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The Social Construction of Dyslexia in UK Higher Education

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Dedication and acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my family! Especially to dad, whose support has tested the very limits of endurance, and my brothers James and David, whose constant queries on progress ensured a steady supply of interest in the research. It's also dedicated to mum; she was always proud that I'd begun the doctorate but who unfortunately cannot see its completion.

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Abstract

This thesis explores dyslexia support in higher education. The research is focussed primarily upon investigating dyslexia as a social construct, and the pedagogical strategies that are employed as part of a specialist intervention. Given the increasing numbers of students either identified with dyslexia before they enrol at university, or during their courses, the background to this thesis is the assumption amongst policy makers and funding bodies that dyslexia support, specifically that which is funded through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), is specialised and distinct. Investigating the premise that support may be specialist, this research has drawn its findings from analysing the shared understandings of dyslexia, and the social processes that contribute to how specialists respond to it.

The findings reveal that how dyslexia specialists have arrived at their understanding of the conditions is as much based on social circumstances and shared assumptions, as it is anything revealed in primary research. Within higher education in particular dyslexia is constructed through social processes that include psychological testing of students, assessing their needs to allocate funding, and discursively referring to dyslexia using medicalised and disabling terminology. The research concludes that the actual pedagogical interventions used by specialist tutors, and suggested in specialist literature, is not easily justified as *specialist* when compared against similar strategies used to develop students' study skills.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research is focused on how dyslexia is understood by specialists. It examines the pedagogy of support, and the role specialist training has played in both the development of professionals and how that, as well as their experience, has informed their understanding of dyslexia. The reason for this is that I am interested in the notion that dyslexia support may be a 'socially constructed' (Berger and Luckman, 1991) form of intervention. That is to say, the reasoning behind the belief amongst 'specialists' to 'support' dyslexic students may be predicated upon the assumption that due to dyslexia's perceived psychological and biological causes, a specialist form of knowledge is required. Where this knowledge is derived may come from many sources, to which end this research will undertake textual analyses of textbooks on the subject of dyslexia support, and interview dyslexia support tutors, to investigate how certain ideals have become prevalent among dyslexia specialists regarding what is and is not perceived to be 'typically' dyslexic, and how this has contributed to a construction of dyslexia within higher education.

It shall be argued there is a distinct discourse around dyslexia, particularly in the context of higher education support. The research underpinning this thesis takes a Foucauldian social constructionist position in that how support is delivered by dyslexia specialists, and how specialist pedagogical interventions are presented by specialist authors of textbooks, form a discourse whereby the condition itself is for the most part made manifest through a combination of material conditions, specialist strategies and highly organised shared assumptions. The research focuses upon the processes that have contributed to a construction of dyslexia as accepted by a broad base of dyslexia specialists as they relate to higher education support.

The *introduction,* firstly, details the aims of this research and explains my journey to arriving at the decision to explore this area of education. Given the impact the research may have on dyslexia support in higher education, it will also explore the relevance the research may have to the profession as a whole, before summarising the outline of the chapters that are to follow.

1.1 The Research Focus

The requirement to understand dyslexia, what it is, where it comes from and how it can be supported, regularly comes up in discussions with students, parents, academic staff and other disability/dyslexia specialists. An assumption exists that someone in my position, a dyslexia support tutor/adviser for a Russell Group university, must know what dyslexia is, describe its effects, suggest interventions and discuss the latest research. The point here is to illustrate the belief that, amongst dyslexia specialists, people with dyslexia experience academic problems that can be remediated by appropriate interventions, and that specialists have a thorough grounding in the knowledge-base of dyslexia to provide those interventions. This suggests that if causes and consequences can be more readily defined then interventions, strategies and specialist teaching methods can be utilised more effectively, despite certain misgivings in some quarters that there is an 'absence of clear evidence that there exists a particular teaching approach that is more suitable for a dyslexic subgroup than for other poor readers' (Elliott, 2005: 728). Indeed, this research aims to investigate dyslexia support in higher education, particularly the beliefs and assumptions amongst dyslexia specialists that interventions are distinctly dyslexia related, and the inter-textual

processes which may have contributed to a discourse from which policy and practice are derived.

Two research methods are employed within this qualitative research study; semi-structured interviews and textual analyses. Although seemingly very different from each other, in uncovering a Foucauldian epistemic discourse of dyslexia within higher education, it may be possible to reveal how formal ways of understanding dyslexia are negotiated amongst different sets of specialists. These methods are directly related to the aims of this research, which as the next section explains, are relevant to how dyslexia is supported within higher education.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim is to explore the construction of dyslexia with particular focus on dyslexia specialist support within higher education. Regarding dyslexia specialists in higher education, be they support tutors or the authors of textbooks, one question is raised; under what circumstances and conditions have dyslexia specialists come to understand dyslexia? This broad question relates particularly to both the theoretical positioning of this research and how that positioning drives the methods under which the investigation takes place. As Koro-Ljungberg (2008: 429) comments:

> Questions such as, What do we believe about the nature of reality? What is worth knowing (ontology)? How do we know what we know (epistemology)?, and how should we study the world (methodology) guide research designs and interpretative processes.

In as far as this research is driven by any theoretical position, it takes the notion that *what is worth knowing* about dyslexia can be revealed through a close reading of literature (textbooks) as used by dyslexia specialists in higher education, and *how we*

know about dyslexia can be glimpsed through exploring the personal circumstances of dyslexia support tutors with regard to their own journey to their present occupations.

There have been numerous research papers published that have investigated different social contexts of dyslexia, from prison inmates (Lindgren et al, 2002), or between the genders (Fink, 1998), to studies examining pioneering teaching strategies (Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001); likewise this focuses upon one particular social context – UK higher education dyslexia support. The aim is to explore the construction of dyslexia with particular focus on dyslexia specialist support provision within higher education. The objectives are:

1. *To analyse the construction of dyslexia within the content of a selection of specialist textbooks.* Dyslexia support will be investigated as a cultural phenomenon, which means that cultural artefacts will be analysed to discern the process by which the authors contribute to the Foucauldian (2002: 37) notion of configuring knowledge through 'the reciprocal cross-reference of signs and similitudes'. Essentially, it takes the view that 'our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to ignore other things' (Crotty, 1998: 54), which in this case could be other external mitigating factors to explain inhibited educational progression such as poor teaching, socio-economic background or inappropriate assessment methods.

2. *To analyse the construction of dyslexia within the self-reported practices of dyslexia support tutors.* Data from interviews will be analysed in relation to, and in conjunction with, a content analysis of key textbooks on the subject of

dyslexia support. The research will analyse data from interview transcripts of support tutors, concentrating on areas of personal experience, specialist training and qualifications as well as their personal understandings of what they consider dyslexia to be.

The assumed uniqueness of specialist dyslexia support will be examined via a comparison with general study support. Dyslexia support tutors are not employed as subject specific lecturers; therefore, it would be inappropriate to make comparisons with how they engage with students with that of university lecturers. For this reason, the chapters within the textbooks dealing with support strategies will be compared with similar advice found in a general academic study skills manual, specifically Stella Cottrell's *The Study Skills Handbook.* The research will examine whether support is oriented towards students with dyslexia, and if it can be distinguished from non-specialist academic support.

There are many texts available on the subject of study skills, so it is worth clarifying why Cottrell's (2009) *The Study Skills Handbook* was chosen and not one of the numerous alternatives. Amongst both study skills and dyslexia tutors this particular book features prominently. From personal experience I have never worked with nor liaised with colleagues who had not used Cottrell's text; indeed of all the books published aimed at improving and developing study skills, it was Cottrell's text that was used by all the research participants I interviewed, and was cited in all the specialist dyslexia texts. One could hyperbolically describe *The Study Skills Handbook* as the 'bible' of the genre, such is the esteem with which the text is held by all tutors responsible for offering advice and guidance on higher education

academic skills development. Moreover, according to the publisher's website

(Palgrave), this is a textbook that has sold over a million copies and has helped

'hundreds of thousands of students' (Palgrave, 2017). Also, a perusal of various

higher education websites, particularly those pages dealing exclusively with study

skills, cite *The Study Skills Handbook* as a key text that has influenced their own

response to developing teaching and support strategies in this area. A noticeable

example is the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Academic Development

(2017), which cites the text in its recommended reading and reference list, as well

distilling many of Cottrell's suggestions into its own strategies.

Arguably, the notion that there may be something distinctively dyslexia related to

support practice is possibly bound with the idea that, amongst dyslexia specialists such

as authors and support tutors, dyslexia exists as an incontestable reality. Therefore,

asking support tutors what their personal views are based on their personal experiences

and analysing the contents of key textbooks on the subject may yield insights that

suggest there is widespread agreement about certain aspects of dyslexia amongst

dyslexia specialists. The status of this research in itself goes to the heart of what

constitutes a truth to be universally acknowledged by specialists in this field, and how

that ontology can be heralded as the way one should go about supporting students with

dyslexia. Therefore, how one approaches research is a matter that will require some

clarification, especially in the context of the subtle relationship that exists between

language and representation.

Language and representation play key roles in determining how one understands an author's views on their respective subjects (Snow, 2012). The analyses of textbooks, for example, will require something other than simply undertaking a quantitative content analysis of the number of times certain words or phrases are deployed; to undertake such a methodological procedure in this instance could be interpreted by some as the 'misguided aping of the procedures and claims of science' (Collini cited in Snow, 2012: liii). A more thematic, qualitative approach may yield insights into how rhetorical techniques reveal a possible unwitting re-articulation of similar features from empirical research on dyslexia, but more pertinently the mechanisms through which professional knowledge is conveyed within a very particular community of practitioners (Wenger, 1999).

This research is also designed to investigate support tutors' attitudes and ideas about dyslexia. If the data indicates a correlation between specialist knowledge in terms of training/qualifications and previous experience, then this may have profound implications for both the future of support practice and the way students experience their dyslexia in higher education. Dyslexia support tutors have access to many of the textbooks that are to be examined. By asking the tutors what their respective understandings of dyslexia are, for example what it is, how it affects students, and comparing their answers with how dyslexia is presented in the textbooks will go some way to provide insight on the possible shared understandings of the condition.

Adopting a Foucauldian social constructionist approach will not necessarily remove me from the broader discourse I am endeavouring to investigate. I am not an outsider or

layperson to dyslexia support, and as such I am not in a position whereby I cannot 'understand the nature and meaning of the discourse' (Oliver, 2010: 29). Therefore, it worth detailing my own professional journey to undertake this research.

