of setting up interview times that were frequently cancelled or postponed due to sports, exams or sickness (even death of a family member), influenced the decision to do one interview with three different parts and then a follow-up interview if necessary.

Interviews with children, remedial teachers and educational psychologists took place over a period of four months, between mid-May and mid-September 2013. The dyslexic children were interviewed first. Questions arising from those interviews were structured for the parental interviews. The interviews with the parents provided opportunity for me to ask questions that their children were unsure of the answers to, such as information surrounding the diagnosis, who diagnosed their children and when. It also provided opportunity for me to understand the background of each dyslexic individual and the circumstances particular to each child. Further to this, questions arising from interviews with children and their parents were constructed for the educational psychologists and remedial teachers associated with independent School A and B. School C have no remedial teacher or psychologist affiliated with the school.

5.5.3 Interview Setting

Interviews were conducted in the natural settings of the social actors: all interviews took place in the participants' home settings or, if they were boarders, in their school environments. The insider's view is emphasized by examining the dyslexic individual's feelings about his or her dyslexia.

5.5.4 Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview (see Appendix 5) was designed to provide demographic data such as name, age, grade, school, familial history of dyslexia as well as open-ended questions which related to academic self-concept of the dyslexic individual. Furthermore, this interview was designed to understand how the dyslexic individual feels about being dyslexic, and this was explored with questions such as 'How did you feel when you were first told you were dyslexic?' and 'Do you think your teachers and peers understand what it's like to be dyslexic?' These questions also include exploring whether the label is helpful for a dyslexic individual or not.

The DIS was designed by Burden (2005:34) to understand the dyslexic individuals' senses of agency and whether they felt others understood them or not. The intention was to identify

changes in a dyslexic individual's sense of self through a change in academic environment. The children Burden (2005) interviewed were from an independent school for dyslexic individuals in the West of England. These children were able to draw comparisons between mainstream and special education. This comparison was not possible for my study as no special school for dyslexic children exists in Grahamstown. I was interviewing children within mainstream educational environments. Appendix 6 can be referred to for DIS questions; questions 2, 9 and 23 were adapted for use in my study. Furthermore, Burden (2005:34) rated his statements according to "a five-point scale, whereby respondents are required to indicate whether the statements are definitely true (YES)[5], somewhat true (yes)[4], not very true (no)[2], and definitely not true (NO)[1] or whether they are just not sure (?)[3]." Scores are accumulated and grouped according to thematic indicators, and are discussed in relation to the other interviews. For the purpose of my study I decided to simplify the responses to just (Y) Yes 'agree', or (N) No 'disagree' or (NS) 'Not Sure'. I then rated these using the equivalent measure that Burden (2005) used i.e. (Yes – 5), (No – 1) and (Not Sure 3) and scored according to the themes Burden (2005:35,36) describes.

Adaptations to my questions are indicated; otherwise the following questions all reflect Burden's (2005:34) Dyslexic Identity Scale (DIS):

Thematic indicators

a) Self-efficacy/Locus of control items

4. If I try hard I can achieve as much as anyone else.
6. I can be good at Maths if I really want to.
8. I can be good at English if I really want to.
11. I have the ability to do well in exams if I really want to.
19. How well I do in the future is up to me.
24. I know how I can overcome my learning difficulties.

Highest possible score: 30

Lowest possible score: 6

Positive self- efficacy indicates a score of 20 or above

b) Learned helplessness items

7. My dyslexia makes it impossible for me to do really well at school

15. However hard I try, I'll never be as good at school work as someone who isn't dyslexic.

20. I will always be held back by my dyslexic difficulties.

Highest possible score: 15

Lowest possible score: 3

Learned helplessness indicated by a score of 10 or above

c) Depression Items

3. I wish I wasn't dyslexic.

5. Being dyslexic really bothers me.

9. I sometimes feel depressed about being dyslexic (adapted).

12. Dyslexia is a curse.

16. I keep wishing my dyslexia would go away.

18. A lot of time I feel depressed about being dyslexic.

Highest possible score: 30

Lowest possible score: 6

Possible depression indicated by score of 20 or above

d) Feelings of being understood

1. Most people understand how it feels to be dyslexic.

2. The teachers at my school really understand my difficulties (adapted).

10. The teachers help me with my difficulties (adapted).

17. Only another dyslexic person can really understand how it feels to be dyslexic.

21. My mother understands how I feel about being dyslexic.

22. My father understands how I feel about being dyslexic.

Highest possible score: 30

Lowest possible score: 6

Feelings of being understood are indicated by a score of 20 or above.

The third and final part of the interview with dyslexic participants was through the use of open-ended questions, which were designed to explore self-concepts more fully as well as provide, according to Burden (2005:37), a check for “consistency of interviewee’s responses.” This part of the interview was entitled “the ‘all about me’ instrument” (see Appendix 7) and allowed for what Burden (2005:37) describes as “a little more probing into the respondents’ current subject preferences and attributions for success and failure.” It also provided opportunity for me to understand my participants’ ways of thinking more clearly, thus allowing their voice to be heard.

5.5.5 Interviews with Parents

General interview questions were constructed for the parents, to provide a context for the dyslexic child’s experiences as well as to verify demographic data and provide more in-depth information regarding assessments and intervention strategies. More specific questions relating to the interview with the dyslexic child were raised in instances where clarity was required. The reason for this was because when these children were diagnosed they were too young to understand the process of being diagnosed as dyslexic (see Appendix 8) for interview questions with parents.

5.5.6 Interviews with Remedial Teachers and Educational Psychologists

These interviews (see Appendix 9) were focussed on the type of role and function each of these specialists perform within the school environment to which they are affiliated. School A, an independent school, had a remedial teacher and an educational psychologist to consult. School B, also an independent school, had both a remedial teacher who worked with the junior school children as well as an educational psychologist who is dedicated specifically to the school children’s needs and assessments. School C, a State school, had no remedial

teacher or educational psychologist connected to the school. These interviews revealed a difference between the Independent Education Board (IEB) and Eastern Cape Department of Education's (ECDoE) way of dealing with children with dyslexia. Interviews with the parents confirmed this inconsistency. Both the IEB and the DoE require vast amounts of paperwork and various tests to be completed, and provision of historical evidence of dyslexia, before any concessions or accommodations can be implemented.

5.6 Role of the Researcher

Access to participants is discussed by Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow (2012:67) as being an important aspect in the role of the researcher. The demographics of the researcher, such as race, age and sex, all influence the access to participants and therefore data collection. Furthermore, the problem of bias is discussed by Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:97) as being problematic in previous research discourses because objective research requires researchers to distance themselves from their research participants. This expectation presumably prevents bias. In some cases the researcher is seen as a contaminant in the research process (Shwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:98). However, Shwartz-Shea and Yanow believe that the researcher is the main instrument in interpretative methodology, and as such needs to understand their research participants' meaning-making within their own settings. Often, according to Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012), the need for objectivity creates a false sense of control with regard to bias. Social interaction and research that involves some emotional and intellectual engagement with participants provides a more engaging environment for this type of research. As Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:97) describe, "(to) presume that humans cannot be aware of their 'biases' is to reject human consciousness – the possibility of self-awareness and reflexivity – and human capacity for learning."

In an effort to avoid a subjective view of my dyslexic participants, I used interview questions that were standard and specific and had been used in Burden's (2005) research. Each interview, however, was a different encounter due to the different personalities, age, sex and experiences of my participants. The fact that I personally have family members who are dyslexic raised concerns that I, as a researcher, would be particularly subjective. However, I conducted my interviews as objectively as possible. When introducing myself to my interview candidates and explaining what my research was about, and the types of questions I

would be asking them, I also explained a bit of my background and why I was so interested in this topic, and asked for their viewpoint. This enhanced the interview situation and an immediate rapport developed between my participants and I. It was as if they felt more comfortable talking to me knowing that I have some experience with and understanding of dyslexia. As Burden (2005:29) suggests, even though I had signed consent from their parents allowing their children to participate, I extended an invitation to the interviewee to participate or not. Ethically, therefore, they had the opportunity to be willing contributors to the research or not.

5.7 Ethics

Martyn Hammersley and Anna Traianou (2012:17) suggest that ethics within the realm of research is a controversial topic. Although they acknowledge that some form of ethical regulation is needed, they question the expertise of an ethics committee as well as the political motivations for research. Furthermore, Hammersley & Traianou (2012:143) believe that ethical considerations can hamper the autonomy of the researcher as well as affecting the production of knowledge. Although production of knowledge is fundamental, ethics determine at whose expense it is produced. David Silverman (2010:153) explains how research subjects can be open to abuse in the name of science. He describes how and why a 'code of research' ethics has been established, and cites the following general principles most researchers should adhere to as being:

- Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw
- Protection of research participants
- Assessment of potential benefits and risks to participants
- Obtaining informed consent and not doing harm

(Silverman, 2010:153,154).

Due to my participants being under the age of 18, permission to interview them was obtained from the parents. This was done at the time of the interview or in the case of boarders, through the remedial or educational psychologists attached to the school. The consent form (see Appendix 9) was signed by the parents. Verbal permission was also obtained from the participants themselves, who were given the option to be interviewed or not. Participants were also given the option to withdraw at any time during the research process Pseudonyms

have been used for the child participants to protect their identities, and the schools will be labelled 'School A', 'School B' and 'School C' to further ensure the anonymity of the individuals involved in the research and to protect the precise identity of the schools, psychologists and remedial teachers attached to these schools.

5.8 Data Analysis

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:105) explain that social reality incorporates many different experiences, therefore the focus of the researcher should not be on "getting the facts right" but rather on understanding and articulating the experiences that are under investigation. Dyslexic individuals experience social reality differently to non-dyslexic individuals: under examination here are their experiences and perceptions, rather than social facts. With regard to positivists' concerns about performance within the research process, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:110) believe that for interpretivists, "presentation of self" is seen as data and not as a problem. This indicates that the way participants present themselves, and not just the answers they give, is important to the research. Furthermore, they believe that researchers offer "situated knowledges" (ibid, 2012:111), knowledge that has been gathered from a variety of forms and then related to location. Knowledge has been gathered from different sources for this research and a Grahamstown-specific design has been created. As Irving Seidman (1998, 87-93) points out, issues such as class, gender and race can influence the interviewing process. Given my own life experiences I believe that class, hierarchy, age and status did not influence my interview relationships negatively. Interviewing children may have incurred unequal power relations (i.e. that of the researcher and researched), however, my participants were more mature teenagers who were genuinely interested in giving their point of view about how it feels to be dyslexic.

A digital recorder was used to tape each interview and texts from interviews were developed through transcriptions of each interview. Seidman (1998:97) believes recording interviews offers the benefits of "preserving the words of the participants", which provides original data for the researcher, as well as providing accountability to the participant and to the research. As Seidman (1997:98) suggests, in order to maintain consistency of the transcription process I transcribed all interviews myself including all sounds (laughter, coughing, outside noises, fiddling with watch sounds) to create a carefully constructed verbal and non-verbal form of

the interview. From these transcriptions the texts were reduced and analysed using common narratives and themes that were identified. Seidman (1997:100) confirms that this process involves “exercising judgement about what is significant in the transcript”. Reducing the data to analyse it meant deciding which material was relevant and needed to be included, and which material was not. Data considered relevant was selected in accordance with the research questions. Excerpts from the different interviews will be used to explain the different themes and categories that emerged from the transcripts (Seidman, 1997:99). Different categories emerged from the transcripts and these connect to the literature as well as to the other participants’ experiences. These connections provide interplay between lived experiences and research and, as Seidman (1997:108) confirms, “(i)n a way, quantity starts to interact with quality.” These connections will be discussed in Chapter Six and Seven.

5.9 Reliability

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:98) state that within the research process “there is no place to stand outside of the social world that allows a view of truth unmediated by human language and embeddedness in circumstance.” This indicates that research is influenced by the researcher’s prior knowledge, acquired through literature review and experience and, furthermore, that truth in the social world is mediated by language and social interaction. Prior knowledge and personal experience with dyslexic individuals enabled this research thesis to become a reality. The dyslexic individuals were all diagnosed with dyslexia and therefore satisfied the requirements of being from the same category. This research thesis made use of interviews with parents, remedial teachers and educational psychologists to provide information that would contextualize the dyslexic participant’s experiences.

5.10 Limitations

Michael Patton (2002:563) discussed various limitations when using qualitative methods of research, such as temporal sampling, situational limitations and selective sampling. Firstly there are limitations to the participants who have been sampled. Not all the dyslexic individuals in Grahamstown were interviewed, only those who responded to the call for participants. This could indicate that those dyslexic students who may have a low self-esteem may not have volunteered to be interviewed because of the way they feel about their dyslexia. Furthermore, due to the voluntary nature of the study, selective sampling and

selective situations are acknowledged. Selectivity of dyslexic people excluded those individuals who have reading disorders not of a dyslexic nature as well as not providing a control group. However, this research is specifically designed to understand how dyslexics feel about being dyslexic, so control groups and reading disordered groups were not required. This means that findings cannot be generalized to the dyslexic population; rather they provide an understanding of a particular audience of a dyslexic nature. Due to local educational psychologists being reticent to diagnose a child dyslexic, and lack of testing in the majority of Grahamstown schools, many participants may have been excluded from this study as they have not been given the diagnosis of dyslexia. Furthermore, Seidman (1997:110) cautions on the limitations of using narratives to shape our participants' lives. As he states, "(t)heir lives go on; our presentations of them are framed and reified." This shows that the discussion in Chapter Six and Seven will stand for this specific time period, in these dyslexic individuals' lives, in this particular context of Grahamstown, at this historical time. It represents a mere snapshot of their lives.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated why qualitative methods using interviews best suits this type of interpretivist research. An in-depth discussion on data collection and interview methods has illuminated the process of research. Furthermore the chapter has outlined issues of race and class within the inclusive education policy of a new democratic South Africa. It has further described the Grahamstown education context. Schwarts-Shea and Yanow (2012:30) believe that interpretive research is a circular process with no fixed starting point or conclusions; the sense-making process occurs where the individual is in the moment and continues to progress, perhaps pausing to make sense of things or publish before the research continues. This chapter has demonstrated the suitability of the qualitative method of interviewing for producing the sort of data required for an interpretivist approach in explaining meaning through symbolic interactionism. The following chapters will discuss the five case studies and various themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the five dyslexic teenage individuals interviewed. Each individual has a different story to tell. It is important to understand the context in which these individuals are being educated, as well as the home environment, history of difficulties, and coping mechanisms they employ. Each individual is unique in his/her experience of dyslexia, with some registering on the continuum as extremely dyslexic, like Jack, to not as severely dyslexic in the case of Matthew. The level of dyslexia was assessed by the level of intervention needed to successfully complete their schooling, as well as the individuals' own understanding and rating of dyslexia on a scale of one (being the best) and ten (being the worst). The context of these teenagers' lives was based mostly on their own narratives. In the cases where information (such as when diagnosed and by whom) was not available or forthcoming from the interviewee themselves, it was asked of the parents. Often the participant would encourage me to rather verify this type of information with their parents as they could not remember the details.

6.2 Jack

Jack is in Grade 10 and attends school A, an independent school. He has been boarding since Grade 8, his first year of high school. He is sixteen years old and the younger of two siblings. His older sister was diagnosed with dyslexia when she was in Grade 11. Cousins on both sides of the family have also been diagnosed with dyslexia. Jack appeared to be the most engaging of all my participants and he enjoyed talking about his life. Jack related his experiences of junior school honestly. He talked of being severely bullied for his differences and that his struggles with schooling led him to be held back in Grade 2 to repeat the year. His difficulties with work and concentration were picked up at the beginning of his school career and remediation in a bridging class took place up to Grade 4, when he was able to join the mainstream. His initial diagnosis was through a paediatrician who put him on medication for hyperactivity. Later he was diagnosed with dyslexia. He has needed academic support throughout his school career to date. His dyslexia appears to be quite severe and he rates it as quite severe, being a seven out of ten.

6.2.1 History of Difficulties and Intervention

Jack has had a history of struggling with reading, writing and spelling since he started school in Grade 1. He attended two different private schools in Johannesburg and was diagnosed in Grade 2 with ADHD for which he was medicated. The medication took away his appetite which initially stunted his growth. He was monitored once a term by a psychologist and different medications were prescribed to try and assist him with his concentration levels. He was small for his age and experienced many difficulties with expressing himself and being understood. He was severely bullied and teased in the first school and so his parents moved him to another school where he repeated Grade 2 and went to remedial classes. These classes were smaller and catered to children with special needs. In answer to the question “do you tell your peers [that you have dyslexia]¹¹?” Jack answered in the following way:

J: “Ja, definitely ‘coz they always [pause]¹² I’ve always found [pause]. Because I was brought back a year I have always been teased about that [being older] and it’s been a hard time of my life. I was small when I was young and I was always bullied but then I was [pause] matured quicker [pause] [being older and on different medication] and I was this big like, (sniffs), ten year old that over-towered everyone and I was seen as this complete idiot. Why I could hardly spell”.

G: “What was the bullying about?”

J: “Most of it was because sometimes I would say something, that wasn’t relevant and people would say I’m idiotic you know”.

In Grade 9, which was his second year at school A here in Grahamstown, he was given a reader and a scribe in addition to his extra time for examinations. His reader/scribe has made an incredible difference to his life. He finally feels that someone understands his difficulties and it offers him opportunity and a great sense of relief. When he talks of ‘J’ [his

¹¹ [] words within parenthesis are the interviewers and attempt to assist the reader to understand the dialogue

¹² [pause] represents a pause

reader/scribe], he is extremely grateful to have her in his life. In answer to the question “Does anyone at your school give you specific help for your dyslexia?” Jack answered:

J:” Definitely. ‘J’ is awesome [pause]. Really without her or JJ [School A psychologist], I wouldn’t have been exempted from Afrikaans. So I really do appreciate her. It’s just so nice sitting with her and having her as a scribe. It makes [pause] for me to go into a test it just makes everything easier mentally and physically. I don’t have everyone just sitting there and writing down and I [pause] I [pause]” [examination time is a stressful time for him, and additional stress is added in the exam environment in which everyone else is writing and seemingly coping with their exams]. “I can just sit there in my own environment and I can say what I need to be written down and I find that my answers for my vocabulary, I find um, I’m more intelligent um, verbally than written. So I can [pause] my answers can be um [pause] I can scribe and I can talk to my scribe and they [the words] sound more intelligent and understanding [make more sense] than if I had to write it.”

Jack is relieved to have the help of a reader/scribe and extra time as an accommodation for his exams. He knows that he would do far worse in an academic environment without his scribe’s help. When asked what his main difficulties are he responded in the following way:

J: “Languages, English, reading, writing and my spelling is atrocious. I forget like, I spell no, NO (emphasis) even though I know that I have to spell it with a K N O W, I still spell it NOW, even though I know consciously that [how] I need to spell it [pause], I still write it that way [pause] the um, way it sounds. Silent E’s (shrugs) instead of ‘F’, a P with a PH for an ‘F’, I still write it differently”.

When asked what the word dyslexic means to him. Jack’s response was the following:

J: “For me it means either [pause], I don’t know how to describe it [pause] I um, think of swapping words or um, or um for me, like my dyslexia comes from [pause], if I see a word I usually think of something that I would um want it to be in my mind wise. Like today in the test, I thought of, immediately I saw a W, so I took the concept of what I was reading about and thought it said WAR, instead it was WATER. So it’s

like my brain just decides what the word means or with numbers sometimes I seem to swop them around and make them what I feel they should be or meant to be. It just seems logical for me and yet it's not, if that makes sense?" (. . .)¹³ "I have the part [of dyslexia] where I take words or a letter and I'll immediately assume a word. Also when I read, my eyes seem to skip um at least three or four lines when I'm reading so I find it very hard to [pause] to concentrate. I have to look and read something like five times, that's why I, I ask for extra time coz that question sometimes doesn't make sense because when I'm reading it [pause] [my brain doesn't see it the same way]"

6.2.2 Home Situation

Jack's home situation is distant at the present as he is a boarder at his school in Grahamstown. Jack had much support and assistance from his mother in his junior years of his schooling. His father is based and works overseas, and his mother chose to join her husband overseas when her daughter finished school and Jack entered high school. Jack's home base is with his sister in Grahamstown for now. Jack has developed an understanding of how the world works. He sees life beyond school life as being a harsh place which offers no support to people who struggle. The following narrative confirms his understanding:

J: "Thing is, in the real world no one is going to sit there and once you [pause] if you have a [pause] job and you have to hand in your paper (fiddles with his watch) [pause] He's going to sit there and look at you and be like, you've spelt this wrong and I have to send this over to China in a few days, he's not really going to [pause] [accept my reason] it's because I'm dyslexic, I can tell you right now [pause] he's not going to care or give a rat's ass! So you have to learn [pause] [to cope], ja".

Jack manages to keep contact with his parents through Skype and email. Although he has had much support, I get the impression he sometimes feels alone and abandoned. He often sends his essays to his Dad who will 'proof read' them for him and email them back to him.

¹³ (. . .) Ellipses are used to express omission.

6.2.3 Homework Experiences

Jack has an English tutor who assists him with work that he has to prepare for tests or exams. She is an assistant psychologist who is affiliated with the school and will often proof read the work that Jack has done. He also has various tutors from Rhodes University that give him one-on-one tutoring for different subjects. Having tutors and proof readers are some of the strategies Jack has developed to cope with his dyslexia. Some of the “clever guys” at school have also been willing to read through his work and correct it for him. Jack is communicative and organizes his life well to enable himself to do the things he most enjoys, like band practice. He gets frustrated when rules like ‘roll call’ get in the way of what he wants to do, especially when he has made the effort to organize it with those in authority. See Jack’s response to this open ended question:

“The things I don’t like about school are . . .”

“Ooo um for me, um here I don’t like the way teachers tell me what I can’t do [pause] I understand that there has to be rules [pause] agreed [pause] perfect [pause] but like I [pause] you’re telling me to do something [pause] something that really frustrates me terribly is like [pause] I have to be restricted. If I’m having a band practice and it’s like from eight until ten and I get told. ‘Oh no! Why weren’t you here at this time? Why weren’t you at roll call?’ Or I’ve, I’ve already made the effort to come to you and told you this is where I will be at this time of the week and yet I’m still getting shouted at and, and [long pause].”

6.2.4 Classroom Experiences

Jack often gets frustrated at school. “Frustrate” is a common word that he uses in his narrative throughout the interviews with me. He finds deadlines difficult to meet and is frustrated by the lack of extra time in class tests that is usually allotted to him during exam time. He needs a reader and a scribe and extra time, which he is allowed during examination times but unfortunately during class tests the timetable does not allow for the extra assistance. He is able to participate verbally in class but struggles to write his thoughts down and finds the experience frustrating.

The subjects he is taking are Geography, Mathematics, English, History, Physical Science, Chemistry (Phys/Chem) and Music. He has been exempted from taking the second language Afrikaans because his dyslexia is quite severe. Of Afrikaans, Jack says:

J: “ Ja, it’s very hard and I hated Afrikaans, well [pause] that’s a bit harsh but one of my pleas was, if I can’t understand and do my own language how can I do another? It just [pause], like, I got 26% for the one term in Grade 9 so I just saw no logical reason in doing it [Afrikaans]. So I really tried.”

Grades are very important for Jack and he gets very frustrated when he does not achieve high grades. Jack often feels that his grades do not reflect the amount of effort he is putting into a subject. This was Jack’s response to the question: “are you good at Maths?”

J: “No, I have to work my ass off. I can get seventy percent but I have to work harder than anyone else even the smart people in my house and it’s very frustrating. They all study two hours and get eighties, whereas I will need to study three times the amount of what they do and I will probably get sixty and they will get ninety [percent] and it’s FRUSTRATING (emphasis)”.

And in part of the response to the open ended question: “The things I like best about school are . . .”

J: (. . .) “But for me personally it’s [pause]. I want to get good marks to show that [pause] the amount of money my father is putting into my education itself is going to good use [pause] even if I am getting sixties. I’m saying, Dad, I did work my arse off for that [pause] you’re [pause] that, and that’s one thing that my Dad’s been amazing with. He, he doesn’t care what marks I have [trails off].”

Jack really wants to work hard and engage with the teachers who teach him but he wants the teacher to put in the same amount of effort. He needs to be understood for who he is and not overlooked. He is open about his dyslexia right from the start, especially with a new teacher. In answer to the question “do teachers help you with your difficulties?” Jack had the following response:

J: “Depends on the teacher, it’s [pause] you have teachers that will put effort into a student. The first thing I do when I have a new teacher is go to them and say “Mam, I’ve got this [pause] this [pause] and this [dyslexia, which is trouble with reading, writing and spelling and ADHD] and if you want to work with me, ah that’s great and we will have an awesome year. If, if she doesn’t then we’re going to have some problems ‘coz I’m going to get [pause] I’m a person that if you’re not going to understand me then I will not put any effort into anything you do!”

6.2.5 Coping Mechanisms

The coping mechanisms that Jack employs are unique to his experience of dyslexia. He knows what has worked and what has not worked in the past and he feels that he has matured sufficiently enough to understand and cope with his dyslexia in mainstream education. In response to a question about coping with bullying he said:

J: “ I used to get very um, I don’t know how to say, um I used to get very down and depressed and I um just couldn’t do anything [about the bullying] and it was terrible. So I had to get over that mentally, it just wasn’t good for me and I used to see her, [a psychologist] at least once a term”.

When asked how he structures his time and days he usually attaches his activities to the days of the week.

J: “I guess, I kind of anchor to each day. Lately I’ve been just saying on Wednesdays [pause]. Mondays, like what I usually do after school, like what I have to do after school if it’s work, or seeing a tutor or like I know I’ve always got this choir thing that I do with the school, Tuesdays I always see ‘J’, Wednesdays I always see a maths tutor, Thursdays I’ve always got, [pause] Thursdays I usually work on science, Fridays I’ve always got band practice, so it’s always” (trails off).

The way that Jack expresses himself, namely an “anchor to each day”, is an example of indigenous typologies that Bernard and Ryan (2010:57) discuss when looking for themes within narratives, describing words that are used in unfamiliar ways. It also provides a perspective on how differently he thinks.

Jack has had to make sure that he is organized to be able to let his scribe know when his tests or exams are. He shows strong positive emotion towards his reader/scribe ‘J’. He not only wants her support and understanding, he feels that he needs ‘J’ in order to cope at school.