1.4 Journey to Research

The inspiration for this research came from my own experiences and is inspired by observations while holding several similar, but distinctly different, positions at other universities. I have had several years developing my skill-set in academic student support practice, both for dyslexic and non-dyslexic students. I was originally employed by an education agency to support dyslexic university students. The agency was called Clear-Links Ltd and it was/is a private provider of specialist study skills support for students with dyslexia, and who are in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance. The support sessions were funded by through DSA, a proportion of which went to the specialist tutor, and the rest to the company. Companies such as Clear-Links operate in direct competition with other 'non-medical help' providers (i.e. DSA funded support practitioners), which would also include those universities who directly employ dyslexia tutors, and who invoice funding bodies for the services they provide. While in many cases private providers of specialist dyslexia support work amicably with universities, the element of competition within the system means that HEIs cannot guarantee to support their own dyslexic students if their in-house support is tied to DSA funded remuneration. For example, once a student has applied to their funding body for Disabled Students Allowance on the basis of their dyslexia, they are then required to attend an 'assessment of needs' meeting in which a needs assessor then recommends to the student's funders at least two potential suppliers of specialist one-to-one study

skills. In most cases the funding body will select the cheapest provider, which of course means that private companies such as Clear-Links can win a contract to provide specialist dyslexia support if they charge marginally less than a university. The tutors employed by Clear-Links are on zero-hours contracts and are instructed not to liaise or work with members of university staff. Other companies also provide similar services; indeed the charity Dyslexia Action provides a range of services that has established it as a particularly influential organisation. Dyslexia Action is, on the face of it, a charity that advocates for dyslexic people in the UK. Previously known as the Dyslexia Institute, Dyslexia Action is in many ways a good example of an organisation that uses vertical integration as part of its management model. Like Clear-Links it can provide DSA funded support for higher education students, but unlike Clear-Links has established itself much more comprehensively within the increasingly commoditized sector of dyslexia support. For example, as well as offering specialist study skills to DSA funded students, they also have the means to diagnose those students as they employ an array of educational psychologists. Moreover, their services also extend to training; they offer many courses with qualifications and CPD modules up to postgraduate level, and they also provide opportunities for dyslexia specialists to become associate members of the Dyslexia Guild. Once a tutor becomes a member of the Dyslexia Guild, then that tutor can, as a member of a professional body, work as a dyslexia support tutor (funding bodies such as Student Finance England will not fund dyslexia tutors who are not members of an appropriate professional body such as the Dyslexia Guild). Annual membership is usually renewed after demonstrating evidence of continuous professional development, often in the form of enrolling on a Dyslexia Action CPD module.

The Clear-Links position I held led directly to being employed, part-time, by my present employer (I have since been employed full time), as a dyslexia tutor, as well as another HEI as a general study skills tutor. The support I provided was one-to-one, academic study skills teaching (e.g. essay writing, reading strategies, paragraph structure, time management), and, for dyslexic students, funded through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). DSA is centrally funded and is available for students with a confirmed 'disability', i.e. as recognised under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and then the Equality Act (2010). UK students with dyslexia, whom have a post-16 educational psychological assessment, can apply for government support. This can involve funding for assistive computer technology and one-to-one specialist study skills support. Often students are funded for thirty hours per academic year, which roughly comes to once a week during term time. My previous experience as a lecturer and tutor, and my academic qualifications, were considered as essential criteria for employment, certainly more so than an indication I possessed specialist knowledge on dyslexia. On paper I have a number of academic achievements; BA (Honours) Humanities, MA New Literatures in English, PGCE Post-compulsory education and training (PCET) as well as a level three specialist qualification in supporting students with dyslexia, which I obtained shortly before commencing my present full time position.

Three events led me to question what little I knew or assumed about dyslexia. The first was the insistence by my present employers that I acquire a specialist dyslexia qualification before I could be considered for full-time employment. Although it was not considered necessary for my part-time position, it was an essential criterion for full-time employment. The second instance was more gradual; while employed as an academic writing and study advice tutor elsewhere, many of the dyslexic students at that institution preferred to come to this service instead of their one-to-one specialist

dyslexia tutors. (In this position, again part-time, I was employed to support students, one-to-one, with their academic study skills, but the main difference was this service was available to *all* students). Here one needs to clarify some terms, specifically 'general study support' and 'dyslexia support'. As was mentioned, I was employed for a time by one university as an academic writing and study skills tutor. My role was to work with students, often one-to-one, and advise them on developing their academic development in areas such as essay and report writing, research methods, referencing, time management and exam strategies. The term 'general study skills' refers to this sort of service, i.e. academic skills development that is available to all students in the university, and is not exclusive to students with dyslexia and is not funded through DSA. A number of universities provide this sort of service, whether as part of their study advice service, learning development department or library skills team. The point is that in a number of HEIs' students will have access to tutors who provide 'general study support'. This of course is perceived to be different from that of tutors who provide 'specialist dyslexia support'. 'Dyslexia support' is that which is funded directly through DSA and is provided by a tutor who is deemed to be a 'specialist'. Dyslexia support is literally the professional practice of the dyslexia specialist who is funded through DSA. Tutors employed by Clear-Links, for example, are all classed as 'specialist dyslexia tutors' and their support is likewise categorised as 'dyslexia support'. What exactly makes dyslexia tutors specialist rather depends on how one identifies their professional practice as being in some way demonstrably distinct from 'general study support'. This is why I have included Cottrell's *The Study Skills Handbook* within my research methods, to help determine if the specialist nature of dyslexia support is indeed specialist, or is in fact no different from general study support. The students' reasons for choosing to access general study support varied, but

the most prominent criticism that their dyslexia support was 'not relevant' prompted me to question what it was they, other dyslexia support tutors, were doing that was clearly so different from what I was doing (in the same position albeit elsewhere), and why? The third instance occurred while I had the opportunity to work closely with colleagues who were also dyslexia support tutors. What became apparent was that many of them had, like me, fallen into this area of education through fortuitous circumstances, but who had acquired some high-level specialist qualifications (up to masters level). From discussions and meetings, their concept of dyslexia seemed very different from mine. It seemed my understanding of dyslexia, entirely derived from my own personal experience, must transform from being purely an educational matter to something more complicated. It was also, according to my colleagues, neurological, genetic, psychological and even nutritional. Study skills and academic support constituted only a small part of their 'interventions'. Suddenly, advice on emotional support, wellbeing, 'metacognition', breathing exercises and dietary changes were all part of the stock-in-trade of the specialist dyslexia tutor; certainly they were factored into much of the advice they gave their students.

My interest in this research originally stemmed from the observations of the similarities between my dyslexia and non-dyslexia support, but this mere curiosity has been given added professional and sector-wide relevance because of the announcement that Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) funding is due to be significantly 'modernised'. With this in mind, much of the focus of the research, particularly in how the dyslexia support community has arrived at its present understanding, will be of relevance to the higher education sector as a whole, who must put into effect government policies intended to include and support dyslexic students on an institutional level. Thus, how

one understands the nature of dyslexia takes on board a much more important function, as one can speculate that how students will be supported may depend on whether their respective universities, possibly driven by their support tutors, perceive dyslexia to be an educational or pathological issue.

Regarding my positionality, I am aware that my experiences have impacted greatly on both the reasons I have chosen to research this area and the manner in which I have elected to do so. As I did not enter the dyslexia support profession as a specialist in this field, I must acknowledge that my own position is such that I do not intend this research to either undermine the professional practice of other dyslexia support tutors nor to promote the interests of the profession. That said, however, I do have a considerable interest in the continuation of the role, but not, I hasten to add, to the extent that any recommendations made on the basis of these findings prioritise the interests of tutors over students. The issue of my positionality is addressed in greater detail within the *methodology* section. But while I certainly acknowledge my own personal circumstances as being relevant to this research, it is worth explaining the relevance of this research to the sector as a whole.

1.5 Relevance and Impact

The relevance of this research upon higher education support was given added prescience following the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) announcements regarding the changes to DSA funding. Presently, (academic year 2015-16) all students identified with dyslexia are guaranteed funding to pay for specialist one-to-one support. From academic year 2016-17 this will change to some

extent, with the intention being that support should be placed more prominently with the

students' respective institutions as the main providers and facilitators of support. This

has directly affected funding for previously financed DSA roles including note takers,

examination support workers and some mentors; but certainly with recent changes

introduced obliging dyslexia support tutors to be qualified up to level seven and/or hold

professional membership of an appropriate body such as the British Dyslexia

Association, one can discern a trend towards specialist support coming from entirely

within the institution, and not therefore externally funded. The key statement in the

announcement sets out, in general terms, how universities may respond to students with

additional needs:

> We will look to HEIs to play their role in supporting students with mild
> difficulties, as part of their duties to provide reasonable adjustments under the
> Equality Act. These are partly anticipatory duties and we expect HEIs to
> introduce changes which can further reduce reliance on DSAs and help
> mainstream support. We recognise that students will continue to need support.
> However, we believe that HEIs are better placed to consider how to respond in
> many cases … The need for some individual non-medical help (NMH) may be
> removed through different ways of delivering courses and information (BIS,
> 2014).

The vagueness of the phrasing does not disguise the assumption that the removal of

some non-medical help may also result in the removal of some dyslexia support tutors.

Speculative though this is, if there is no substantial difference between specialist

dyslexic and more general study skills pedagogy, then the impact felt by tutors on part-

time, fractional or zero hours contracts may be profound. Indeed, support tutors

working for agencies and universities have already keenly felt the effects of this policy.

One-to-one dyslexia support is classed as non-medical help (NMH); new Quality

Assurance Guidelines (QAG) that came into effect from April 2016 now specifically

state that for DSA funded NMH support to be provided for dyslexic students, there is

now a criteria based registration process for which the following criteria apply, 'Specialist one-to-one study skills support qualification at level 7; membership of professional organisation e.g. PATOSS, BDA, ADSHE or Dyslexia Guild' (PATOSS, 2016). It is unlikely that these changes will affect the integrity of this research given that the interview participants were recruited on the basis of their already existing membership of a professional organisation, in this case the Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE). Thematically there is a definite relevance with current policy and the aims of this research in that the professional registration and insistence on specialists gaining higher level qualifications does appear already to reinforce the belief in some sort of unique pedagogy being available for students diagnosed with dyslexia. This interpretation has recently been given greater urgency in the phrasing of a more recent BIS (2015) consultation document to HEIs and disability related stakeholders. The proposal that 'specialist one-to-one study skills support should not be recommended where a study assistant will meet the needs of the student' (BIS, 2015: 24), suggests the role and function of a specialist dyslexia support tutor is something that is either easily replicated by 'study assistants' or the 'specialist' nature of their one-to-one study skills practice is not so specialist after all.

Embedding study skills into students' mainstream curricula, or students having access to academic writing or study advice services may reinforce the argument that, in the light of DSA cutbacks, universities are quite capable of making all the anticipated reasonable adjustments for dyslexic students without the need for specialist support tutors. On the other hand, should the support, as derived from a close reading of the specialist textbooks and the transcripts of the interviews, suggest that specialist one-to-one dyslexia support is indeed specialist and distinct, then the requirement for

universities to retain and indeed invest in dyslexia support tutors becomes that bit more urgent.

How this research could have practical applications to other support tutors rather depends on whether a 'signature style' of support has developed within the profession. Given the rather uncoordinated nature of dyslexia support practice, the insights gained from this research could suggest that, certainly for permanent and full-time dyslexia tutors, developing a career within the sector could prove to be limited to only a handful of institutions. For instance, even a cursory glance at advertised vacancies for dyslexia tutors strongly suggests that even with several years experience, many tutors could not relocate to other universities to take up the same position if they did not have a 'specialist' qualification, or if they were not familiar with the assistive technology packages. While this research may not be able to provide specific recommendations for recruitment of staff, it may illuminate an area of employment difficulties that have arisen due to the preferred style and different emphases of particular universities.

This rather uncoordinated area of professional practice perhaps explains why the role of the dyslexia specialist has not been subject to the same academic scrutiny as other practitioners in higher education. Therefore, one can state with some justification that my thesis contributes something new, original and distinctive to knowledge; dyslexia support specialists, their role, qualifications, pedagogic practice, background, as well as their individual and collective understandings of what dyslexia is, have not been the subject of research before. Despite being casually mentioned in some research papers and specialist literature, it has always been with the assumption that they were 'lightly trained' or provided a service to students not dissimilar to that of a functional skills

tutor, or indeed a special needs teacher. This research has investigated an area of higher education in the UK that has been, until now, singularly overlooked.

As there is much to unpack in terms of appreciating the differences of dyslexia definitions and the distinctions to be made between dyslexia support and study support, it is worth detailing how this thesis will attempt to negotiate through this field.

1.6 Outline of Thesis

Literature Review: The literature review will investigate research undertaken on dyslexia in higher education and on general concepts of disability. My research is positioned as an investigation into the social construction of dyslexia in UK higher education; therefore given that dyslexia is recognised under UK law as a disability the research falls within this context. The literature review will focus upon theorising disability, particularly research that has been published on the social contingencies that have contributed to both how disability has come to be understood, but also how that understanding has in some cases driven responses to it. It is for this reason that the literature on dyslexia in higher education, in particular literature exploring dyslexia as a disability in higher education in terms of institutional responses, will be examined. The relevance to my research is that literature on the social processes of disability construction, combined with literature on how the UK higher education sector has responded to their legal requirements to put in place measures intended to support dyslexic students, will enable me to identify any gaps in the research.

Theory: This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the research. As well as being a qualitative research study, the main influence for the methods of research and analysis stem from social constructionism and the works of Michel Foucault. If

dyslexia support is influenced by epistemological and ontological assumptions, then one must be cognisant of the possibility that particular practices may be cultural as much as they are professional. How this is relevant to this research is due to my focus on how dyslexia and disability are understood by HE specialists. The *theory* chapter explores the notion that dyslexia and disability can be comprehended as social constructs, and reflects on how this theoretical underpinning has driven this research.

Methodology: This chapter will detail how I acquired the interview data and textually analysed the contents of the textbooks. The chapter begins with a discussion on the theoretical issues of criticism that regularly beset researchers. In doing so I will present my positionality; which is to say that as my previous academic experiences have been primarily in the arts and humanities, particularly literature, I make the case that these formative experiences and the skills of textual and discourse analysis that have arisen out of them, have been deployed in this instance for applying a critical evaluation to modern and contemporary academic material. This section will explain the almost impossible task of maintaining a wholly neutral, objective position as a critic, while also laying out the methods of textual selection and the practical methods of extrapolating from the texts data relevant to the aims of this research.

The chapter will also detail the process of locating, recruiting and interviewing dyslexia support tutors. It will explain how the interview participants were contacted, and how ethical considerations were factored into the proceedings for the purposes of maintaining confidentiality. This section will detail the issues regarding maintaining contact with the interview participants and negotiating with them the manner in which their comments were presented, as well the steps taken to ensure inclusivity was maintained. I will state the steps I took to make initial contact, give a summary of the

emails I forwarded before and during the research and write-up period, as well as explain how the interview transcripts were matched with the contents of the textbooks.

What is Known? The first section of the findings are presented in such as way as to firstly reveal the epistemological framework, which will be done in a section by analysing the significance of the wording and phrasing of the titles of the textbooks, as well as detailing how that is theoretically similar to wording and phrasing used by the tutors to describe dyslexia.

Discursive Strategies of Dyslexia: This section will concentrate on how dyslexia has been constructed as a textual entity. It will focus on the recurring rhetorical and idiomatic techniques used to construct an atypical profile of regularly occurring dyslexia characteristics. Specifically, the chapter will explore how dyslexia is constructed through certain discursive strategies employed by specialists, particularly in how the condition is labelled and to an extent commodified.

The Use of Evidence and Professional Status: This section presents the way primary research and the use of psychology are both utilised for the purpose of lending a crucial legitimacy to the contextual knowledge dyslexia specialists assume to be fundamental to their practice and professional status. On the subject of professionalisation, the findings suggest that how dyslexia is understood and constructed is through a complex process, with evidence and empirical data on one end of a continuum, with accreditation and specialist qualifications located as a liminal space between *a priori* knowledge and the later stages of comprehension founded upon personal experience.

 Supporting Students with Dyslexia: metacognition, reading and writing This section examines the assumptions that dyslexia support has a pedagogy that is unique. The suggestions for strategies contained in the textbooks and the techniques used to support

dyslexic students will be compared with Cottrell's (2008) *The Study Skills Handbook*.

This element will be discussed in a section detailing the thematic similarities between

students' self-reflection and the notion that meta-cognition is a strategy ideally and

almost exclusively relevant to students with dyslexia. The section will also examine the

techniques used to support students with their reading, writing and self-management.

Conclusion: The conclusion will discuss the findings from the analyses and the

interviews in relation to the modifications to DSA funding. The evidence reveals

dyslexia support is not a specialist skill, and certainly not something that can be

distinguished from more general study skills support. The research suggests that

dyslexia support is believed to be distinctly specialist, but is otherwise general study

skills by another name. The nature of the support is not that the professional practice is

demonstrably dyslexic-specific in nature, but that it is an aggregate of policies and

circumstance that contribute to the notion that it is a distinctly specialist practice. The

conclusion states that this may have profound implications for the future of both the

practice of support and the funding of tutors. Furthermore, the conclusion will detail

how UK universities may adapt their commitment to supporting students with dyslexia

by reorienting their focus to providing broader policies and practices of accessibility,

rather than concentrating on an individual, deficit model of support, as is presently the

case.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes a review of literature relevant to my research. Current literature has not revealed much research on the specific role of the HE dyslexia support tutor, but this is not to suggest there are no examples of research that are of relevance. As we shall see presently, researchers have alluded to the role of the dyslexia tutor, or casually mentioned that students have the option to access specialist tutors, their role has gone largely ignored within academia. For this reason one can locate a gap within the literature where my own research fits. And yet, there is much research that is of relevance, not least papers published in areas such as higher education responses to dyslexia and research conducted into the social contingencies that have contributed to the construction of disability and dyslexia. The following section includes literature concerned with the conceptualisation of disability, as social construct. My interpretation of the literature contends that disability in general and dyslexia in particular are not only social constructs, but commodities that presently exist within a western, socio-economic climate.

2.1 Theorising Disability

Foucault (2002) observed that professionals in certain spheres have bestowed upon them through circuitous routes the moral authority to diagnose and even cure those 'afflicted' with whatever category of ailment or impairment they have identified. Whether subsequent specialist treatments and interventions are effective is to an extent immaterial. In the case of dyslexia support for example, one can observe how its epistemic driving force mirrors Foucault's (2009) own observations of madness in that students (patients) are subjected to the 'priestly' caste of educational psychologists who make pronouncements on their suitability for acceptance into the physical environment

of the university. Support tutors monitor progress for signs of deviation and through their interventions help overcome students' 'disabling' condition. It is, therefore, questionable whether the practice of support logically follows from the empirical evidence of the disability, especially if the treatment of the disability may not easily be distinguished from other forms of support. This theoretical position is directly related to the practice of dyslexia support in that support strategies rarely include support tutors actively engaged in the process of fostering a more inclusive learning environment for their students, which largely confirms the suggestion that 'it was not impairment that was the main cause of the social exclusion of disabled people but the way society responded to people with impairments' (Oliver, 2009: 43). Indeed, it is arguably the 'power to control' that may be applied to dyslexia support, as it is still driven by an 'obsession with scientific validity' (Oliver, 2009: 109). As dyslexia is recognised under UK law as a disability, the Foucauldian social model of control and authority provides a prescient insight into the dialogue between the 'scientifically obsessed' researcher and the 'lightly trained professional' (Beech and Singleton, 1997; Snowling, 2000) specialist study skills tutor. The point here is that a particular sort of quantifiable, incontestable body of knowledge is necessarily required in order for 'experts' or 'professionals' to engage in supportive practices with those deemed 'disabled'. This model of disability allows one to include a wide scope of research areas to explore the inter-relationships between empirical evidence and how that evidence may be routinely translated, if not directly into evidence-based practice, then at least into a justification for that practice to exist.

Here we must disentangle the relationship between concepts of disability and particular research paradigms that are of relevance here.

The preoccupation with evidence and its function in disability studies and practice is a seemingly perennial constant for many writers. Oliver (2009) was not the first to conceptualise a working model for disability and impairment, but his contribution has provided a marked influence for subsequent authors. Some have argued the social model of disability, characterised primarily as 'structured by social oppression, inequality and confusion' (Thomas, 2004: 570) leans too far towards a deconstructionist position (Thomas, 2004) in which impairments are rendered obsolete. The conceptual imbalance of what is or is not a disability/impairment was summarised by Finkelstein as an either/or choice; 'you see disability fundamentally as a personal tragedy or you see it as a form of social oppression' (Finkelstein cited in Thomas, 2004: 571). This model of almost binary oppositionalism may be useful to understand how disabled individuals have become recognised by some writers as part of a wider community, but it does rather limit the scope for any potential research that seeks to understand broader social and professional contexts. One is either researching a quantifiably realised and naturally occurring *a priori* ontological reality, or one is aware that disability is 'imposed by non-disabled people upon disabled people' (Swain, Cameron and French 2007: 23). Thus, a fine line is established between how the researcher conceptualses disability, and what elements constitute the main factors that make up the impairment being researched. Certainly, evidence for its existence is taken to be crucial, so arguably empirical, scientific data is paramount to furnish how that impairment is individually and collectively understood. And yet, it would be unwise to accept the notion that all empirical research is either necessary or else ideologically oppressive. This means that, in effect, disability needs to be understood as a 'complex dialectic of biological, psychosocial, cultural and socio-political factors, which cannot be extricated except with imprecision' (Shakespeare and Watson, cited in Thomas 2004: 574). Bury

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similarly argues that the social model of disability denies the view that disability is unquestionably caused by impairment:

> The denial of any causal relationship between illness, changes in the body, and disability comes up against the daily realities experienced by the chronically sick and those who care for them, whether in the community or in health care systems … The point needs to be stressed … that in any overview of disability in modern society, chronic illness remains its most significant cause" (Bury cited in Thomas, 2000: 574-5).