J: “So if I go to a teacher and say I’ve got extra time and I’m going to put my effort in. Like I make sure that ‘J’ knows when my tests are so I’ve got my reader and scribe and if she’s [the teacher], she’s not going to tell me in advance [about when the test is] then there’s, there’s no understanding. With a dyslexic person there has to be understanding. ‘Coz I’m putting in the effort to get as far as [I] possibly can in work and do as well as I possibly can”.

J: “that’s why I love having ‘J’, she will know exactly [what I need].”

Jack prefers the one-on-one instruction that he gets with his tutors, to big classroom teaching situations. He often finds that his attention drifts off during class and he loses concentration.

6.3 Wade

Wade is in Grade 10 and attends school A. He has been a boarder since Grade 8. He is fifteen years old and the youngest child of three, with an older brother and sister. Neither of his siblings are dyslexic but his father and uncle have been diagnosed as dyslexic and they think his grandfather was dyslexic too, according to Wade: “they didn’t know about it [dyslexia] then, so not sure if he, [the grandfather] was diagnosed.” Wade came across as the most confident of all my interviewees, with low expression and very controlled one word answers. Although willing to be interviewed he was the least engaging and most reserved of all my candidates. Wade has the co-morbidity of hyperactivity for which he takes medication to enable him to concentrate. Wade had early identification and intervention (Grades 3-7) for his dyslexia through a programme called NILD (National Institute for Learning Development). He had one-on-one instruction, twice a week, over this four year period,

where difficulties with different learning areas were addressed. His hyperactivity was detected first and medication was prescribed for concentration. Wade's parents had him assessed in the Western Cape as they were aware of the family's history of dyslexia. Wade comes across as a bit of a perfectionist who is organized with his school work and copes best that way. His dyslexia does not appear to be too severe, although this may be due to strategic assistance from early on in his school career. Wade rates his dyslexia as a six out of ten.

6.3.1 History of Difficulties and Interventions

In Grades 1 and 2 Wade struggled to concentrate and exhibited both learning difficulties and hyperactive tendencies. He had several tests administered. He was assessed and his hyperactivity was diagnosed. He takes medication to help him to concentrate. His parents also had his eyes tested and he has worn glasses since Grade 2. His dyslexia was only diagnosed in Grade 3, when he was still struggling to read, write and spell. As far as he can remember, he has struggled to remember names. When asked who he did the NILD programme with, his response, after a long pause, was:

W: "Argh, I'm terrible with names!"

Through email correspondence on the third of October, with Bridget Wren at NILD, the following was gleaned about the NILD educational therapy programme that Wade had attended.

"NILD uses various techniques to address deficits. We believe in deficit stimulation and not compensation. Our phonics/reading approach is Orton-Gillingham based and addresses the five core pillars of reading that have been identified by research, namely phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies. There are a number of things that we do to address reading and phonics. This is a very language-based approach....Mediation is the key...Our intervention addresses perceptual as well as cognitive deficits" (Wren, correspondence, 2013).

Wren explained that the NILD intervention tries to integrate different learning strategies and addresses the underlying difficulties so that they become a 'thinking process' rather than just a memory. NILD's website highlights the difference between educational therapy and tutoring: "The focus of NILD Educational Therapy is the development of clear, efficient

thinking. Students are given tools to enable them to overcome specific learning weaknesses. Tutoring typically focuses on content while educational therapy builds efficient learning processes” (www.nild.org, 2013). Furthermore the therapy involves collaboration between parents, teachers and the educational therapist at NILD. It is a holistic approach that guarantees success with barriers to learning.

Even though Wade has had early intervention his dyslexic frustrations are still evident. In answer to the question “what would you say your main difficulties are?” Wade had the following response:

W: “Languages, reading, I’m so bad at, and writing, I’m terrible at, and spelling, I’m horrible at spelling!” and “Afrikaans, I’m terrible at Afrikaans.”

6.3.2 Home Situation

Wade has been a boarder at School A since 2011, when he began Grade 8. He prefers boarding although he did not allude as to why. He comes from the Western Cape, but considers Grahamstown to be his home for now. His parents seemed guarded and distant and were difficult to get in touch with. Wade’s mother provided much of the support during his junior school years and highlighted Wade’s strengths such as judo and computer skills, rather than discussing his difficulties. She has helped him to be organized and disciplined in his work. It seems they have done what they can to assist their son academically, and the rest is up to him. He is well aware of this and has a positive attitude toward making the most of his school life. He acknowledges that the one on one instruction from Bridget at NILD, twice a week during term time, over a period of four years, helped him tremendously.

6.3.3 Homework experiences

Due to early intervention and strategies instilled by the NILD program Wade is confident in his homework experiences. He is very controlled, organized and says he enjoys doing work as it keeps him busy. He enjoys the independence of being at boarding school and being able to focus on his work as well as being actively involved in sporting activities. He does not enjoy his organization being interfered with:

W: "I like to have my books organized and stuff, but if there is something on the floor I probably won't pick it up! But my books I want in height order or colour order or something like that."

G: "Do you find that helps you?"

W: "Ja, ja. I like to have everything, like if someone changes it then I hate it. Like, my Mom was told to teach me how to be more organized and that it would help me with my marks and since then I have stuck with having files and like you know having order to it."

6.3.4 Classroom experiences

Wade's current classroom experiences appear to be fine, as no out of the ordinary comments about his current experience were noted. It seems that his medication for concentration helps him to focus during class. However, Wade did comment about his negative early school experiences in the following way:

G: "Did any teachers take note of your struggles?"

W: "Ja, ja, it was my Grade 3 teacher that noticed it." [the dyslexic struggles]

G: "Okay and before you were diagnosed how did teachers treat you?"

W: "Ja, like in Grade 1 and 2 my teachers hated me... We were just... they just hated me!"

G: "Why?"

W: "From what I understand it was because I just wouldn't do the work and also that was before they knew I had ADD as well, so I wasn't on medication[pause] I was running around the place[pause] I couldn't[pause] [help it] It was like I put up a wall in front of me and I just couldn't really care about it," [the work at school].

Other than English, Wade has chosen subjects that require little or no writing, like Accountancy, Physics, Chemistry, Computer Programming and Mathematics. He excels at mathematics:

W: "I'm fantastic at maths."

He was able to drop Afrikaans as a subject in favour of another subject which he enjoys far more, namely Computer Programming. This provided great relief for him as he did not enjoy getting low grades for a subject that he could just not achieve in. Grades are important to Wade. He is glad that he was able to drop History, which required a lot of writing, as well as Afrikaans.

G: "Do you have any difficulties in subjects other than English?"

W: "Afrikaans and um History, because there's just so much essay writing and

I um don't do that [Afrikaans and History as subjects] anymore".

6.3.5 Coping Mechanisms

Wade copes with the challenges of being dyslexic by being upfront about it. He tells his teachers, his peers and his friends quite openly that he is dyslexic. For him, the label has helped.

G: "Do you tell your teachers or peers that you are dyslexic?"

W: "Um, I'm just straight up".

G: "And your friends, do they know?"

W: Ja, I find it helps me if everyone just knows, it gives me [pause] you know, a bit more leeway if I have to like read in class or anything. If a teacher like asks me to read in class then I will be like 'Mam, I'm dyslexic and I really battle a lot, please can I not read,' and they go 'okay, it's fine.'"

He also copes by using the strategies that he has been taught at NILD and the organisational strategies that his mother helped him put in place.

He seems to have come to terms with the fact that he is dyslexic and will not be able to change it. The answers to the following questions indicate how he feels:

G: "Do you think dyslexia can be cured?"

W: "No".

G: "Do you think you can get better in any way?"

W: "I think you can do spelling tests [pause] practice your reading [pause] but then eventually you get to a point where you can't get any better."

6.4 Matthew

Matthew is in Grade 10 and attends school B, also an independent school. He is a day scholar and lives with both his parents and sister in a home nearby. He is fifteen years old and the older of two siblings. There are no known cases of dyslexia in his family, however his mother suspects that Matthew's younger sister, who is ten, is also dyslexic. Matthew came across as a relaxed, laid back teenager who was very articulate when speaking. His junior schooling was a bit disruptive as he was first schooled in South Africa and, later, at two international schools in Holland where his family moved in his Grade 6 year. Matthew has not been diagnosed with any co-morbid conditions. He experienced slight difficulties in junior school and was put on the Audiblox Programme to try and assist him, but received no diagnosis. Matthew was diagnosed with dyslexia in Holland when the international school he attended picked up on his difficulties. He attended a See and Spell workshop in Holland and has needed assistance with his work from his mother. Matthew does not take any medication and his dyslexia seems to be the least severe of all the candidates I interviewed. Matthew rates his dyslexia as four and a half out of ten.

6.4.1 History of Difficulty and Intervention

Although not severely dyslexic, Matthew has experienced difficulties with memory, reading and spelling since Grade 1. However, he was only assessed when he was ten years old in Holland. Matthew says that his biggest problem is with his memory. It frustrates him that he is not able to remember things, not even from one lesson to the next. He also struggles particularly with remembering names.

M: “[pause] um[pause] I mean I get to school and I have like a special card [pause], like up that has all my lessons on [pause] and I’ll take it out and look at it and I have a twenty minute walk to my locker and then I would have forgotten them [pause] the two subjects before break. Um and then I will have to look at it again.”

He also finds change annoying and confusing because he struggles with his memory:

M: “(. . .) and then it will change [change of term for sports programme]. They give us the sheet with the practice things on and I look over that a few times and then once I’ve gone to a few practices I’m sure about what’s on when (trails off). But the annoying thing is when,[pause]one day you go to the one place and then the other you go to another [pause],I get[pause]I get really confused!”

Another thing that frustrates Matthew is that when he reads, the words run off the page; if he’s very tired it’s worse, and he prefers to read larger font otherwise he finds that he skips lines when reading:

M: “When I tell them [his friends] what happens with the words running off the page and stuff they sort of say that must be cool. If the words are a bit bigger and the spaces are a bit bigger, like when I’m reading, it it’s like a big paragraph like that (shows me about 10cm in the air with his fingers) and um if it’s got really small writing, I will be reading the first line and I will skip to the fifth.”

His mother is a trained teacher and has been very hands on with assisting him with his difficulties. Before they left for Holland he had OT (Occupational Therapy) sessions as well as Audiblox in an attempt to assist him. Although not diagnosed, there is a possibility that Matthew is slightly dyspraxic as well as dyslexic. Once he was diagnosed with dyslexia in Europe, he was given extra support at school and at home.

6.4.2 Home Situation

Matthew has always enjoyed the support of his parents. His home situation was a bit disruptive when they left South Africa, and he missed his friends. His Mom believes that Matthew would have been diagnosed at a much later stage had they stayed in South Africa. She has recognized the same difficulties and tendencies in her daughter, who is ten, and the local Grahamstown Educational Psychologists are reticent to give the diagnosis of dyslexia, even though there is a history of dyslexia in the family. This frustrates the mother as she believes that a diagnosis is necessary to facilitate correct intervention.

6.4.3 Homework Experiences

Matthew has had lots of support and intervention where necessary. His mother helps him to organize himself by putting strategies in place such as painting his cupboard doors with blackboard paint so that he can make ‘to do’ lists on them to help him remember things. He also has the tools necessary to assist him such as an iPad and a computer. He appears to take responsibility for his learning but feels he doesn’t have enough time to get through everything that he has to get through during the week.

6.4.4 Classroom Experiences

Matthew’s classroom experiences are interesting because it seems that his teachers do not know that he has dyslexia, even though it is ‘on file’ from when he came back from Europe. He says:

M: “Most of my teachers don’t know that I have dyslexia [pause] um my mom is trying to get, you know, get them to know it and it is in my file in school, I think”.

And in answer to the question “do the teachers take note of your struggles?”

he replies:

M: “I don’t think anyone’s given me any special treatment that I can remember. Except in Grade 6 or Grade 7, and it was in Afrikaans and we wrote a test and I didn’t get a good mark and the teacher asked me why, and it was to do with spelling and I said it was probably to do with my dyslexia and he did offer to mark it

[the paper] again with dyslexia in mind[pause]. But I turned it down, ‘coz I’d rather be tested like everybody else.”

The subjects that Matthew is taking are English, Afrikaans, Mathematics, Physical Science, Chemistry and Drama. He loves Drama and gets fully involved in school plays.

6.4.5 Coping Mechanisms

Matthew has employed coping mechanisms such as using a special card that he keeps with him to remind him of his lessons. His weeks are planned around sport and extra murals. He also contacts friends just to make sure that he has the right day for activities. He is very aware of what he needs to do in order to cope and what does and does not help him. He sees a psychologist when he needs to:-

M: (. . .) “I was talking with my therapist once a week which I really [pause] that [pause], I need a way to let off steam, coz I do get overstressed and stuff.”

In answer to my question “Do you feel you are coping in the mainstream?”

M: “ Um yeah, I feel that I cope. Every now and again I have a mental breakdown ‘coz of my memory and stuff but yeah besides that I think I cope quite well”.

Mathew has the support structures in place which help him to cope with his difficulties, such as his timetable card, friends, family support and a psychologist who he can call on anytime he needs to talk or discuss his frustrations. His classroom experiences may have to be addressed in the future as his teachers will need to know of his dyslexic difficulties in order to offer any assistance that he may need.

6.5 Candice

Candice attends school C, a state school. She is a day scholar and lives with her mother and father. She is in Grade 12 (her final year of school) and is eighteen years old. She is the younger of two siblings. Her sister attends the local university in Grahamstown. Her mother

is dyslexic and they think her grandfather on her mother's side was too. However, to her knowledge, no diagnosis of dyslexia occurred during her grandfather's lifetime. Candice was keen to talk about her dyslexia to someone who wanted to understand her difficulties. She did not seem to have a good understanding of what dyslexia is, nor does it appear that she has had much support or assistance. She has the co-morbid condition of hyperactivity and takes medication to concentrate, but only during examination times. She has struggled with school work since junior school and was kept back in Grade 3 in an effort for her to 'catch up.' In Grade 3 she was diagnosed with dyslexia but was not told about it until she found out "by mistake" in her Grade 7 year. This was when her hyperactivity was also diagnosed. Her dyslexia is quite severe but she does not seem to think so. Being quite unsure she rates it as a five or six out of ten. This could be due to a less informed understanding of what dyslexia is. She seems to be a determined and diligent worker and has had the least amount of support and assistance of all the interview candidates.

6.5.1 History of Difficulty

Candice was very hyperactive as a young child and was always getting into trouble at school. Her reading, writing and spelling are areas of difficulty for her. In Grade 1 and Grade 2 her teachers both suggested different interventions. She had her vision and hearing tested, and was eventually diagnosed by an educational psychologist in Grahamstown as being dyslexic. The psychologist made several suggestions for interventions and praised Candice for achieving as much as she had with no support. It is difficult to determine why, but Candice's mother was not happy with these words of encouragement or with the report that the psychologist wrote on her daughter. Apparently she did not want her child to use dyslexia as an excuse not to excel academically. Candice's mother was far happier with the hyperactivity diagnosis that she received from the paediatrician when Candice was in Grade 8. However, she did not act on the recommendation of medication until her daughter's Grade 10 year.

From the interview there seems to be a long history of denial or not dealing with the issues at hand. When asked what the word dyslexia means to her Candice responded:

C: "Um actually I've been told that you shouldn't call it dyslexia. But,

basically the idea [is] that you struggle to learn because the neurons in your brain don't recept as well".

The word 'recept' is an example of indigenous typologies that Bernard and Ryan (2010:57) discuss when looking for themes within narratives, describing words that are used in unfamiliar ways. Candice has taken the word 'neurotransmitter receptor' and changed it into a verb 'to recept'. Dyslexic individuals often use words incorrectly or in the incorrect contexts.

When asked what her main difficulties are she responds:-

C: "Um, probably spelling and reading. Reading I don't even try um I [pause] my [pause] I skip all the lines and it's so...ja Writing is not that bad...its messy but I can write."

6.5.2 Home Situation

The impression I got from Candice was that she has struggled very much on her own and feels isolated and unsupported, and perhaps a bit misunderstood by society. From her mother's response there appears to be a bit of pressure from her father:

Candice's Mother: "My husband wasn't happy to hear that [she needed to stay back and repeat a year] because he's from the era where that's seen as a failure."

And by her mother's own admission:

"Um, to be honest my girls are [pause], they've got to today on their own because I travelled quite a bit."

Candice's mother struggled throughout school with academic difficulties. When her daughter was first diagnosed with dyslexia she recognized similarities in her own struggles and, through a process of self-diagnosis, realized that she was also dyslexic and, later, that she too had ADHD.

6.5.3 Homework Experiences

Candice has had to put a lot of effort in to her homework and does not receive assistance. She has been advised by her mother to re-check her work over and over again. Her mother cannot

understand why her daughter cannot spell, and she confides that she comes from a time period where not being able to spell was unacceptable. Candice loves Art and uses that as a way to excel through her creativity.

6.5.4 Classroom Experiences

Candice has had a history of difficulty with schoolwork since starting school in Grade 1. She remembers always being the naughty child that had to sit under the teacher's desk.

C: "Um when I was at [Grade 1 School], I was always under the Teacher's desk, they couldn't keep me under control".

Although Candice was diagnosed with dyslexia early it seems no interventions were implemented as she was unaware of her condition until a teacher asked her in her Grade 7 year if she was dyslexic.

G: "How old were you when you first found out you were dyslexic?"

C: "Um, I only found out in my Grade 7 year. My Mom [pause] ja, my parents um, everyone knew [pause], except for me. They like found out when I was like in [pause] um I was in [Grade 1 School], or something and then I found out when I was in Grade 7".

G: "Okay, wow, and who told you?"

C: "Um, it actually happened by accident. Um I was writing an assignment an English assignment and I swopped the numbers for my letters and my teacher was like, 'are you dyslexic?' and I'm like 'what's dyslexic?' And then I spoke to my Mom about it and she's like 'Ja' and I'm like 'WHAT!'"

She was re-assessed in Grade 8 and diagnosed with hyperactivity. She was offered medication but did not use it until her Grade 10 end of year exams. She still only uses medication during exam time and the rest of the time she is expected to concentrate with no assistance.

Candice takes English and Afrikaans as subjects and struggles with them. She finds them frustrating, with too many rules to learn:

C: "I don't like them [English and Afrikaans subjects] because [pause] they're very difficult and there's too much to it (laughs). Like especially for Afrikaans there's like

[pause] they say [pause] this is the rule for sentence structure and then there's this exception and that exception to the rule and then it's just, there's so much to get into your head. In English they ask you your own opinion and then your own opinion is marked wrong and I don't like that, it's too much.”

She also takes Geography and Biology which she enjoys and is interested in, as well as Mathematics and Art, which she loves. Given the opportunity Candice would have loved to drop Afrikaans and pick up another subject. Unfortunately the Eastern Cape DoE (Department of Education) will not allow a non-immigrant to drop Afrikaans as a subject. This was confirmed by Dr Steenkamp, the Department of Education's Educational Psychologist (Interview with Author).

6.5.5 Coping Mechanisms

Candice struggles to remember the days of the week but has a friend that she messages daily to make sure that she has the correct details for the day. Another coping mechanism Candice employs is to keep her school work organized and up to date. Furthermore she has extra time during exams due to her diagnosis, and she takes medication to help her concentrate during exam time.

6.6 Kelly

Kelly attends school B, an independent school. She is a day scholar and lives with her mother, father and older brother. She is in Grade 6 and, at 13 years old, the youngest candidate I interviewed. She seemed to be the most honest and confident, secure and happy of all my candidates. There is no known family history of dyslexia. She has had a long history of problems, right from birth where her mother felt that the multiple ear infections she had as a baby caused deafness. At twenty four months of age she had grommets inserted and was able to speak for the first time. During the interview I noticed a slight speech impediment, for example “fwends” for “friends” and her mother confirmed a history of speech therapy. Kelly has been diagnosed with verbal aspraxia, dyspraxia as well as dyslexia and ADHD. Her co-morbidities are many and yet she comes across as a confident young lady. She is on medication for her hyperactivity. She was kept back in Grade 3 to repeat a

year, but does not seem to be too distressed about being older than everyone else in her class. Her understanding of her dyslexia is very good compared to all my other interviewees and her dyslexia seems to be quite severe. She rates her dyslexia as an eight out of ten. Her mother wrote a little booklet entitled *A Privileged Mom*, for her teachers, in an effort to provide a more personal account of what her daughter has been through, rather than hand over a file full of clinical reports from specialists. In the booklet she describes and defines the different diagnoses and how they, as a team, have had to overcome different challenges along the way. It provides an informative account of what Kelly and her family have experienced from birth up to her Grade 5 year.

6.6.1 History of Difficulty and Interventions

Kelly presented with continual ear infections as a baby. She was two years old when she first tried to repeat what her mother said to her. Before that she had a baby language all of her own and used to babble to communicate. She was also a very active child and was later diagnosed with ADHD. Kelly was diagnosed by an educational psychologist in Port Elizabeth and needed the care of various specialists. Her paediatrician diagnosed her hyperactivity and started to treat her with medication. She had speech therapy for three years. She also went to Occupational Therapy (OT). When Kelly was diagnosed with dyslexia she was ten years old. She was diagnosed by an Educational Psychologist in Johannesburg.

When asked “what are your main difficulties?” Kelly responded:

K: “Like, my main difficulties are spelling and reading.”

When asked what she struggles with in other subjects this was her response:

K: “Like with most of the questions [in tests and exam situations] you have to like read the question and then sometimes they have like words that we [dyslexics] don’t recognize.”

6.6.2 Home Situation

Kelly’s home situation is very supportive. Her mother is very pro-active and involved in her daughter’s life, as is her father, who is also very supportive. Kelly’s older sibling initially didn’t understand why his little sister demanded so much attention from his parents but as he

has grown up, his understanding of her struggles, and the way she has triumphed over them, has deepened. Kelly's mother acknowledges that, as each year progressed in Kelly's life, so the diagnosis changed, from initially not being able to speak, also known as verbal dyspraxia, to a diagnosis of developmental dyspraxia (sequence and movement co-ordination difficulties), to being diagnosed with dyslexia. Each of these diagnoses was addressed with interventions that assisted Kelly in overcoming the challenges they presented. She has had intense support and intervention.

6.6.3 Homework Experience

Kelly's mother helps her with her homework every day. She rewrites notes for her and reads her work from the text books to her, to help consolidate the learning that has taken place during the day. She admits that this is still fine at Grade 6 level, however, she acknowledges that a different intervention will be needed for Kelly when she gets to high school. Kelly also has remedial classes twice a week with the remedial teacher attached to the school, as well as extra assistance with a former teacher who helps children in the junior grades to consolidate their work.

6.6.4 Classroom Experiences

Kelly's classroom experiences have been positive. She is open about her dyslexia and there are other children in the class that also have difficulties similar to her own so she does not feel alone. The teachers have been fully supportive and interactive, advocating remedial classes and suggesting a computer programme that would assist Kelly with her homework. Kelly has a friend who is dyslexic and a cousin in her class so her network of friends is strong. Five children from her grade go for extra remedial support and to extra lessons together.

6.6.5 Coping Mechanisms

Kelly was very excited to tell me about her 'Dragon.' This is a programme called Dragon Naturally Speaking and it uses voice recognition software to type the spoken word. It takes a bit of time for the 'Dragon' to learn an individual's speech patterns and so a certain amount of training is required. As soon as the interview was finished Kelly rushed to get her Dragon

to show me. She is excited that it will help her to do her work more independently as it can read to her as well as type what she says.

K: "I'm just gonna make a diary and everyday say something and then I will train it to get used to my voice. So we're wanting, [mom and Kelly] when I get back next term that I can take it [Dragon] to school and actually use it and I can then use it for exams. I will then go into my own little room, and then I'll have the question paper on the computer saved on a flashstick, and then I would open up a word document and it will read the question paper to me".

Kelly has the support of her teachers as well as her family and so feels understood and supported. Although her difficulties have been extreme, she does not reveal a sense of hopelessness nor low self-esteem. This indicates that Kelly identifies with the role that she is expected to perform in society that of 'student' and 'daughter'. As Stryker (2007) points out, this role is fashioned through expectations. Kelly has experienced support in these roles and therefore identifies with them based on the support she receives and has come to expect.

6.7 Dyslexic Identity Scale (DIS) results

Burden (2005:33) describes the Dyslexic Identity Scale as being a "specially constructed, theory-based questionnaire" with the purpose of drawing out and understanding the feelings dyslexic individuals have about themselves: "being understood by others, about whether they feel confident and in control of their future learning outcomes, or by contrast, if they felt helpless to improve or even depressed because of this." Burden believes that these feelings could be good indicators of a dyslexic individual's future success. His measures include questions which relate to "self-efficacy" which "represents a person's feelings of competence and confidence of success when faced with specific learning and/or assessment tasks" (Ibid, 2005:33) and the "locus of control refers to the beliefs that people hold whether the things which happen to them in their lives are mainly within their own control or at the mercy of others." Furthermore, the DIS questions "learned helplessness", highlighting the possibility of an "ingrained sense of failure" from negative academic experiences as well as "feelings of depression" which may result from this negative experience (Ibid, 2005:34).

The following table shows the results.

Dyslexic Identity Scale					
	Jack	Wade	Matthew	Candice	Kelly
	16 years	15 years	15	18 years	13 years
Self-Efficacy	26	22	28	30	30
Learned helplessness	3	3	3	7	3
Depression Items	10	6	10	16	6
Feelings of being understood	16	22	16	14	26

Jack, Matthew and Candice’s answers to the DIS questions revealed that they all exhibit a positive self-efficacy and locus of control which, according to Burden (2005), means that they generally feel confident despite their dyslexic difficulty. They do not present high levels of learned helplessness nor possible depression. However, they do show feelings of being misunderstood i.e. they don’t feel like their peers or teachers understand them fully.¹⁴ This corroborates findings in the narratives of the interviews. Wade and Kelly also demonstrate a positive self-efficacy and locus of control and do not show signs of depression¹⁵ or learned helplessness¹⁶. Yet they show very positive feelings of being understood. This correlates to the responses received during the interviews with them. Wade and Kelly seem to have had the most support from family, friends and educators. Matthew’s feeling of being misunderstood is surprising as he has received support for his dyslexic difficulties. This anomaly could be explained by the fact that his dyslexic difficulties are not as severe as the rest of my interviewees. Burden (2005:34) believes that the DIS “provides information on the level of understanding that the dyslexic student considers other people to show about his or her condition”. This links to Blumer’s (1969:2) discussion that Mead accounts for meaning arising out of social interaction with other humans which represents his second premise. Through support and early identification these dyslexic individuals have been able to develop a positive sense of self in relation to their difficulties.