This view, however, has been challenged by writers who take the position that 'science', if over-emphasised instils a reductionist element into human affairs (Morrall, 2008). Thus, Morrall (2008) argues the contribution of science and the mechanisms of its inclusion and status in society is itself a process of culture and context. As he says:

> The continuous rearranging and updating of social and scientific knowledge, periodic epistemological paradigm shifts, and contradictory findings from research studies are indicative of the relatively primitive methods available for discovering reality. 'Research suggests', a stock phrase of the empiricist, is followed by another stock phrase, 'however, further research is needed'. It is likely that the further research contradicts the original research (Morrall, 2008: 37).

Arguably, an understanding of disability is that it is determined by the interaction of impairment and society combined, but nonetheless there are differences of emphases which oscillate between the social model and the medical model. Disability, in this context as an impaired or 'restricted activity' (Thomas, 2004: 574) is understood as a process of epistemological and ontological interactions. These interactions inform how the concept of 'disability' and indeed dyslexia, is understood; as an epistemic aggregate of empirical research, qualitatively deduced insights, policy and personal experience.

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This brings one back to the issue of evidence and the function of research. This is fundamental to understanding the epistemological and ontological position of specialist professionals, such as in the case of case dyslexia tutors because of the implication that a dyslexia support tutor's practice must be driven by some form of evidence. French and Swain (2009) ask the beguilingly simple question 'what is good practice?' Their answer is 'Good practice can be determined and defined within the knowledge base – in recent parlance this is referred to as evidence based practice' (French and Swain, 2009: 2). They also state that as well as empirical research, 'good practice' 'is grounded in the informed intuition, creativity and art of the experienced practitioner' (French and Swain, 2009: 2). These criteria are themselves culturally determined, and the inclusion of scientific evidence is shaped by, as Morrall (2008: 36) puts it, 'the contents and form of his/her society'. Another way of putting it is personal experiences can only be understood relative to the prevailing social orthodoxies, which will determine how supposedly neutral scientific data can be integrated and utilised within society. The point here is that it is societal composition that informs concepts such as 'disability' rather than essentialist quantitative data. Thus my own understanding of the term is premised on this notion; my position is that 'disability' begins as an observation of difference, of which those differences challenge ideals of normality. The social function of 'disability' as a concept, therefore, is twofold. Firstly, it reinforces the status of the non-disabled as the standard by which normality ought to be achieved, and secondly it locates the inability of the disabled individual as the cause of the problem. Certainly, the social model of disability has challenged this notion, but from a professional point of view (i.e. working within an HE disability Services) the medical model still prevails. This perspective is compounded by the fact that for students to even request consideration for any 'social model' adjustments (e.g. extra exam time,

assistive technology, ergonomic equipment), they must first satisfy medical model criteria, which for higher education is written evidence by an appropriate specialist confirming the student's diagnosis of a recognised disability. Thus, to my mind, disability is the combination of difference with label. My position is that 'disability' as a social concept is not really about how an illness, restricted physical mobility, or other impairments are inherently disabling, but that the concept allows society to impose or project its own values onto the disabled person, often with more regard for the person doing the projecting then the person with the impairment.

Timimi (2004) makes this point in relation to autism. The implication from her paper is that disability, in this case autism, will always be somewhat intangible while certain vested interests stake their claim on how the terms are classified, and more precisely how we are to supposed to accept certain characteristics as symptoms of a pathological condition. Autism and dyslexia in particular are of relevance here as both are recognised under the Equality Act 2010 as disabilities despite there being an absence of data to indicate a biological cause. I would agree with Timimi when she states that:

> Without any tangible evidence or organic pathology and any biological tests to substantial our hypothesis of a neurological dysfunction, the boundaries of the disorder can expand endlessly and are dependent on the subjective opinion of the person making the diagnosis (Timim, 2004: 328)

To be asked the question, what is disability?, is in many ways to ask an impossible question. It is an aggregate of experiences and procedures, observations, testing and comparisons. The idea that 'disability' and 'impairment' are somehow distinct or can be disentangled from each other conceptually is problematic. An impairment is still a label, and one often with a substantial evidence base and therapeutic history with which

to lend it credibility. A person, to my mind, can only be 'disabled' once labelled. Irrespective of the extent to which the person has limited or full access to society, 'disability' *is* diagnosis.

Likewise, to be asked what my position is with dyslexia is to largely reiterate the above point. My position is that 'dyslexia' is a label, of which there is only broad agreement on its causes, effects and interventions. From experience I have observed that the difference between students who require 'specialist' dyslexia interventions against those who may benefit from general study skills largely depends upon how one educational psychologist has interpreted the data from a single psychological assessment. As Timimi (2004) pointed out, dyslexia under those circumstances is rather dependent upon the subjective opinion of the professional, rather than the experiences of the student. Under the Equality Act 2010, however, the student is officially categorised as 'disabled' once 'dyslexia' has been identified as the cause of the problems the student may (or may not) be experiencing. There is an entirely anecdotal caveat here in that UK HE policy states that for students to be accepted as 'dyslexic' they must provide evidence in the form of a post-16 psychological assessment. For students identified with dyslexia as children, only for their adult tests to come back negative does rather place them in a liminal situation as being simultaneously dyslexic and not dyslexic. Under those circumstances, their status as 'disabled' is problematic to say the least. Two pieces of contradictory evidence cannot be both right, arguably. By my point is that they can be both right. It is, after all, only the interpretation of the test results that hinges on the label or mislabel being attached. The student's relative strengths and weaknesses would still be the same, irrespective of the reason why they have weaknesses in certain areas. Thus it is the culture of practice that allows some students access to support yet denies others equal availability, despite experiencing the same

difficulties. Certainly within higher education dyslexia support, the concept of 'impairment' is inextricably linked to notions of disablement for the very simple reason that it is assumed struggling students experience their difficulties differently. Which to an extent is true, but only in so far as the battery of testing, assessing, and labelling compels dyslexic students to experience their problems in a wholly different cultural context than would be case for students whose support is supposed to be entirely educational. Both sets of students are 'impaired', particularly in the sense that their ability to engage in the full range of academic skills is restricted. My position, therefore, is that 'disability' and 'dyslexia' are both problematic terms, the understanding of which is confined within cultural frames of reference. They are cultural orthodoxies given the veneer of essentialist credibility through the myriad of research data which serves as much to reinforce their orthodoxies rather than shed light on a supposedly *a priori* phenomena.

This suggests if one is to take account of the contribution quantitative knowledge has made to our social understanding of disability, then understanding that society through qualitatively derived data is equally necessary. Therefore, the following section examines this notion within the context of research on the subject of the social construction of disability.

2.2 Researching the social construction of disability

Locating a socio-cultural context of disability research is an established field of enquiry. The cultural dialectic between the perceived primacy of science (and by implication the medical model) and its status within particular communities has a number of interesting precedents in research literature. Ariotti (1999) examined the notion that the concept of disability is not only a social construction, but a hegemonic cultural imposition. Making the point that disability occurs on different levels (cognitive, behavioural and social), Ariotti concludes that, in terms of service provision, support 'must be based on scrupulous attention to the way each individual and community defined disability. In this way, it is the individual and the community and their perceptions of the issues that determine how the services are provided' (Ariotti, 1999: 221). Ariotti states that as well as the primary problem of definitions and agreed terms of 'disability' 'the word disability, as it is commonly understood, has been constructed during particular historical circumstances in Europe' (Ariotti, 1999: 216). This, of course, chimes with Elliott and Grigorenko's (2014) assertion that dyslexia is a constructed aggregate of different disciplines, as well as assertions made by Loewenstein (2014) that professional vocabularies exercise some considerable control over thinking and behaviour, all of which share a common epistemological/ontological cultural foundation (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). Support provision is associated with how disability is perceived by those whom wield the authority to classify it and recommend interventions.

There is a tradition of disability research, particularly intellectual disability 'from the perspectives of social-workers, psychiatrists, psychologists and other medical specialists' (Klotz, 2004: 93) which has on one level rendered people with intellectual

impairments as 'professionally 'known' in terms of their 'disabilities' or 'abnormalities'" (Klotz, 2004: 4), yet on another provided insights into how specialist knowledge, and techniques/strategies have been brought together 'in a coordinated fashion under a guiding, purposeful philosophy' (Rothstein, 1994: 375). According to Rothstein (1994) for example, professional practitioners 'become an identifiable group … when we choose to collect a body of knowledge and clinical approaches that focused on eliminating disability, when we sought to bring meaningful function back into the lives of those who sought our services' (Rothstein, 1994: 377). The two key terms here are 'meaningful function', which Rothstein later clarifies as 'the disabilities that deprive them [patients] of full participation in life's activities' (1994: 377), and his reference to 'a body of knowledge and clinical approaches'. The reference to both reveals a position centered on the idea that professional practice is remedial and grounded in incontestable evidence. Rothstein has articulated the major issues prevalent in disability research; that practice/process and evidence are fundamental to each other's raison d'etre, and are socio-culturally driven.

Dyslexia is understood according to Macdonald (2010) as a social reality as much as a medicalised entity. Macdonald's conclusions suggests in effect, what the dyslexic student experiences is a form of institutionalized disablism within academic institutions, whereupon academic difficulties are compounded through inappropriate teaching, learning and assessment and because of their psychological condition. This is supported by Madriaga who similarly found many students entering higher education may already have low expectations of themselves due to previous negative experiences (Madriaga, 2007), and who therefore expect professional adjustment or remediation to be made available.