¹⁴ A feeling of being understood is indicated by a score of 20 or above (Burden, 2005:36)

¹⁵ Depression is indicated by a score of 20 or above (Burden, 2005:36)

¹⁶ Learned helplessness is indicated by a score of 10 or above (Burden, 2005:36)

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a historical context for each of my interview participants, by providing an overview of the history of their difficulties and intervention strategies employed. A discussion of the home situation, homework experience and classroom experience of each participant provides a social backdrop of their daily lives and lived experiences. It is important to understand the daily lived experiences of each participant, as they provide an understanding of each individual's social experiences that have shaped and influenced his/her personal understanding of dyslexia.

Furthermore an understanding of how each individual feels about their dyslexia from the Dyslexic Identity Scale Burden (2005) provides in table form is crucial to determining whether these participants feel confident despite their difficulties or lack thereof. It also provides an indication of whether the individual participants feel depressed and helpless about their condition of dyslexia and gives a good idea of whether they feel understood or misunderstood by peers, teachers and parents. This historical overview enables an understanding of the themes that emerge from the narrative and that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Thematic Analysis

7.1 Introduction

Qualitative methods of research that use interviewing as a form of gaining research information generate a huge amount of data. Given the expectation and restriction a thesis like this presents, it is imperative that the themes emerging from the narratives be carefully constructed. These themes must be framed in such a way that they represent the participants' viewpoints rather than those of the researcher. For this reason Bernard and Ryan's (2010) observational techniques have been used to analyse the narratives and locate emerging themes.

Bernard and Ryan (2010:54-64) discuss eight observational techniques that are useful when analysing data: "Repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, and linguistic connectors." Repetition is easy to recognize in text and refers to words or utterances that commonly emerge such as Jack's use of the word "frustrated" which was used twenty times in one interview and the phrase "I see things differently" which emerged from each interview with all the participants. Bernard and Ryan (2010:57) cite Patton's idea of "indigenous categories" and believe that another way to find themes is: "to look for unfamiliar, local words and for familiar words that are used in unfamiliar ways". An example of indigenous typology is when dyslexic individuals use words out of context.

Bernard and Ryan (2010:57) cite Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) work which: "observed that people often represent their thoughts, behaviours, and experiences with metaphors and analogies". Burden (2005) concurs as he also discusses the use of metaphors that frame the participants' experiences. Burden (2005:43) highlights that the value of a metaphor is when people seek to resolve confusion:

"When we are confused about things that happen to us in our lives, each of us tries to make sense of what is happening in our own individual way, often by conjuring up a picture in our minds of the problems with which we are faced in order to make them more real and/or manageable. This use of language and non-verbal images to represent an idea or concept in another way is what is what we mean by metaphor."

Burden (2005:44) further believes that through the construction of interviews that prompt discussion, dyslexic individuals are able “to make sense of their condition.” He notes that often dyslexic individuals are not aware of these metaphors that frame their experience of dyslexia as they are not obvious to the individual. In Burden’s research experience the majority of metaphors he uncovered related to “some form of obstacle or barrier that was interfering with the learning process” (2005:44). Some obstacles were seen to be surmountable and others appeared to be insurmountable.

Similarities and differences are likened to the constant comparison method (Bernard and Ryan, 2010:58). This comparison method enables systematic comparisons across sets of data that are representative of the respondents’ experiences both similar and different. In this thesis each of the participants interviewed would have been assessed and diagnosed as dyslexic. This would represent an experience that resembles another participant’s experience, even if each individual’s experience was with a different Educational Psychologist. Alternately differences would represent the inconsistencies that arise such as Candice experiencing little or no support compared to the other four candidates receiving acknowledgment and full support of their dyslexic condition.

Lastly, linguistic connectors represent the ways in which dyslexic individuals associate with other dyslexic individuals through the use of words such as “us”, “we” and “our”. Bernard and Ryan (2010:60, 61) list the different linguistic connectors; “*Causal relations*” for example “because” and its variants, ’cause, ’cuz, ’coz. This type of text analysis requires strong linguistic skills in the language of text when picking out subtle differences. “*Conditional relations*” reflect another linguistic connector and words such as “if”, or “then” or “rather than” and “instead of” are used. Bernard and Ryan also refer to “*Time-oriented relations*” which are time-ordered events that relate to the interviewee’s conceptions. Furthermore “*X is Y relations*”; “*Contingent relations: X and then Y*”; and “*Spatial relations: X is close to Y*”. These linguistic connectors allow the analysis to acknowledge causal or conditional relationships between words or phrases that add to the richness and diversity of data analysis.

The observational techniques Bernard and Ryan (2010) discuss were helpful in identifying themes from the narratives within my interviews. Furthermore, as Bernard and Ryan (2010) caution, every attempt was made to uncover the themes that the data presented rather than just the themes I was looking for. The following major themes were identified: Diagnosis and the label; dyslexic identity; a different perspective; age brings understanding; effort; disability; feelings of being misunderstood; support needs and structures and helping other dyslexics. These themes were discussed within the framework of symbolic interactionism, with a view to understanding how the dyslexic individual views the world and how s/he ascribes meaning to being dyslexic.

7.2 Diagnosis and the Label

Through social interaction individuals create meaning for themselves (Blumer, 1969). Interaction with others therefore influences the experiences dyslexic individuals have and create meaning associated with their dyslexia. In a society where literacy is paramount, not being able to achieve this skill can be debilitating specifically if the interaction with others results in ‘a negative look’ or a ‘negative word’ such as ‘lazy or stupid’. The label ‘dyslexia’ therefore gives the object meaning and allows the actor (individual with dyslexia) to understand and explain the difficulty. This provides meaning to the dyslexic and to her/his dyslexic condition.

As Riddick (2000) cautions, before the formal label of dyslexia is given, informal labels and stigma can exacerbate negative experiences for the individuals. These were experienced by Jack, Candice and Wade before the official diagnosis was given. Jack experienced negative labels in a look from a teacher and often viewed himself as being a bother or annoyance:

“When you’re younger and when dyslexia wasn’t really known that much, people [pause]teachers, just looked at you as [pause] a [pause] like, he’s a lazy child, so that was a bit frustrating.” (. . .) “But obviously you get teachers that are not that enthusiastic, whether [pause] if a child needs help, obviously it’s that much more effort for them [the teachers].”

For all but one of the respondents, the label and diagnosis of dyslexia has been helpful and allowed them to be straightforward about their struggles. It has also provided them with an

opportunity to get assistance in the areas in which they need it and has provided a reason for their struggles. Frustration is a common expression related to feelings about being dyslexic. Jack and Wade's answers to the question "How does it feel to be dyslexic?" reveal frustration, and a sense of being judged.

J: "Um, at the start of it I was very frustrated 'coz I just, I seemed to be this other kid who is dyslexic and I find some people just use it as an excuse, which is irritating. But I'm fine with it, and you just gotta work through it, and work with what you have."

W: "Ja, it really does help for some people. I had this friend who battled terribly and he eventually had to go to a different school [pause] a special school. If you don't say 'I have dyslexia' then people just think you're quitting [pause] they don't have that [explanation for their difficulties] ja [pause] so it really does help having a label."

Matthew reflects that a not so good thing about himself is:

"my memory because [pause] it lets me down."(. . .) "I feel sad when there is something important I need to remember and I can't remember it," and "people my age do a lot of tuning [pause]if you know what I mean [pause] we insult each other for fun, and then I am usually completely fine with that but sometimes it hits home and it really gets me down. It is especially hard for me 'coz I can't think on my feet, so I can't do [say] anything back" (laughs).

Candice had a very negative experience in relation to the dyslexic label because she found out accidentally. She had never been told that she had been diagnosed with dyslexia nor was the syndrome explained to her. This meant that she never understood her difficulties. In answer to the question "how did you feel when you were told?" she answered:

"Jooh I was upset...like, I felt...how do you ...like you got isolated all of a sudden. You like...I'm different ...you know...you isolate yourself when you find out". (. . .) "I like heard about dyslexia and I was like OK (emphasis), and then the way people told me about it was like, you have issues and you're not smart enough

and that, and then when I actually did my own research I realized that...it's just something you are born with and you can cope with it, so it's not that bad".

Candice said that she believes that her mother did the right thing in not giving her an "excuse" for her struggles:

"Um, I think it was actually a good thing that she didn't tell me [pause]'coz [pause] um [pause] how I see it is [pause] she didn't tell me so I could work around it without going, 'Ah, I'm dyslexic'[as an explanation] 'I can't do this'[as an excuse]. Now when I look at myself [pause] the fact that I didn't go [pause] 'Ah I'm dyslexic' [pause] it just means okay I can't do it. I just need to learn more [pause] so it helped me a lot. I don't see it as an excuse."

However, Candice also believes that the label is helpful, and it did provide the opportunity for her to make sense of her difficulties, as Riddick (2000) indicates.

In answer to the question "do you think it's helpful to have the label dyslexia?" Candice answers:

"Well in a way ja, 'coz then you can understand why the person is the way they are, but you shouldn't use the label to treat them any differently. Like if you get, if a person with dyslexia is treated differently in a way that they get more help and stuff, and they don't do it themselves then they use it as an excuse."

Candice seems to view the label as helpful to bring understanding but not helpful as it's equated to a weakness: "I would have loved to have done history and [eventually] law, but I got cut off because of my dyslexia."

7.3 Dyslexic Identity

Humans act towards things (objects) based on meanings. The meaning of dyslexia, which in this instance represents a social object because it arises out of social interaction with other human beings, determines how dyslexic individuals incorporate the difficulty as part of their identity (Blumer, 1969:2,10). Burden (2005:5) concurs that the identity of individuals is shaped by the social context and interactions with other humans which influence their unique

sense of self i.e. their identity and, furthermore, that these early childhood experiences influence attitudes towards self.

Jack is very aware of how the working world works. He believes that social connections are a very important part of getting anywhere in life but he also realises that he has to work hard to achieve this goal. These meanings have been defined as important based on the social experiences he has had at home and in school.

J: “It’s you, it’s all up to you, it’s your arse on the line, you have to work, your parents are paying.”

Jack is also frustrated when he gets no support, no understanding, and wants to be seen for who he is:

J: “They [the school] think everything revolves around school but it doesn’t! I do love school and I don’t wish it away, the camaraderie is something you need as a person (trails off)”

When asked to fill in the blanks and complete the sentence beginning ‘Dyslexia...’ Jack responded in the following way:

J: “Dyslexia [pause]um[pause]it’s just like my stupidity of swopping things around [pause] when I think of myself, dyslexia is just like something I’ve had, I’ve always had, and I’m always going to have [pause] so it’s kind of just like [pause] I’ve got brown hair[pause] It’s the same concept. You’ve just got it and it’s part of my DNA, and that’s me! (smiles).”

Wade also identifies with his dyslexic identity, and he has learned to embrace his weaknesses and his strengths.

W: “I like being good at some things and worse at others.”

Similarities and differences in responses also provide an opportunity to identify themes as Bernard and Ryan, (2010:59) portray. Candice, who has had little or no support, does not identify with the dyslexic identity. She associates dyslexia and ADHD with disability and therefore as a negative sense of self. For Candice, dyslexia is meaningful in that it offers a

reason for her difficulties, however, within her social context (School C) and interaction with significant others, like her mother and father, she has interpreted the meaning of dyslexia as being associated with a weakness that cannot be used as an excuse for not working hard. In contrast, Kelly has had a considerable amount of support and identifies with her dyslexic identity. When asked what would come to mind if I just said the word “dyslexia”, Kelly answered “Me! Just me! (laughs). It’s not the worst thing in the world and it’s not like the best thing in the world, ja it’s just me.” Matthew has a positive approach to his dyslexia: “[It] can be difficult but it’s not impossible to overcome.” Mathew feels frustrated with the fact that he is dyslexic. However he also embraces his difference as he relates:

“I’d rather know than not know. Um, ja and I sort of you know, like, I almost [pause] I know I think differently to other people and I’m not sure if it’s to do with dyslexia or not, but I do enjoy thinking differently to everybody else.”

The contrast in Candice’s and Kelly’s experiences of dyslexia provide an example of Blumer’s (1969:11) discussion of how individuals bring meaning to objects and highlights the idea that objects such as dyslexia can mean different things to different people. The reason for this is that the way dyslexics define their dyslexia relates to their experiences and interaction with others.

7.4 A Different Perspective

Bernard & Ryan (2010:56) discuss identifying common concepts through “repetitive themes”, and dyslexic individuals who were interviewed believe that they see things differently to non-dyslexics. The common and repetitive theme that emerges throughout the data is that of seeing things differently, from a different perspective. What this means for the dyslexic individual is that they are aware of their difference and will act towards others in society based on this perspective. A feeling of difference can have positive or negative effects on behaviour, based on the interactions within different contexts. Within the educational context of Grahamstown this is what these individuals feel about their difference:

G: “So how does it feel, being dyslexic?”

W: “I don’t know [pause] I enjoy it.”

G: "Why?"

W: "'Coz it makes things fun [pause] playing scrabble is amazing (laughs). I love scrabble. Ja, it's the hardest game in the world, chess is a lot easier [pause] but scrabble you can clown around with it. I love it [pause] making up big words is fun [pause] my brain works completely different. They did this test on me and I had the puzzle solving brain of like a grade 11, but the reading skill of like a grade 6, or whatever, so ja (trails off)"

Wade enjoys his difference. He has learned to embrace it. His response to the open ended question "A good thing about me is...?" was "everything's always a surprise because [pause] it makes life fun."

W: "My brain works completely different"

Jack also says he sees things differently:

G: "A good thing about me is . . . and because . . ."

J: "'Coz I've always had to work at life, I always say that you [dyslexics] see things in a different view, nothing ever comes easy to you [pause]it's [pause]and for me, my personality is [pause] sometimes when[pause] because I'd been bullied so much I nowadays [pause] I don't take cognisance of that. I am who I am [pause] life's cool. I'm having fun at the moment. I have no worries of adulthood, um [pause] I can just live. I can do what I need to do and have fun when I need to have fun [pause] sometimes [pause] I'm a teenager and sometimes I take it over the top, but hey that's what happens (laughs)."

Matthew feels that he thinks differently too; in answer to the fill in the blanks question "a good thing about me is . . ." he responds:

"being me, being me, because [pause] I don't know just 'coz I'm me and I'm comfortable with myself. Of course I'd like to be fitter and more muscular and stuff (laughs). I like the way I think in a philosophy way [pause] philosophical way," (he corrects).

Matthew also describes how his puzzle solving skills impresses his mother:

“I’ve got this game on my iPad that [pause] it has a box and it only slides one way and I’ve had it for five days and have done two hundred puzzles and I don’t even have to think about it and my mom [pause] she’s like how do you do this?”

Candice is frustrated that the state school system she is being educated in does not recognise her different way of thinking:

“and you’re asked for your own opinion [in English] then your own opinion is marked wrong.” (. . .) “We [dyslexics] have such a different perspective on life. We see things other people don’t see. I can solve problems so well, but I have issues with other things.”

One of the possible reasons Candice’s opinion is marked down is because the marker (teacher) may make assumptions based on the spelling of the written work and cannot get past that to embrace the expression of the work.

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7.5 Maturity brings understanding

Through reflection and a process of interpretation, meanings are negotiated. In order to interpret information about the social world and about the object of dyslexia, conversations need to take place with the self. According to Blumer (1969:12) an individual needs to see her/himself from an outsider’s perspective before being able to reflect on actions. This then enables dyslexic individuals to identify with and define themselves within a particular role, for example, dyslexic student. Through experience and reflection another common analogy and theme that emerged is that of the maturity of the individual providing an opportunity for deeper understanding of the dyslexic condition. Even Candice, who does not seem to have a good understanding of dyslexia, feels that she understands her condition more now than she did when she was younger. Jack definitely finds maturity has enabled him to deal better with his condition:

J: “ I found that when I was younger, I took it to heart [people’s attitudes], but

as I have gotten older maturity just kicks in and you kind of just [pause]I'm using slang here, but you get over it and um [pause] you carry on [pause]"

(. . .) "For me I am an intelligent person, I'm not trying to be cocky or anything but I know that I am intelligent, but there is one thing that is holding me back and it's a big but small thing (fiddles with his watch). I think with age you learn how to work through it."

In conversation with Wade regarding his diagnosis:-

G: "When you were diagnosed did you understand what it meant to be dyslexic?"

W: "My Dad kept on trying to explain it to me as if like I'd feel bad about being dyslexic, but, like no, you can't change it so why be you know (trails off)"

G: "Okay and would you, do you understand it more fully now?"

W: Um I've [pause] more than I did when I was in grade [pause] when I was nine years old, but [pause] you know I've read a little bit about it and stuff but [you can't change it]"

Matthew's response was similar:-

M: "When I was told, I had no understanding of it [dyslexia]. I've only really started to get an understanding of it over the last few years. I was like [pause] oh cool [pause] I'm dyslexic. (. . .) I understand it [dyslexia] far more than I used to."

Even in discussion with Kelly the youngest of my interviewee's:

G: "Do you understand what dyslexia is now?"

K: "Ja, each year you understand it a bit more."

7.6 Effort

Joint action represents actions of individuals which are ordered, fixed and repetitive (Blumer, 1969:71). This action is historically significant in that it predetermines the way individuals interpret their experiences. Academic environments historically affirm that achievement based on marks and percentages are important if individuals want to excel in school and academic environments. This view holds that the system of meritocracy¹⁷ which reflects academic merit based on individual effort is important to succeed in life. For the dyslexic individual academic merit does not reflect the amount of effort required to achieve and an education system that is based on merit unfairly discriminates against them. Individual effort does not equate to achievement in the form of marks and percentages at school level.

A common metaphor expressed was that being dyslexic required a huge amount of effort for little reward. This theme is consistent with Shaywitz's (2003:81) discussion on the brain pathways that dyslexic readers use to read, which are slow and not very fluent. This is also consistent with Davis's (2010) discussion on the disorientation that dyslexic individuals encounter when the word is not associated to a picture; it takes more effort for the dyslexic individual to concentrate, to read, to learn and even to spell. This can lead to discouragement when effort is not rewarded. High grades are symbolic of hard work, but this is not the experience of dyslexic individuals. Dyslexics interpret the action of attaining grades through reflecting upon the amount of effort that has been exerted, and may then come to realize that the effort involved may not be worth their while. This will involve a change in behaviour or action. Burden (2005) and Riddick (2000) agree that the academic self-concept or self-esteem of the dyslexic can be influenced negatively through this experience.

J: "Coz, I'm putting in extra effort" and "Dad, I did work my arse off for that [60 percent]."

W: "I've tried one or two of those reading programmes but I find they don't help as you have to put a lot more effort than I'm willing to put in for minimal reward."

¹⁷ Meritocracy according to Giddens (2006:1024) is defined as "a system in which social positions are filled on the basis of individual merit and achievement, rather than ascribed criteria such as inherited wealth, sex or social background"

M: “When I was in grade nine, I, um [pause] for exams I made this whole power point [for English] and I went over that a lot because I knew I needed to know it to pass and that was the simple stuff like nouns and stuff ‘coz I also didn’t learn those at a young age, I only learned that about two years ago. But now it’s like more concord and stuff like that and I just don’t understand how one word can agree with another word [pause] like it makes no sense to me.”

C: “I can learn...it’s just slower.”

K: “You have to work really hard at it to get better.”

Working hard is a consistent theme and seeing others work less for higher grades causes frustration, especially if the dyslexic individual has never experienced a high grade.

7.7 Disability

Stephen Macdonald (2009:12, 22) believes that dyslexia needs to be re-defined within the understanding of a “disability rights approach.” He believes that by defining dyslexia within a social model of disability a transformation of the disabling social barriers can occur. This would provide an opportunity for a positive disabled identity and result in positive implications for the dyslexic individual as well as society. Riddick (2000) and Macdonald believe that dyslexia needs to be acknowledged as a disability before support and access can be provided. This would then enable dyslexic individuals and not exclude them from learning.

Consistent with the literature from Riddick (2000) and Burns & Bell (2010), Candice makes a comparison between a hidden disability, such as dyslexia, versus a more obviously physical disability. She reveals that she tries not to tell people about her dyslexia, especially people she does not know. Her English teacher indicated that by law she is required to state her dyslexia as a disability. Candice does not view disability in a positive light.” Candice does not like being labelled as disabled:

“Ja, like I don’t see it as a disability that’s why I don’t like the label of

being a disabled person, like there's people in wheelchairs [pause]like that's disabled! But for us [dyslexics] yes it does stop us from learning as much as other people, but it doesn't stop us completely. Like people who are in wheelchairs they can't walk, that's a disability. We can learn, we just need it [the teaching] to be slower" [at a slower pace].

This quote also indicates that Candice feels misunderstood in being categorized as a disabled dyslexic. Candice's experiences of lack of support and the negative associations of disability with dyslexia have caused her to act towards her dyslexia in a particular way, both symbolically and non-symbolically, by interpreting peers, teachers and significant others' actions towards her. This provides us with an example of Blumer's (1969:12) discussion on humans as acting organisms that possess a self and act on a symbolic level in accordance with interpreting the actions of others.

7.8 Being misunderstood

Some of the dyslexic individuals interviewed feel misunderstood within the educational environment in which they find themselves. This correlates with the discussion in Chapter Six regarding the DIS, where only two participants felt as if they are understood for who they are. Jack particularly shows frustration that his teachers do not take his needs into consideration. He expresses this need for support and understanding in the following quotes:

[if the teacher doesn't give him advance notice of a test then he can't organize himself]:

J: "with a dyslexic person there has to be understanding."

He wants support and he wants to be understood. When doing cycle tests, teachers forget he needs extra time:

J: "I need extra time and some teachers are like 'no I'm taking your paper in

now' and I'm like on question 3 if [pause]I can finish this [pause]I know everything. I was very frustrated in English 'coz I know everything and I looked at the story and I was like [pause] I can fly through it! But I didn't have my scribe, so it took me a longer time, 'coz I find that I sound [pause] I don't know if it's the right word [pause] stupider (sniffs) from [pause]'coz I can't put what I'm thinking through my hand and on paper, what I am thinking sounds completely different to what I actually wrote."

J: "I find that if you can speak well, people are more engaged with you. "It's something I like to strive for [having a good command of the English language]. I like having neat little facts in my brain that I know. Like silly things [pasue] does that make sense? It's just fun [pause] It's silly, small facts that capture you [the person he is speaking to]."

Jack believes that through social interaction people are swayed by how intelligent an individual sounds. Although he wants to be noticed for who he is, he wants to sound intelligent and be recognized as an intelligent person.

Jack reveals the following in answer to the question "the worst thing about being dyslexic is...?"

J: "Um, I'd be saying [pause]I would say the teasing amongst peers [pause]they [pause]the not understanding of who you are as a person. It's frustrating [pause] it's irritating. For me it was just being as I said before [pause] dulled [pause] dumbed down by your own grade and the grade above you, which you're meant to be in. Either way you, you just seemed stupid and I could [pause] I could actually say that if a person is not mentally strong enough they, it, [being teased] would actually take a toll on them. It took a toll on me for a while but [pause] Um I had really awesome friends and I had amazing parents and a beautiful sister [pause] and so [pause] hey, you just carry on with it [pause] you just have to. You're just like, you're just like well the future we'll see where everything happens so [pause] ja [pause]."

Matthew finds that the worst thing about being dyslexic is: “the memory thing, like I will leave a piece of school clothing somewhere and then I won’t know where it is and then that causes problems.” Matthew has an interesting description of how he copes with his dyslexia “I find it good to not take anything to heart like that [being called stupid and stuff] and suggest you soldier through it, ‘coz life is going to be difficult sometimes!”

W: “The worst thing about being dyslexic is...it kind of kills your confidence if you have to do public speaking, (. . .) as soon as I have a serious discussion in front of people where I will be criticized [pause] I can’t do that [pause]I’m good at arguing, but I wouldn’t say I am good at debating, they are very different.”

C: “The worst thing about being dyslexic is [pause] um that barrier you have between other people, it comes from both [sides], more to them [from their side]’coz you try to express yourself and they kinda never been brought up to understand the barrier [difficulty].”

7.9 Support Needs and Strategies

Blumer (1969:11) cites that “the meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts.” The meaning of dyslexia as a social object therefore originates from the definition others in the society s/he interacts with attribute to it. Therefore, if there is access to support such as Jack, Wade, Matthew and Kelly have experienced within their independent educational environments, then the meaning attributed to dyslexia will cause them to act in such a way that they make use of the support strategies and accommodations that are offered to them. For Candice no such strategies exist within her educational environment, and she therefore acts in accordance by implying that dyslexia is no excuse. Behaviour follows interpretation and interaction with others within a social environment.

In answer to the statement “I have the ability to do well in exams if I want to . . .”Jack replied:

“Um yes but with concessions, with the help of a reader and a scribe. I have

the intelligence to do well but I need my concessions.”

Whereas in response to the statement “The ways I have been helped the most with my dyslexia are . . .” he replied:

(. . .) by my scribe definitely [pause] anyone who’s dyslexic and not [pause] cannot put what they think on paper. I recommend that to anyone. It’s the best thing that ever happened to me, my marks have gone from rock bottom to sky high.”

Even though Wade had extensive assistance with the NILD program he still reveals that he has difficulty with reading and spelling as well as essay writing and remembering names. Peoples’ names escape him; “eventually you get to a point where you can’t get any better.” He also avoids things he is not good at, such as public speaking but engages in things that he is good at, such as sport and computers.

K: “I’ve got a lady called Mrs (F) who takes me for extra English and then Mrs (E) she takes me for remedial, and sometimes she helps me with work that we still have to do in class.” () “I can ask the teachers to read the questions and the words I don’t know.” “Like with most [questions] they have like words that we [dyslexics] don’t recognize and then ja, I read it wrong.”