Within the literature what is apparent the perception of dyslexia as a condition consistent with the medical model of disability (Oliver, 2009). This epistemology, however, is not necessarily shared by those writers who have objected to the medical profession's 'progressively lowering the bar for what counts as mental disorder' by recasting 'many natural responses to the problems of living as mental disorders' (Davies, 2014: 40). Many writers have suggested teaching and support practice for dyslexic students and children takes its cue too willingly from the medicalised ontology of the diagnostic procedure (Goodley, 2010), and moreover, that an acceptance of the external origins of dyslexia orients advisers, teachers and support tutors to 'lean towards presuming incompetence' (Goodley, 2010: 212). Koegal (1986: 47) suggests that this way of thinking and responding to particular characteristics is believed on the part of the professional 'to reflect some sort of deficit in the physiological or cognitive machinery', as professionals are socially conditioned to view symptoms 'solely through biomedical and physiological perspectives'. These writers are alluding to the idea that learning difficulties are cultural and social phenomena. Establishing arbitrary criteria for diagnosing learning difficulties lends itself to unnecessary labelling based on assumed generalities (Lea, 2004), which filters through to specialist practice. Yet professional practice, like the term 'dyslexic' can be identity constituting depending upon whether the professional doing the practice is dyslexic him/herself (Burns and Bell, 2011), in which case they are likely to be disposed to a positive attitude towards themselves as professionals and dyslexics. Research conducted on teachers trained to be 'specialist' dyslexia tutors in schools concluded that 'teachers who work with dyslexic pupils view themselves as different from other teachers, as having distinct attributes and different motivations for pursuing their chosen career paths' (Woolhouse, 2012). The implication is that 'specialist' dyslexia tutors may hold similar assumptions

about their own particular skillsets, and perceive themselves in a manner distinct from mainstream educators. As an example of research into the self-perception of specialists, this is relevant to my research, especially as the social context of support seems to be justification for the belief that what is done to aid students is the result of specialist knowledge. However, categorising specialist teachers is by definition also categorising students with dyslexia. If dyslexia tutors and specialists are believed to be specialist, then students with that diagnosis are equally believed to be different. This makes relevant the social processes that lend themselves to people becoming categorised by experts.

Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2016) make the point that impairment categories work in distinctive and cultural ways. Focusing upon autism they distinguish the terms 'disability' and 'impairment' as being categories that 'should never be considered as naturally occurring, scientifically discoverable 'objective concepts' for they are always within cultural, as well as social, political and economic contexts' (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2016: 115). Applied to dyslexia in HE this position informs one's interpretation of the literature under review and the direction of my research. If one takes the position dyslexia is a cultural category, deeply established as a disability within the ontology of researchers and professional practitioners, it becomes apparent the term is a commodity. Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2016: 113) further state 'disability also refers to the marginalization of people due to the (unhelpful) way in which society chooses to respond to those who are deemed different from the norm'. In HE this position is made material in numerous ways, certainly the role of the education psychologist, for example, is pivotal to the process of differentiation, as is the seeming eagerness of many researchers to assume everyday experiences are assumed to be

directly related to the diagnostic process. In this case dyslexia is conceptualised as 'a thing-like form' (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 21), one which exists independent of any cultural context, and whose associated impairments are naturally occurring. As a commodity, that is, something with cultural or social value, dyslexia as a legally recognised disability provides value for interested stakeholders. Certainly Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2012: 37) are of relevance when they suggest the commodification of, in this case, autism is contingent upon 'social arrangements in which the buying and selling of goods and services is not only the predominant activity of everyday life but is also an important arbiter of social organisation, significance and control'. As related to this literature review and my own research is the emphasis on buying and selling of goods and how social arrangements cohere around assumptions of remediation. For example, in his book *Dyslexia: The Government of Reading* Campbell (2013) similarly states that the 'consumers' of dyslexia are the lobbyists who campaigned for the inclusion of dyslexia into disability legislation and the specialists who called for professional recognition of their services. The point is that any research into the social construction of dyslexia needs to divest itself of the assumption the category has intrinsic meaning, and recognise that as Mallett and Runswick-Cole suggest, and as Campbell (2013) states, research into this area should understand the discursive foundations of the term. Taking a Foucauldian approach, Campbell states:

> According to this approach all practices studied by genealogy are by definition both discursive and material in that they are accessed through textual inscriptions, but are chosen because they run through with relations of power and are directed towards bodies (Campbell, 2013: 14).

In the literal sense one can apply Campbell's reference to 'textual inscriptions' and Mallett and Runswick-Cole's discussion of commodification to my own research. For commodification to occur, there need to be commodities. In this case there are a plethora of textbooks on the subject of dyslexia that are widely used by specialists to inform what they know about dyslexia.

Primarily my research is focused upon how professionals understand dyslexia and how that understanding has informed their practices. As we have seen there has been much literature on the construction of disability; although my research is focused on a specific area of HE one must constantly be reminded this localized area does not exist independent of both the individual HEI and the UK HE. Given this research is examining the *social* construction of dyslexia in HE, a review of the research literature pertaining to responses to dyslexia will enable me to critique any epistemological assumptions that may exist amongst the researchers, especially in the context of Campbell's suggestion that dyslexia is a discourse 'not of ideas, but practices' (Campbell, 2013: 14).

2:3 Research into the Social Construction of Dyslexia

Dyslexia literally translates from Latin as 'difficulty with words'. The term itself was first introduced in 1887 by German ophthalmologist Rudulf Berlin. Prior to this in 1878 German neurologist Adolf Kussmaul used the term 'word blindness' to describe 'adults with reading problems who also had neurological impairments' (Dyslexia Awareness, 2017), and whose primary characteristics were poor reading skills and using words in the wrong order. Both men had an interest in adults with reading difficulties, or more precisely adults of average to good intelligence who had reading difficulties.

The move in Europe at that time was to put into effect educational policies that shifted away from restricted to mass literacy (Houston, 2011). The introduction across Europe of institutional policies of mass literacy for the whole population caused a shift in societal attitudes to reading, which changed the educational and intellectual landscape in such as way as to reveal certain individuals as being unable to read at a level normally expected of someone of sound mind and reasonable intelligence. These people, in other words, were noticeable anomalies. In short, the inception of dyslexia as a category of impairment coincided with society's shift towards a universal emphasis on the written word and the nineteenth century's obsession with standardisation and scientific classification. Dyslexia, then, has always been a synthesis of the social and medical model.

Indeed, the medicalisation of dyslexia was reinforced in 1896 when the British Medical Journal published an article by W Pringle Morgan entitled *A Case of Congenital Word Blindness*, in which he described 'a well grown lad aged 14' as having 'an inability to learn to read. This inability is so remarkable, and so pronounced, that I have no doubt it is due to some congenital defect' (Pringle Morgan, 1896, np). Interestingly, much of the article proceeds thence to detail the many primary characteristics of dyslexia (e.g. poor visual memory, phonetic incomprehension, poor spelling and inability to read) that are still with us today. Indeed, current descriptions of dyslexia are strikingly similar on websites for both the British Dyslexia Association and Dyslexia Action to that of Pringle Morgan's. Today, however, the idea that 'word blindness' is an intrinsic characteristic of dyslexia is open to question, especially as that particular feature has its own category of Mears-Irlen Syndrome. Dyslexia today is now understood as less to do with optical difficulties with words, and more to do with the deeper processes of cognition. As will be revealed in the chapters analysing the textbooks on dyslexia, there

is an almost universal acceptance in brain functioning and right-left brain hemisphere defects as the causes for dyslexia, the antecedent of which can be traced to a 1925 theory put forward by American Neurologist Samuel T. Orton (Dyslexia Awareness, 2017). Orton theorised that if one side of the brain was more dominant than the other, then a child's educational development would be seriously impaired without the right interventions. Whether or not his suggestions for appropriate interventions were particular for children with dyslexia or could just as easily to co-opted into mainstream teaching is beside the point. The point is that as early as 1925, neurology and later psychology staked a claim in how the world perceived, thought, talked about and responded to dyslexia.

There has been much research on dyslexia. The research itself is an aggregate of different academic disciplines ranging from genetics, neurology and psychology, which suggests the condition affects language acquisition and literacy development (Pennington, 2006; McManus, 1991; Williams, 2006; Scerri and Schute-Korne, 2009; Carrion-Castillo, Franke and Fisher, 2013), to nutrition which presents dyslexia as contingent upon deficiencies in fatty acids (Stordy, 1995; Richardson, 2006). Many of the conclusions conflate dyslexia with illness. Thus certain researchers describe the condition in medicalised terminology, referring to people being at 'risk' of being diagnosed (Pennington, 2006; Williams, 2006) or suggesting dyslexia is an inherited condition (Nicholson et al, 2001; Ramus, 2003; Shaywitz et al, 2001; Francks et al 2002; Demonet et al, 2004; Shaywitz and Shaywitz 2005). Arguably, language within these papers contributes to the means other professionals (authors and tutors) come to understand dyslexia, indeed *must* understand dyslexia, specifically as a medical and psychological problem. Although my research is not directly related to these areas,

other authors who have researched the construction of dyslexia have made the point that this scientific/medical model of understanding has made a significant contribution to how dyslexia has come to be recognised as a learning *disability* as opposed to learning *difficulty*.

Elliott, for example, has repeatedly researched and criticised this model of understanding and argued 'attempts to distinguish between categories of 'dyslexia' and 'poor reader' or 'reading disabled' are scientifically unsupportable, arbitrary and thus potentially discriminatory' (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008: 475). The point Elliott makes is the construction of dyslexia is based upon a series of assumptions that unquestioningly but tenuously links research into neurobiology, psychology and genetics with reading difficulties. In another paper examining the ways dyslexia is understood, he states in terms of pedagogic interventions 'the current state of knowledge suggests that all youngsters with reading difficulties should be provided with structured intervention programs and one must query whether the amount of energy devoted to diagnosing the condition is a sound use of time and resources' (Elliott, 2006: 14). Elliott and Gibbs (2010) reiterate these points more forcefully in their chapter with the unambiguous title *Dyslexia: A Categorical Falsehood without Validity or Utility.* They state:

> …our contention is that dyslexia is not a distinct and distinguishable category of impairment. We suggest that dyslexia is falsely reified, and is indistinguishable from the generality of reading difficulties. In order to support greater educational and social inclusion, as well as ensuring greater equality of opportunity, we will therefore, argue that the maintenance of dyslexia as a differentially diagnosed condition is divisive and unfair. In short we will argue that dyslexia – as a differential term – is a social construct with arbitrary definition (Elliott and Gibbs, 2010: 289).

Elliott and Gibbs (2010) argue the social construction of dyslexia is initially founded upon observing and classifying perceived abnormalities in human behaviour as the human brain reacts to socio-cultural factors, particularly decoding written word

orthographies and acquiring language. Their thesis is that whereas the brain is a naturally evolved organism, literacy is not. They suggest the different definitions and unreliability of diagnostic testing, combined with an over-reliance on scientific research, has contributed to confusion as to what the term 'dyslexia' means. Thus, dyslexia is a term with no fixed meaning.