7.10. Helping other dyslexics

Human action is both individual and collective. Humans interpret their world, and construct a response in the form of action. Blumer (1969:16) postulates that humans may do a terrible job at constructing action, however, it is imperative that they do. “We must recognize that the activity of human beings consists of meeting a flow of situations in which they have to act and that their action is built on the basis of what they note, how they assess and interpret what they note, and what kind of projected lines of action they map out” (ibid, 1969:16). This involves a conscious thought through process that occurs through interaction with the self and interaction with others, namely the social world. Although the dyslexic individuals interviewed in this research do not represent a collective group they do identify with one another through common difficulties and understanding. Common linguistic connectors as

indicated by Bernard and Ryan (2010:61) such as “us” “we” and “our” link the one dyslexic individual to another as they identify with one another on a dyslexic identity level. When asked the question of how they would help another dyslexic understand their dyslexia, they responded in the following ways:

J: “I wouldn’t really tell them much [pause] I would more ask them what they feel, and then relate to what I experienced [pause] over time [pause] that’s the best thing that you can do. You can never, you can tell them what they should do, on the path. I would say to a dyslexic kid in grade 6 right now, is, get a scribe [pause] do this [pause] get that [pause]and you, work hard and matric and the rest of it will, will, you will do well and you will be like a normal mainstream student.”

Not only does Jack express how he would assist another dyslexic individual by relating what he has been through. The above quote also reveals a desire to be seen as a “normal” mainstream student. This contradicts what he knows and what he revealed to me throughout the interview. He admits that he will always need assistance in order to achieve his academic goals.

Wade would tell them [other dyslexics]: “Enjoy it [pause]forgetting stuff’s okay and being bad at things is really okay, you know, that’s [pause]just accept it, don’t fight it, just don’t fight it, if you do something wrong, it’s okay. The most interesting people I know are all dyslexic.”

Matthew felt he would tell them [other dyslexics] “what I know about dyslexia is and that we use a different part of the brain, but I would say that it makes you different, but who wants to be normal? Being weird is quite fun, it’s not a bad thing to be dyslexic”.

Candice said:

“I would tell them my own experiences and how I persevered through it.

More the kind of moral, inspirational talk, you know.”

Kelly, who is thirteen, responded:

K: “I would, if they didn’t know what dyslexia means I would tell them what

dyslexia means, I'd tell them what I go through and if they still didn't understand, I would draw them a little picture."

G: "Okay and what would you draw the picture of?"

K: "Like, make a circle (draws with her finger on the table in front of her to demonstrate) and then put a line, not really half way but a bit less. And then, say that's usually the art side and the other side is the knowledge side. But dyslexia's got it swapped."

G: "And why is it difficult when it's swapped?"

K: "Because, it's a smaller bit [here in the brain on the imaginary picture] and it [the information] comes out of this side so it has to go further to get all the way around and some stuff [information] gets lost along the way."

From the above themes we can see that the meaning of dyslexia to the dyslexic is based on interaction with others. Meaning is produced through interaction with peers, teachers and significant others. How others act towards a person with regards to dyslexia give the thing (dyslexia) meaning. Negative actions, such as bullying and teasing, or positive actions, such as support and accommodations, influence the experience of dyslexia. For these individuals, dyslexia has been a process of interpretation. The process of interpretation involves having a self which is able to be an object to itself through conversations with self. During this process meaning is negotiated through self-interaction. Jack provides this example through conversations with himself: "don't be so stupid", "I should know what that says", "If only I had my scribe", "if only I had more time". Meaning is produced socially by interaction with others. A good understanding of dyslexia with support and intervention provides a more positive experience of being different. A lack of support or understanding, as in the case of Candice, results in a negative meaning being associated with the diagnosis and the label. Dyslexia is seen as an excuse rather than something that exists and affects the way Candice learns. Dyslexia (for Candice) is symbolic of struggle rather than of difference; it is a condition that should not be labelled and should be hidden.

Human action is a thought through process. Action is based on what they (the actors) note, interpretation and assessment of what they note, and what projected lines of action are possible. Education demands a certain level of attainment at reading, writing and spelling. It is therefore interpreted as being important to pass at school and get good grades. The actor is able to assess that s/he is not good at this task and will project a line of action. This line of action is based on support and previous experience:-

- a) use/get the support I need – Jack, Kelly, Matthew
- b) persevere – Candice
- c) declare I'm dyslexic – Wade

Symbolic action is interpreted through reflection. A dyslexic's reflection shows that they identify with being dyslexic, with the dyslexic identity. That they see things differently and that not everything revolves around school or academic work. Dyslexics want to be seen for who they are. They want their perseverance to be noted. However, they do not want to be treated differently even though they recognize that they have to make use of the accommodations made available to them.

7.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion on the observational techniques that were used to analyse the narratives from the interviews with my participants. The major themes that were identified and discussed are: diagnosis and the label; the dyslexic identity; a different way of seeing things; understanding of dyslexia comes with age and maturity; a huge amount of effort is required for not much academic reward; the notion of disability; feelings of being misunderstood; support needs and structures and helping other dyslexics. These themes were discussed within the framework of symbolic interactionism which highlights the fact that dyslexic individuals assign meaning to their dyslexia based on interaction with others. This interaction can be with peers within a social and educational environment, with teachers and tutors, remedial teachers and educational psychologists. It is important to note that the support structure that the family environment provides impacts the experience of dyslexia for the dyslexic individual.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This final chapter provides a summary of the thesis by drawing together the various discussions contained within it. Through contextualizing dyslexia as a condition, and providing a historical account and pertinent definitions, the thesis has highlighted the fact that, internationally, dyslexia is recognized as a barrier to learning because not all children are able to learn to read, write or spell in the same way within existing education systems. It has also been established that the South African education system does not recognize the condition of dyslexia as it should. The reasons for this include the fact that educational psychologists in South Africa are reticent to give the diagnosis of dyslexia. Complications associated with co-morbid conditions, as well as the varied experiences of dyslexic difficulties, add to psychologists' hesitance to apply the label. Furthermore, lack of resources and intervention strategies affect the prevalence of diagnosis in South Africa.

Although traditionally much of the focus of research and academic literature, from a causation and remediation perspective, has fallen under the psychological/medical or educational disciplines, this thesis has provided a social perspective on dyslexia. According to symbolic interactionists the meaning individuals give to their dyslexic condition is created and understood within social interaction. Through application of Mead's (1934) idea of humans being able to see themselves as the 'other', and reflect on their experiences before choosing to act, an understanding of how dyslexic individuals are able to work through their difficulties is gathered. This thesis has revealed that this process of working through difficulties is based on the contexts of the individual and therefore on socio-economic status, social class and positioning. In instances where support and intervention strategies have been employed, dyslexic individuals have had more positive experiences than when no support or intervention is forthcoming.

Although these findings cannot be generalized to the greater South African dyslexic population, they do provide a voice for dyslexic individuals to be heard. The main aim of this thesis has been to understand how selected dyslexic individuals in Grahamstown feel about their diagnosis, and the meanings they give to their dyslexia. Burden's (2005) multifaceted approach was adapted and used to highlight the social and educational experiences of dyslexic individuals situated within local mainstream educational

environments. Burden's (2005:33) Dyslexic Identity Scale provided an opportunity to establish whether the individuals interviewed felt confident and competent with specific learning tasks, or whether they felt in or out of control of their lives. The DIS also provided information relating to failure and depression. Jack, Candice and Matthew all showed a positive self-efficacy and locus of control which indicates that they generally feel confident despite their dyslexic difficulties. They did not present with high levels of learned helplessness nor depression, however, they did show feelings of being misunderstood. Wade and Kelly revealed high levels of being understood as well as positive self-efficacy and locus of control.

As a researcher I had made assumptions that my interviews with dyslexic individuals would reveal low self-esteem and poor self-image based on their dyslexic experiences. To my surprise this was not the case, and the following themes emerged in relation to their individual dyslexic experiences; diagnosis and the label, dyslexic identity, a different perspective, maturity brings understanding, effort, disability, being misunderstood, support needs and strategies and helping other dyslexics. These themes provide an opportunity to address the difficulties dyslexic individuals have within their school environments, and can therefore provide a way forward for early identification of dyslexia and practical and intentional intervention.

Four out of five of my participants believed that the label and diagnosis of dyslexia has been helpful to them and allowed them to get assistance in the areas in which they struggled. Although Candice felt the label was helpful in order to understand the difficulties she had been experiencing, she did not believe that the label was helpful generally because she views the label (or condition) of dyslexia as a weakness. The need for support and early identification was highlighted by the fact that the teenagers who had the most support identified with the dyslexic identity, whereas those with little or no support did not. All of my participants knew that they "thought differently" to their peers and therefore recognized the different perspective they bring to class and social situations.

All recognized that through reflection, and with maturity, understanding of their condition was improved. Each one of them related the extra effort required for not much reward. In an educational environment where marks and percentages are understood to reflect the amount of work put into a subject, it is important to understand that dyslexic individuals' experience with effort has been different. Whether dyslexia should be seen as a disability, and the way that disability is socially defined, is an area that needs to be further explored in future research papers. Unfortunately the scope of this thesis did not allow for further focus on this particular theme of disability, whether hidden or physical and therefore obvious. The dyslexic individuals interviewed expressed the need to be understood for who they are as dyslexics, as well as the need for support and intervention.

These themes have highlighted the meaning of dyslexia to dyslexic individuals, based on their interaction with others. This meaning is produced through interaction with peers, teachers and significant others. Dyslexia is therefore given meaning based on how others interact with the person who has it. If the experiences of the dyslexic are negative, such as Jack's experience of being bullied and teased then the experience of dyslexia is a negative one. However, if the experience is positive, with assistance, accommodations and support such as Kelly's and Matthew's experiences, then the experience of dyslexia will be interpreted differently and the meaning given to the difficulty will be more positive. Human action is a thought through process; symbolic action is interpreted through reflection. Dyslexic individuals' reflections show that they identify with being dyslexic, with the dyslexic identity. They see things differently and, more importantly, grasp that not everything revolves around school or academic work. The dyslexic individuals interviewed in my study want to be seen for whom they are; they want their difference to be noted and they want their perseverance to be acknowledged and understood. However, this does not mean that they want to be treated differently i.e. as intellectually inferior. If they are given the correct support and accommodations, they believe that their intellectual abilities will be recognized.

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Correspondence

Sharon Gerken, Davis Facilitator, Balito. August 2011

Dr Jan Knoetze, Rhodes University, Grahamstown. November 2011

Dr Dot Steenkamp, Department of Education, Eastern Cape. July and October 2013

Malusi Mhanli, Department of Education, Eastern Cape. July and October 2013

Bridget Wren, NILD Facilitator, Cape Town. July - Sept 2013

Appendix 1

Davis (2010) Trigger Words

A	be	being	
about	am	been	
again	are	because	
ago	is	become	
all	was	became	
almost	were	becoming	
also		becomes	
always		before	
an		between	
and		but	
another		by	
any			
anyhow			
anyway			
as			
at			
away			
can	do	each	for
could	did	either	from
can't	does	else	front
cannot	doing	even	full
come	done	ever	
came	don't	every	
comes	doesn't	everything	
coming	down		
could			
get	have	I	last
gets	had	if	leave
getting	has	in	leaves
got	having	into	leaving

go	he	isn't	least
goes	he's	it	left
going	her	its	less
gone	hers	it's	let
	here	just	lets
	him		let's
	his		letting
	how		like
			liked
			likes
			liking
make	neither	put	same
made	never	puts	see
makes	no	putting	saw
making	none	run	seen
many	nor	ran	sees
may	not	running	she
maybe	now	runs	she's
me	of		shall
mine	off		should
more	on		so
most	one		some
much	onto	soon	
my	or	stand	
	other	standing	
	others	stands	
	otherwise	stood	
	our	such	
	ours	sure	
	out		
	over		

take	unless	we	yet
takes	until	we're	you
taking	up	what	your
took	upon	when	you're
than	us	where	yours
that's	very	where's	
the		whether	
their		which	
theirs		while	
them		who	
then		who's	
there		whose	
there's		why	
these		will	
they		with	
they're		within	
this		without	
those	won't		
through	would		
to			
too			

Appendix 2 – Advertisement in Grocotts' Mail

ReseaRch on PuPils with Dyslexia–

Has your child been diagnosed
with Dyslexia and between the
ages of
9 and 18?

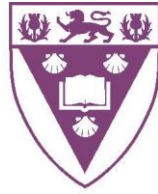
If so, would you and they be
willing to take part in research
by sharing your experiences?

Your input would be greatly
appreciated, please contact
me on

072 626 9362 or email me at
g.johnson@ru.ac.za.

Confidentiality is assured, thank
you. Gwendolyn, Rhodes
University Ma Student.

Appendix 3 – Letter to the Principals, Head of Academics and all local Schools



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

Gwendolyn Johnson

Masters Student

Department of Sociology

Tel+27 (0)46 603 8361

Cell+27 (0)72 626 9362

e-mail g.johnson@ru.ac.za

01 May 2013

Dear Sir/Madam

RE : Research on pupils with dyslexia

I am a mature Masters student at Rhodes University doing research on the perceptions dyslexic children create for themselves in relation to their educational experiences and environments in Grahamstown.

I would like to interview children aged between nine and eighteen years old, who have been diagnosed with dyslexia.

Would you be kind enough to forward my email to parents of children with dyslexia in your school, who may possibly allow their children and themselves to be interviewed. I would greatly appreciate their valuable input.

For more information or agreement to participation please contact me on my cell 072 626 9362 (text Dyslexia and your number and I will contact you) or email me on g.johnson@ru.ac.za.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Gwendolyn Johnson

P.S. Should your parents be concerned I wish to assure them that my interest in this subject is highly personal as I have members of my family who are dyslexic and so have formulated my research questions in such a way that they intend no harm and confidentiality is assured.