However, Ramus (2014) takes issue with a number of Elliott's assertions, and refutes them in his paper, written as a response to Elliott and Grigorenko's (2014) book *The Dyslexia Debate.* This book is a synthesis of many papers and chapters previously published by Elliott and is, like much of his research, an extended literature review. Ramus (2014) asserts that practitioners do have a shared agreement of what constitutes dyslexia, in effect as a cognitive difference that has been adequately defined by the American Psychological Society, and refutes the claim there is no neural basis upon which any understanding of dyslexia can be drawn. And yet, in his refutation of the claim there is no treatment that can be applied to dyslexic students that cannot be applied to poor readers, Ramus does not offer anything substantial beyond a call for more research amongst different subtypes of dyslexics.

The problem with much of Elliott's work is that, as highlighted also by Ramus (2014), he does not base his conclusions on primary research, relying rather on reviewing already published material. Also, although Elliott makes cogent points about what he calls the social construction of dyslexia, Elliott is not a sociologist and has no background in educational research. A criticism of his research is that he relies too much on quantitative evidence from which he draws his conclusions, and not more qualitative research. This limits the relevance his research has on how dyslexia has come to be understood amongst practitioners in higher education.

There is a paradox in Elliott's work in that, he makes the case for dyslexia being a social construct, but approaches it from his own academic specialism. This reduces those social aspects of dyslexia which have informed how others have come to understand the term, not least educationalists and students. Elliott is emphatic in that as far as the term dyslexia is concerned, it has little meaning or value and contributes nothing to how dyslexic students should be treated. As he says in a paper published in 2005, there is an 'absence of clear evidence that there exists a particular teaching approach that is more suitable for a dyslexic subgroup than for other poor readers' (Elliott, 2005: 728). Like Ramus (2014), Nicolson (2005) directly responded to Elliott's assertion that diagnosis inevitably leads to a particular teaching approach:

> The mismatch between diagnosis and treatment is indeed unfortunate. It arises partly from the need for a 'formal' diagnosis, which is needed for legal purposes, and a 'pedagogical' diagnosis, which should inform the development of an appropriate support system (Nicolson, 2005: 659).

Nicolson's (2005) reply, based only upon Nicolson's professional specialism in psychology, mirrors research previously conducted by Paradice (2001) into the social construction of dyslexia. Paradice (2001) takes the notion implied by Nicolson (2005) that different groups will arrive at different understandings of dyslexia, and interviewed numerous stakeholders including educational psychologists, special educational needs co-ordinators and parents. Her findings showed that 'although there were differences between the three groups, there were also areas of agreement' (Paradice, 2001: 213). Her findings revealed there was broad agreement that dyslexia causes literacy and reading difficulties, but little agreements as to what causes dyslexia. Her research revealed that amongst educationalists the link between dyslexia and intelligence is

established, which implies they are either 'not aware of the current debate about the discrepancy hypothesis, or that their own experience suggests to them that there is indeed an issue about dyslexia and intelligence' (Paradice, 2001: 224). Of relevance to my research is the acknowledgment in Paradice's comment that certain professionals' understanding of dyslexia is informed not by Elliott's model of quantitative verification, but from subjective personal experiences, itself echoing Campbell's (2013) idea that dyslexia is a discourse of practices. What the research up until now suggests is that dyslexia is complex and not easily defined. Yet the term is recognised under UK law as a disability, and this has seemingly informed researchers' focus, not the least in areas such as effective responses to dyslexia, or understanding the experiences of those who have it. Certainly in as far as research into the construction of dyslexia is concerned, there is acknowledgement that one needs to understand the condition as a series of experiences framed within institutional practices, but more pertinently that dyslexia itself is approached as an uncontested term; its status assumed to be a self-evident disability. The next section will explore the literature on dyslexia in higher education that takes this approach; it will reveal that within the broad corpus of research on dyslexia in higher education its categorisation as a disability lends itself to assumptions of both specialist support and differentiating students.

2.4 Dyslexia as a disability in higher education

It is contended there are processes contributing to the social construction of dyslexia, chief amongst which is the assumption of disablement and the requirement for students to conform to a higher education culture. In this sense dyslexia is made manifest not by

the 'symptoms' exhibited by students, but through the active collaboration of professionals (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005).

Research undertaken on dyslexia in HE has revealed this, particulary its transient quality. Although there is a broad agreement it cannot be easily defined (Riddick, 1995; Richardson and Wydell, 2003; Mortimore and Crozier, 2006; Morris and Turnbull, 2006; Stampoltzis and Polychronpoulou, 2009; Macdonald, 2010) and no universal profile exists, nonetheless many researchers do not question its status as a disability. For example, in her paper on dispelling dyslexia myths, Riddick (1995) acknowledges there is no agreed definition but nonetheless suggests dyslexia specific interventions can be beneficial for people with diagnosed cognitive deficits. Her research, in which parents and dyslexic students were interviewed to gain insights into the labelling process, does not reconcile the apparent disparity between the absence of any definition and her suggestions there are inherently benign effects in the diagnostic process. What is apparent is a conundrum running like a vein throughout much research in this area. As she states:

> It can be argued that if we wish to safeguard the needs of working class children then it is important that the educational establishment takes the lead in identifying and supporting children with dyslexia so that they can ensure that all children receive the support they need (Riddick, 1995: 471).

Riddick is suggesting dyslexia specialists, particularly educational psychologists, posses a unique body of knowledge that can distinguish between struggling dyslexic and struggling non-dyslexic students, and there is a unique way of supporting dyslexic students that will benefit all. Her research makes clear much of the blame for these struggles lies with the educational establishment for not recognizing dyslexia's intrinsic

reality. Thus a template is established for much dyslexia related research to continue; the term is widely acknowledged to have no definition, therefore the condition is not supported by any universally defined features. Irrespective of this, the belief that dyslexia is an inherently disabling condition goes largely unquestioned.

Riddick (2000) reinforces this point in her later paper examining the relationship between stigmatization and dyslexia. Her thesis is advances the notion that the label dyslexia proves its legitimacy as a disability to sceptical educationalists. To Riddick (2000) the disabling element is simultaneously pathological and environmental, specifically in how her conclusions appear to reject the idea non-specialist educators may have skills necessary to respond to diagnosed students. The implication is that once diagnosed, students must either be supported by dyslexia specialists, or that mainstream educators must take advice from dyslexia specialists.

Contrasting Riddick's notion of the dyslexia specialist, research by Exley (2003) adopts a more educationalist approach to the response and support of dyslexic students. Exley's research examined the effectiveness of teaching strategies for students with dyslexia based on their preferred learning style. Although Exley assumes dyslexia exists and does not contest the notion of its essentialist status, the research nonetheless assumes it is appropriate teaching that can address the academic issues faced by dyslexic students. Significantly, this paper makes no mention of disability or impairment, but focuses on improving academic attainment within an educational context. Unlike Riddick, Exley (2003) concludes supporting students is the responsibility of the whole institution.

However, while Exley's research can be located within the context of educational support, much literature on supporting students in HE falls within a disability paradigm. Research by Heiman and Precel (2003), Mortimore and Crozier (2006) and Boxall, Carson and Docherty (2004) for example posit dyslexia as a series of deficits that necessarily need to be ameliorated by specialist interventions. However, while authors such as Heiman and Precel (2003) describe the academic barriers faced by dyslexic students in HE, and Mortimore and Crozier (2006) summarise students' difficulties as 'remembering sequences, rote memory tasks, problems with telling the time and time-keeping, concentration, writing, copying and word retrieval' (Mortimore and Crozier, 2006). Heiman and Precel (2003) take this ontological assumption in their research and extend it to a comparison of students with learning disabilities to students without in the areas of academic difficulties, learning strategies, functioning during examinations and students' own perception of barriers to learning. On the face of it their conclusions make sense from this epistemological position; students with learning difficulties are 'different' from non-dyslexic students and therefore require specialist intervention in areas such as academic skills, organisation and information processing. Their research indicated there may be distinguishing features characterising some study skills strategies for dyslexic students, but a close reading of how the research findings have been presented indicate their conclusions should be accepted with caution. For example, they report that:

> Students in both groups reported that they understood the materials better if they reread the text or made short notes, highlighted different parts of sentences, rephrased facts, or wrote sentences more clearly. Students with learning difficulties preferred additional oral explanations or visual explanations … To concentrate better on their studies, both groups of students preferred a quiet environment or music in the background (Heiman and Precel, 2003: 251).

In some instances the differences between the students were self-perceptual rather than based on statistically significant results, with the suggestion it was the perception they had of themselves as different and excluded from the learning environment which contributed primarily to their status as disabled.

In similar studies by Boxall, Carson and Docherty (2004) and Mortimore and Crozier (2006), the focus on academic deficits and abstract notions of emotional wellbeing are synthesized into ontologies of the dyslexic profile. Mortimore and Crozier (2006) begin with an acknowledgment that dyslexia is a disability (albeit one with no agreed definition) and posits the symptoms for university students as deficits and difficulties 'acquiring and employing a range of skills that would in the past have been regarded as essential for effective study as this level' (Mortimore and Crozier, 2006: 236). They state these skills deficits include restrictions on reading, spelling and writing primarily. The interesting aspect of this research is, similar to Heiman and Precel (2003), there is a belief in the notion dyslexia causes deficits and moreover, specialist intervention can help overcome these barriers. And yet, like Heiman and Precel's (2003) paper, Mortimore and Crozier state that, even though dyslexic students can access literacy based dyslexia tutors, they also report non-dyslexic students with similar academic problems would also benefit from the same advice. This raises the question as to the specialist nature of that support.

It would appear therefore that dyslexia is understood in HE with an acceptance of its status as a disability with characteristics pertaining to difficulties with reading and writing and information processing. But a close reading of the academic literature reveals something more nuanced. For example, in their research examining the

differences between dyslexic students and non-dyslexic students' writing skills

Connelly et al (2006) framed their research within the context of disability, but made the point that in HE students with dyslexia overcame their disablement with their own coping strategies with higher levels of literacy than expected. While this could be attributed to any number of educational reasons, Collinson and Penketh's (2010) interpret students' coping strategies as acts of resistance against non-inclusive environments. Their paper, exploring the narratives of postgraduate students with dyslexia, concluded that 'dominant discourse can be challenged by non-authorised, informal learning' (Collinson and Penketh, 2010: 7). Of relevance to my own research is that the authors accept dyslexia as an essentialist fact and the educational environment as an enabler of exclusion. However, one needs to take issue with elements of their paper; for example, although much is made on the notion of exclusion, the authors' assertion that students' later academic success were of acts of 'resistance' could be interpreted as acts of conformity. The implication is that the support their research participants received helped enable academic success is one of acculturating students into a particular socio-economic system than it is anything emancipatory. Arguably it is contended specialist support was part of a broader process of commodification identified by Mallett and Runswick-Cole. This is reinforced by a reading of the wider research literature on dyslexia in HE which begins with the assumption that students arrive at their support after diagnoses have been made, and after the term 'dyslexic' has been accepted by students. Many papers preface their research on the idea that students already have a self-concept as dyslexic and disabled (Harris, 1995) because of the social processes they must go through before accessing support. Yet, my own research should not assume students' self-perception as disabled invariably prompts them to undertake rigorous academic challenges for the sake of

making political statements. As some researchers suggest, the self-awareness of students informs the strategies behind their decisions to enrol at university.   Thus, the next section will illustrate how some researchers have revealed the context in which support is delivered, and that how dyslexia is understood is founded on the interactions between students, support staff and institutional responses to their legal obligations.

2.5 Inclusion and Conformity

Under the 2010 Equality Act, universities are legally required to put into place reasonable adjustments for disabled students, of which dyslexia is included. This places a requirement on students to disclose their dyslexia. This raises the question as to why students would disclose. Morris and Turnbull (2006) suggest from their research examining the clinical experiences of students with dyslexia that diagnosis and the label 'allows access to academic support services within the university, thus providing tangible benefits to disclosure in the form of funding, additional learning support, and enhanced educational resources' (Morris and Turnbull, 2006: 243). They explored how nursing students experienced being dyslexic on clinical placement. The relevance to my research is the reason for students' disclosure was primarily to enhance employability. Dyslexia was understood as an inherently disabling condition that reduces an individual's social participation, and that the support which follows is geared towards the twin objectives of improving certain skills and enhancing employability prospects. Therefore, institutions may need to be cognizant of students' reasons to seek support. In this case the reasoning for support is as an enabler of employability. This assertion is reinforced by a second paper by Morris and Turnbull (2007) who again examined the experiences of dyslexic student nurses which emphasised disclosure. They found some students restricted whom they chose to disclose, and only disclosed when there was a

tangible advantage. Morris and Turnbull (2007) suggest one of the reasons students refrain from full disclosure, especially to their placement settings, was due to a combination of fear of stigmatisation and fear of demonstrating unfitness for practice. Interestingly their research indicated fear of stigmatisation outweighed any consideration their dyslexia may put themselves or their patients at risk. Their conclusion, along with other examples of research investigating the experiences of students enrolled upon professional degrees (Baron, Phillips and Stalker, 1996; Richardson and Wydell, 2003) coheres around the notion that disclosure and support are less to do with overcoming disabling barriers than they are to provide a strategic mechanism through which educational and employment objectives can be met.

Many papers focus upon self-perception, exclusion and overcoming barriers to learning, the majority of which make reference to the necessity of specialist or literacy tutors. My research fits into this literature by locating it within the context of institutional practices. The reason many authors refrain from contesting the term dyslexia is because it is recognised as a disability. Therefore, many researchers focus their attention on the manner in which HEI's respond to their legal requirements rather than undertake any analysis on whether dyslexia is inherently disabling.

The literature suggests that how dyslexia is understood is founded on a legislative framework around disability. There appears to be no reason why researchers should question the impairments associated with dyslexia as anything but inherently disabling. Also, the literature indicates that by the time students choose to disclose dyslexia to their university and access support (after a protracted application for DSA and a further

assessment of study needs), their self-concept as dyslexic has been informed by the processes and practices that have led to this point. Institutional practices perpetuate the belief in the disabling nature of dyslexia, as well the benign effects of diagnosis and labelling, along with the belief that overcoming any disabling barriers to learning is both emancipatory and specialist. And yet, the literature has indicated that the measures put in place to reduce exclusion are framed upon conforming students into a higher education environment. This naturally raises the question as to the specialist nature of those measures, something the next section will examine.

2.6 Responses to Dyslexic Students in Higher Education

As we have seen UK universities are legally required to respond to dyslexia on account of its status as a disability. However, an international perspective allows one to discern some difficulties in responding to dyslexia when the term is not legally recognised as a disability. An example of this is found in a paper by Tanner (2009) who focused upon the deficit nature of dyslexia, specifically the social construction of failure, and concluded from her research that one way of tackling instances of failure is 'the need for societal, institutional and attitudinal change' (Tanner, 2009: 785). This paper is of relevance to my research, especially that area examining the distinguishing features of dyslexia related support practices, in that the context of Tanner's (2009) research was undertaken in Australia where some states do not legally recognise dyslexia as a disability. Tanner's paper concentrates upon the secondary characteristics of emotional and mental anguish that comes with experiencing dyslexia, and yet makes reference to academic success (and by extension an amelioration of those secondary characteristics) as being attributable to the intervention of additional tutors. Unfortunately Tanner does

not extend to questioning her research subjects on who those tutors were, what their qualifications were, or how their pedagogic activities could be demonstrated as distinctly dyslexia related.

Similarly, Stampoltzis and Polychronoppoulou (2009) concluded from researching the experiences of Greek university students that dyslexia (which is recognised legally as a disability in Greece) is characterised as a series of academic deficits in reading and writing, which they state is attributable to neurological difficulties. The state it is the secondary symptoms, particularly low self-esteem and emotional difficulties, that ought to be addressed as much as reading, writing and information processing. So the question remains as to how HEI's should respond to students with symptoms of a disability that can be at once purely academic yet also emotional.

Mortimore (2012) addresses these issues in her paper examining the processes in which inclusive institutions may be created. She points out that despite legislation, not all institutions can guarantee support can be met. The logistical difficulties implementing many of the recommendations for so many dyslexic students, force smaller institutions with fewer resources to respond inadequately. This, according to Mortimore, leads to the learning environment being inherently disabling. Her suggestion for reasonable adjustments is that all dyslexic students should have access to university counselling services, as well as being able to draw upon advice and guidance of specialist tutors. This suggests for a university to be fully inclusive will mean supporting the emotional consequences of dyslexia as well as integrating dyslexia specialists into the environment. However, Mortimore (2012) does not specify how these dyslexia specialists should support dyslexic students, and also states the study skills her research participants received should be an issue for academic departments. Moreover, in the light of Morris and Turnbull's (2006) research which indicated some students chose to

be selective to whom disclosed, the idea of institutional responses becomes much more problematic.

Many of these issues have been addressed by Riddell and Weedon (2006) who framed their research around the legislative requirements for universities to respond to dyslexic students, but highlighted the difficulties found with putting into effect institutional adjustments. They conclude from a series of semi-structured interviews with academic staff that what counts as 'reasonable' may be considered as unreasonable if those adjustments undermine the integrity of a course or reduce the perceived legitimacy of established teaching methods and learning outcomes. Riddell and Weedon (2006) acknowledge the problems responding to dyslexia, especially as understanding it can be contingent on variables such as age and socio-economic background, but their research does not question the validity of the process through which individuals arrive at their understanding, or acknowledge that term may be considered problematic. Their research revealed students have availed themselves of specialists within their university's support services and received advice on study skills and academic development from their lecturers, who also gave the same advice to non-dyslexic students. Riddell and Weedon (2006) and Mortimore (2012) reveal much regarding how dyslexic students may be supported, but little in how and why that 'specialist' support is delivered.

Much research focusing on institutional support to dyslexia follows a similar template. Research emphasises that diagnosis leads to students developing a greater sense of self (Glazzard and Dale, 2013) whereupon they take ownership of their identities. Glazzard and Dale (2012), and Cameron and Nunkoosing (2012) arrive at similar conclusions. In

the case of Glazzard and Dale's (2012) research on the personal narratives of resilience amongst trainee teachers they concluded that dyslexia related symptoms can be overcome with the right social processes which involves identifying dyslexia and enabling the intervention of specialist teachers. The problem with this paper is that their research participants were selected because their personal narratives cohered around the authors' belief that dyslexia related symptoms could be overcome with appropriate support. However, methodologically the research was problematic because their conclusions cannot be generalised and the authors admit 'fictionalising' aspects of their participants' accounts. Nonetheless, their conclusions cohere around other examples suggesting social processes and interactions contribute to the alleviation of students' dyslexia related problems. For example, Cameron and Nunkoosing (2012) highlight that many academic members of staff rely upon advice by support services, and conclude by suggesting support tutors should be fully integrated into the learning environment as specialist cooperative partners.

What can be taken from the literature is that dyslexia is understood as a disability because legislation states it is, as well as the belief it is complex and neurological. The obligation of universities to respond to dyslexic students is not questioned, thus the nature of that support is as amorphous as the definition. Research has emphasised study skills advice is available from academic staff, while also suggesting students make use of specialist tutors. Other research concentrated upon emotional and metacognitive elements of dyslexic students' experiences (i.e. notions of self-concept), and suggest support should be available to address these issues. While other papers, particular those examining the experiences of students enrolled on professional degrees, link students' choosing to disclose as being relevant to students' employability.

What has not been addressed is the specialist advice delivered by support tutors. Certainly there are indications it may be literacy advice, or emotional support, or related to students' sense of self. But evidently support from dyslexia tutors is broadly acknowledged as a requirement for students with dyslexia, but no additional research was undertaken on their professional practice, their relevant training or their own concepts of dyslexia. It is not clear whether specialist advice is premised upon overcoming difficulties with academic development, or if the epistemological assumptions of dyslexia specialists influences students' sense of belonging in HE.

Research dyslexia in HE tends to present the condition as a pathological reality; and although some papers attempt to evaluate the implications of labelling and diagnoses, the term goes untroubled by many researchers. There is a general consensus dyslexia is something that can be detected and once identified its deficits can be ameliorated with specialist interventions. The literature assumes many students with reduced capacity can overcome their deficits through either adaptations to the learning environment or enabling their inclusion into HE. This is seen as the most vital aspect of supporting students, but also framing the discourse through which dyslexia as a disability has come to be understood.

Disability literature indicates the Foucauldian notion that diagnostic categories come about as responses to extrinsic contingencies. Campbell (2013) points out the prevalence of dyslexia in western society owes itself to the economic shift from manual and skilled labour to cognitive labour. This position goes to the heart of understanding the epistemological discourse of higher education and the driving forces behind dyslexia

as a social construct. For example, dyslexia researchers advocate inclusive practices after students have been identified as excluded from the university. Yet there is an awareness this form of acculturation must serve the (ideological) purpose of conforming to higher education culture. In effect the literature suggests that identifying deficits in the linguistic capacity (Campbell, 2013) serves the purpose of enabling inclusion into a socio-economic model. With this in mind, my research is of relevance to literature focused on the social construction of disability and the commodification of impairments.