Appendix 4 - Email Correspondence with Dr Robert Burden

Response on the 16th of May 2013

Dear Gwen,

Thank you for your most interesting letter. Please feel free to use any of my work that may be helpful to your studies and/or to adapt it to fit your own context. I wish you the very best of luck in your studies,

Best wishes,

Bob Burden.

Emeritus Professor Bob Burden

MA, PhD, Dip.Ed.Psych.,FBPsS, FRSA.

Director: Cognitive Education Development Unit

Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Heavitree Rd, Exeter, EX12LU.

Tel;01392 724795

From: Gwen Johnson [<mailto:g.johnson@ru.ac.za>]

Sent: 10 May 2013 11:29

To: Burden, Robert

Subject: Research on learners with Dyslexia in Grahamstown South Africa

Dear Dr Burden

I am a mature masters student at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. My research involves the perceptions children with reading difficulties such as dyslexia, create for themselves in relation to their educational experiences and environments in Grahamstown.

I would like to interview children between the ages of nine and eighteen years old who have been diagnosed with dyslexia.

This is a particular challenge to me as many of the children with specific learning difficulty in reading, writing and spelling do not get diagnosed as Dyslexic in Grahamstown. The Educational Psychologists I have consulted with regard to this say that they prefer to not use the label, but try to isolate a particular problem such as the problem in perception which then means that they can recommend remedial in Speech and Language Therapy and OT. There is no specific intervention that they can recommend for dyslexia– I know we have tried them all – even the Davis method that Ron Davis who wrote the book “the Gift of Dyslexia” recommends regarding re-orientation. This information will be something that I can add to my research discussion☺

We do not have specific schools for Dyslexia in particular (usually these children need to go to a school where there are physically and mentally handicapped children that attend a special needs school). This as I am sure you will agree could be very detrimental to the Dyslexic Self-Concept.

The reason for my research is that there is a paucity of literature available in South Africa regarding Dyslexia as well as being based on my intense interest in the subject as both my husband and my sixteen year old son are dyslexic to one extent or another.

Your published journal articles are very interesting as well as your book “Dyslexia and Self-Concept, Seeking a Dyslexic Identity (Burden,2005)” is absolutely spot on for the type of research I am trying to do. So firstly thank you for such an informative piece of work. I use your work liberally throughout my literature review☺

Secondly I would like your permission to use your interview questions on pages 30 & 31; The Dyslexia Identity Scale on pages 34 & 35; and the “all about me instrument” on pages 36 and 37 (Burden, 2005). It goes without saying that it will be referenced correctly as this is an academic piece of work!

I need to adapt some of the questions as we don't have a dyslexic school here so the children cannot draw a comparison between mainstream and a special school – they are learners in a main stream education system already.

I also want to add some of my own questions to the questionnaire and adapt the Dyslexia Identity scale to be more simplified to a “yes” “no” and “maybe” as I had a practice run on my son who told me it was just too complicated the way I was asking the questions - because there were too many options for him to keep track of. He is not part of the research but it is great to be able to bounce things off with him from time to time as his understanding of dyslexia is so much more than mine. Due to the nature of Dyslexia I am reading the questions off for the learners I wish to interview and not requiring them to read at all. I have candidates that range from 13,15, 16 and 18 at the present but still hope for more (am still in the early stages of my research☺)

I also intend to interview the parents to provide a contextual history of the child's life as well as teachers of specific interest and specialists in the field such as psychologists and remedial teachers.

Any assistance from you would be most appreciated.

Kind regards

Gwendolyn Johnson (Mrs)

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Appendix 5 - Semi Structured Demographics Interview

The Interview **part 1(Burden, 2005:30and31)**

I am really interested in finding out what it feels to be dyslexic because there is a great deal written about dyslexia but few people have asked dyslexics themselves what it is like.

If you are interested I would like to ask you some questions about your school career, how you found out you were dyslexic and who has helped you with your dyslexia, how you feel right now and things like that. There is no right or wrong answer so you can be honest and tell me how you really feel.

What you tell me is in complete confidence. I will be interviewing other kids with dyslexia as well and writing about how dyslexic children “feel” about their dyslexia in a research paper. You will have a pseudo name (pretend name) to protect your identity. What would you like that name to be?.....

You really don't have to take part if you don't want to but I would really value your opinion and would like to hear your story if you'd like to tell me.

Demographic Data

Name:

Age:

School:

Grade:

Time spent in present school: How long have you been at this school?

How many different schools have you been to?

Position in family:

No. of siblings and ages:

Any familial history of dyslexia (Does anyone else in your family have dyslexia that you know of?)

Father's occupation: What does your Dad do?

Mother's occupation: What does your Mom do?

Residence: Where do you live?

Interview Questions:

What does the word 'dyslexic' mean to you?

Can you have different kinds of dyslexia?

If so what kind are you?

Have you been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD?

Do you think some people's dyslexia is worse (more severe) than others?

If so on a scale of 1 (being the best) and 5 (in the middle) and 10 (being the worst) where would you rate your dyslexia?

What would you say your main difficulties are?

Do you sometimes suffer from clumsiness?

Can you skip?

Have you ever struggled with remembering the days of the week?

Would you say that you are an organized person?

(room, clothes, schoolwork?)

Do you have difficulties in English?

Do you have difficulties in subjects other than English?

Why do you think this is?

How do you think people come to be dyslexic? Born like it.....?

Do you think dyslexia can be cured?

If so how?

If not, can you get better in any way?

If you can get better how?

How old were you when you first found out you were dyslexic?

Who told you? (How were you diagnosed?)

How did you feel when you were told?

At first did you understand what it meant to be dyslexic?

Do you understand it more fully now?

Did anything change after you were diagnosed?

Did any teachers take note of your struggles?

Before you were diagnosed how did teachers treat you?

How did other kids treat you before you were diagnosed?

Do you tell teachers or peers that you are dyslexic?

If so why?

If not, why not?

Do you think that they understand what it's like to be dyslexic?

Who has helped you the most to understand your dyslexia?

How did they do that?

Are you coping in mainstream?

Does anyone at your school give you specific help for your dyslexia?

If so who?

What kind of help do they give you?

If there was a special school for dyslexic children would you prefer to go to a school like that?

If so why?

If not, why not?

How does it feel to be labelled dyslexic?

(relieved....ashamed...happy.....sad....frustrated?)

What do you think the future holds for you? (What do you want to do with your life when you leave school?)

Appendix 6 – Dyslexic Identity Scale (DIS)

The Dyslexia Identity Scale Part 2

Questionnaire adapted from Burden, 2005:34 and 35.

Burden's YES yes ? no No seemed too confusing when asking children the questions so it has been adapted for this study to Yes, No and Not Sure.

The following statements are about how it feels to be dyslexic.

Every dyslexic person feels differently. I want to know how you feel.

There are no right or wrong answers so please be as honest as you can.

All you have to do is listen to the statement and answer

YES if you think it is definitely true

No if you think it is definitely not true

NOT SURE if you are not sure

1. Most people understand how it feels to be dyslexic	Y	N	NS
2. The teachers at my school really understand my difficulties	Y	N	NS
3. I wish I wasn't dyslexic	Y	N	NS
4. If I try hard I can achieve as much as anyone else	Y	N	NS
5. Being dyslexic really bothers me	Y	N	NS
6. I can be good at maths if I really want to	Y	N	NS
7. My dyslexia makes it really impossible for me to do well at School	Y	N	NS
8. I can be good at English if I really want to	Y	N	NS
9. I sometimes feel depressed about being dyslexic	Y	N	NS

10. The teachers help me with my difficulties	Y	N	NS
11. I have the ability to do well in exams if I want to	Y	N	NS
12. Dyslexia is a curse	Y	N	NS
13. On the whole I feel good about myself	Y	N	NS
14. There are worse things than being dyslexic	Y	N	NS
15. No matter how hard I try I will never be as good at school As someone who is not dyslexic	Y	N	NS
16. I keep wishing my dyslexia would go away	Y	N	NS
17. Only another dyslexic person can really understand what It means to be dyslexic	Y	N	NS
18. Much of the time I feel depressed about being dyslexic	Y	N	NS
19. How well I do in the future is up to me	Y	N	NS
20. I will always be held back by my dyslexic difficulties	Y	N	NS
21. My mother understands how I feel about being dyslexic	Y	N	NS
22. My Father understands how I feel about being dyslexic	Y	N	NS
23. (NA)			

24. I know how I can overcome my learning difficulties Y N NS

25. Most of the time I like being me Y N NS

Appendix 7 – All about me open ended questions

All about me open ended sentence completion instrument (Part 3). Burden 2005.

I am going to read the first part of some unfinished sentences.

What I would like you to do is finish each sentence off for me.

Use the first thoughts that come into your head.

Don't think about your answers too much – just let the words come out for themselves.

1. My name is.....
2. My birthday is....
3. My favourite food is.....
4. My favourite pastime (hobby) is.....
5. When I leave school I want to.....
6. The things I like best about school are.....
7. The things I don't like about school are.....
8. My favourite subjects are.....
9. I like them because.....
10. The subjects I don't like much are.....
11. I don't like them because.....
12. When I do well at schoolwork, the main reasons are usually because.....
13. When I don't do well at my schoolwork, the main reasons usually are because.....
14. A good thing about being me is..... because.....
15. A not-so-good thing about being me is because....
16. I feel really happy when.....
17. I feel miserable or sad when.....
18. The best thing that has ever happened to me was.....
19. The worst thing about being dyslexic is.....
20. The ways I have been helped the most with my dyslexia are.....
21. I get annoyed or cross when.....
22. The thing I need most now is.....
23. Dyslexia.....
24. If I wanted to help someone else understand their dyslexia, I would tell them.....

Appendix 8 - Interview with Parents

July 2013 **Interview with Parents**

General Questions:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview your child and yourselves, I really appreciate your input!

Is there any history of Dyslexia in your family?

If so who and how were they diagnosed?

When was..... Diagnosed?

Who diagnosed them?

What was the process that led up to the diagnosis? i.e. what were the concerns that you noted or main difficulties that caused you to have your son/daughter assessed?

Were there any other conditions like ADD or ADHD that were also diagnosed?

Were these diagnosed at the same time or at a different time?

When they were diagnosed how did you feel?

Do you think that the label “dyslexia” is helpful or harmful to your child? In what way?

Were any intervention strategies proffered at the time of diagnosis or thereafter?

How did you explain the diagnosis to your son/daughter?

Do you feel they understood/understand what dyslexia is?

What does the word dyslexic mean to you?

Have you informed the school of your son/daughter’s dyslexia?

What assistance does the school offer?

What intervention strategies have you tried with your son/daughter? And When?

Which do you think were the most effective in assisting your child and why?

In what ways do you feel that your child’s dyslexia has affected him/her negatively or positively?

If there was a specific school for dyslexic children would you have sent your child to that school? If so why – if not why not?

How would you saycopes with his or her dyslexia?

What has your greatest challenge been having a child with dyslexia?

Specific questions from the Interview:

Example

Jack mentioned his sister also has dyslexia, were there any intervention strategies you implemented with her that helped?

He says he had remedial in grade two and three “bridging class” was this specifically for his dyslexia? Did it help? In what ways?

Who would you say has helped Jack understand his dyslexia the most?

Who would you say helps Jack to cope with mainstream education and why?

Is there anything you would like to tell me that I have not asked you about?

Appendix 9 - Interview Questions for Remedial Teachers and Educational Psychologists

July 2013

How long have you been at this school?

Please describe your role and function at this school?

Are you involved in the process of diagnosing Children with difficulties?

What sort of difficulties/ diagnosis do you encounter?

Are you involved in designing intervention strategies for the children that you diagnose?

Have you ever diagnosed anyone with Dyslexia specifically?

If not what does the diagnosis usually entail?

If so what intervention strategies did or can one apply?

How would you define dyslexia?

Is dyslexia categorized in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders). Do you think it has been correctly defined and categorized? If so why? If not, why not?

The Department of Education does not allow dyslexic children to drop one of the language subjects in favor of another. Does the IEB (Independent Education Board) allow this for children diagnosed with Dyslexia?

Do you find the IEB sympathetic and helpful to children with barriers to learning such as dyslexia?

Do you think children diagnosed with Dyslexia should be included in main-stream education? If so why? If not why?

How does this school assist children who have been diagnosed with Dyslexia or a reading, writing and spelling disorder?

Do you think improvements can be made in the ways to assist them? If so how?

Is there anything significant that you would like to say that I have not asked you about?

Thank you for your time☺

Appendix 10 - Consent Form

Consent Form: For research involving pupils in Grahamstown who have been diagnosed with dyslexia or SLD with reading writing and spelling.

I..... herby give my consent for myself and my child..... to be interviewed concerning his/her dyslexia or SLD (Specific learning difficulty with reading, writing or spelling).

I am fully aware that the interviews will be recorded and data incorporated into a Masters research project by Gwendolyn Johnson from the Sociology Department at Rhodes University.

Under the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity I agree to allow my son/daughter to answer questions about how he/she feels about his/her dyslexia or SLD, with the full understanding that his/her responses will not be made public knowledge but only presented within the context of a masters thesis and related academic presentations and publications.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my or my child's participation at any point during the process, but agree at this time to taking part in the research process.

On request I understand that I will be able to obtain an electronic form of the research findings.

.....

Signature

.....

Date