The following chapter examines in detail the theoretical perspectives related to dyslexia and disability, paying particular attention to disability as a discourse and concepts of truth.

In most social structures, there is an internal logic underpinning the concepts and cultural practices of the members of that society (McLoughlin, 2006; Crotty, 1998). Many definitions of dyslexia indicate a shared agreement about the general descriptors of symptoms, which if taken as an epistemological paradigm, constitutes a significant part of the shared assumptions amongst dyslexia specialists regarding 'typical' profiles. In other words 'being labelled as having learning disabilities can affect other people's perceptions and expectations' (Ho, 2004: 88). The issue is how exactly these descriptive symptoms have come to be widely accepted, but also how they have contributed to a discourse around dyslexia. For these reasons this chapter will clarify how the term 'discourse' is applied throughout this study, as well as the necessity of acknowledging the term within a wider understanding of disability.

3.1 Dyslexia as Discourse.

Dyslexia can be understood from a Foucauldian social constructionist perspective. Taking the position that knowledge is socially constructed then the social conditions that bring dyslexia to bear in the minds of specialists are such that dyslexia depends upon a number of interrelated contingencies to be made knowable. These contingencies include primary research as well as specialist training, personal experience and the shifting focus of support as driven by institutional and governmental policies. As such dyslexia within this research is approached from the position that it is a discourse, and not an *a priori* reality existing independently of human experience. Dyslexia is understood as a discourse that exists within the activities of specialists as they interact and share knowledge amongst themselves. A Foucauldian analysis would not

necessarily identify 'primary' research as the loci for a foundational body of knowledge on dyslexia; indeed, a Foucaltian perspective would reject outright the idea that dyslexia could be reduced to a corpus of texts from which all understanding must flow. Therefore, one must clarify certain terms as they will be applied throughout this study, specifically social constructionism, discourse and disability.

3.2 Social Constructionism.

The *Introduction* asked what is known? The synthesis of the epistemological and ontological lies at the heart of social research which explores the myriad factors contributing to the processes that allow shared understandings of a subject to take root.

The principle that individuals in possession of professional status must acquiesce to certain ways of thinking about particular aspects of their identity, specifically those aspects assumed to be external to the identity constituting nature of their role, plays into the social constructionist view that 'society is actively and creatively produced by human beings' (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 698). As Gomm (2009: 332) states, 'all human knowledge is cultural knowledge, produced collaboratively by social beings in particular social, economic and political relations at a particular historical moment'. Social constructionist research focuses not upon any reality external to the self, but is directed 'towards documenting the way knowledge is produced and justified' (Gomm, 2009: 333). Therefore, dyslexia as a discourse, that is to say the processes that contribute to the means it can be understood by specialists, is inextricably intertwined with professional status.   For this reason social constructionism refers to the complex relationships that exists between people and their circumstances which asserts the

notion that individuals are shaped by their social contexts (Giddens, 2009) which in this case is the confluence of contingencies including the inter-textual nature of the literature under investigation, the political influence directing the implementation of practice and the personal experiences of specialists in higher education dyslexia support. It is on this principle that social constructionism can be for the purpose of uncovering instances of empowerment and disempowerment (Oliver, 2009), through the focus upon how 'participants actively construct the world of everyday life' (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008: 3).

Social constructionism figures heavily in literature pertaining to research methodologies, it is also worth noting there is more to it than its application to social investigation. As Foucault is a strong influence on this research, one should point out that although 'Foucauldian social construction research' is a term casually deployed here, it is most unlikely Foucault himself would approve of the manner in which his works are being appropriated. Therefore, this term will not be taken to mean there is established any universal method which is distinctly Foucauldian, but that this research acknowledges the suggestion that 'constructionist research always has been and will very likely continue to be heavily influenced by philosophers' (Weinberg, 2008: 13).

While social constructionism is taken as a starting point that knowledge is produced and acted upon through the participation and collaboration of people, it also refers to researchers' theoretical awareness which in practice can set 'a particular epistemological frame around various stages of the research process' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008: 429). This epistemological orientation locates the researcher within a discourse that is most likely to be the main focus of the research being undertaken. For this reason, I must also clarify the use of the term *discourse* as it applies here.

<u>3.3 Discourse.</u>

Discourse is taken to mean an established system of knowledge that allows particular statements within that system to be mutually understood by individuals operating inside its parameters (Miller, 2008). In this case there are multiple participants engaging with the continuation of the dyslexia discourse, all of whom come from disparate backgrounds and have distinct professional roles, but who are constituted and made knowable to themselves and each other through the assumption that there exists a 'preferred' version of dyslexia (Miller, 2008). Therefore, as this study aims to research the construction of dyslexia through practice and textual representation, it is suggested that the subjects of this research are located within a broad epistemological discourse.

The textual analyses and interviews will contribute to an understanding of 'what' is known. If we continue on the principle that a discourse is a formal way of thinking about and acting upon what can be articulated through rhetorical statements (Gutting, 2005), then the themes as they are identified through the research can be taken as the ontological barometer to which subsequent views and perceptions can be tested. This is not to suggest the books, for example, form any 'sovereign' corpus of knowledge, from which all subsequent knowledge is derived, but merely that the contribution the books make to the idea that a lived experience such as dyslexia can be reduced to a seemingly immutable objective form establishes the ontological framework of what *should* be known, if only as a sort of justification for the perceived differentiation of students and professional status. The books and tutors are not documents or individuals unencumbered from social contexts, but products of their society. They are archaeological examples of a system of references that establish the notion of expert

knowledge which possesses 'the power to influence the nature of discourse' by exerting 'considerable control over the nature of the educational system and the manner in which people thought about the world' (Oliver, 2010: 37). Which in this case is about dyslexia and how it affects students. The main themes, or statements, as they are identified through a close reading of the interview transcripts and books' contents, will be read as examples of the discourse of dyslexia.

The question of what is being constructed needs to be considered in relation to the 'identification of the rules of the production of statements' (Kendall and Wickham, 1998: 43) and how particular research methods may reveal the mechanisms through which this occurs. It is the epistemological framework that allows specialists to make statements. A Foucauldian perspective allows the researcher to reconcile the objects of the research enterprise (textbooks and support tutors) by uncovering the 'episteme' within the beliefs and practices of a society; and it was Foucault's attempt to uncover these processes that informs how this research approaches dyslexia discourse. How dyslexia is represented in the textbooks and how support tutors have arrived at their understanding can be brought together through revealing the discursive regularities that inform both the conception of dyslexia and the boundaries within which any knowledge of dyslexia is confined. For this research, books and support tutors will be treated as examples within a society that serves to represent the values and ways of knowing of that society. Yet, one must not make the mistake of assuming the actions of all participants in any society are driven by an unconscious desire to preserve a totalising epistemological framework from which there is not the possibility of resistance or independent agency (Foucault, 1991). Dyslexia specialists are inescapably social participants discursively constructed. Certainly, Foucault makes the case that discursive

regularities are complex and difficult to identify with any accuracy (Foucault, 2002), but nonetheless advances the idea that the exercise of knowledge is also the exercise of power (Foucault, 2009b; 2009c). This may possibly lead one to assume there are certain hierarchies of dominance or power existing amongst specialists, and power indeed that is concentrated around access, acquisition and application of knowledge. In keeping with the suggestion that power struggles tend to be over different interpretations of reality, and that it is possible for multiple versions of reality to be compete against each other within any discourse (Foucault, 2009a), this research does not limit itself to identifying consistencies and agreements, but explores the implications of the interactional encounters between the participants. For example, the authors are in dialogue with empirical research, and the support tutors can only support students once educational psychologists have diagnosed dyslexia. Thus, 'power' is not the dominance of one individual, but is a dynamic force dispersed throughout the system in which the social participants operate. Therefore, one way in which one can research the social construction of dyslexia is not through the regularities and agreements articulated within the discourse, but through the disagreements, tensions and random contingencies.

The 'reality' of dyslexia, therefore, is part of the fabric of everyday life through the regular reiteration of its specialist interventions. The effect of this, according to social constructionist theory (Gubrium and Holstein: 2008), is to lock the subject of cultural objectification into a barely perceptible dialogue of reciprocity that takes place in the relationship between people and their actions.

Foucault provides the theoretical position to enable the researcher to locate dyslexia as a synthesis of textual and practical construction. Authors do not simply view a text bereft of any corresponding 'context', but rather: 'it is a matter of being judged *responsible* for

the text' (Gutting, 2005: 11). This means one must be conscious of 'a plurality of selves fulfilling the author function' (Gutting, 2005: 12). Any text on dyslexia inevitably means it is produced as a result of the language and concepts already established in that field by previous writers and texts. The 'plurality of selves' speaks of assumed notions which form a paradigm for understanding what is accepted as 'truth'. Specialists blend seamlessly together as an accumulated conglomerate of interdisciplinary yet unified professionals. As specialists there may already be established a perceived, albeit unconscious, locus in operation which serves to direct how language is used, and what words and phrases are deployed descriptively or rhetorically. Text and context then are combined, which equally is the case for the context in which support tutors discuss their practice. One is not analysing a book out of any social or political context, but locating it in the same discursive bracket as the language used by the interview participants. The content of the books and substance of the 'talk' are not mutually exclusive; so in the same manner in which 'to be an author … is to fulfil a certain socially and culturally defined role' (Gutting, 2005: 11-12), so it is to analyse conversations on the same topic. In *The Order of Things* (2002) Foucault explores the view that truth, as is socially constructed, is perceived primarily between the relationship between language and the subject of which it is it attempting to make sense. Nature, or that which is understood to be natural, can only be comprehended through 'the whole dense layer of signs with which it or they may have been covered' (Foucault, 2002: 44). One can understand how the application of this position for the critic/researcher comes into play; the idea that there can be no single 'sovereign' original text, from which all others are tributaries, means any attempt to present a claim to 'truth' is rather a process of interpreting that text within the existing paradigm. As the previous chapter demonstrated, to understand dyslexia is not to understand it as

something inherently psychological, but as something pertaining to social deficits perceived to be physiological. The linguistic features that make up the descriptors of dyslexia in research journals are not accurately reflecting back a similitude of the 'natural' but instead constructing a reality that has legitimacy bestowed upon it through subsequent citations. Foucault, however, is not wholly exercised by uncovering the established processes that make thoughts and actions possible as much with the idea that a discourse imposes limitations on what can be said and thought.

Foucault (1991) makes the point that parameters of understanding, or 'regimes of truth', do not exist independent of any social or historical mechanism which contributes to their production. There exists a co-dependent multiplicity of practices that serve to function as enablers of institutional power. This is played out discreetly, giving the illusion that development and 'growth' in any given discipline is the consolidation of those already in a position to include or refute additional affirmations of 'truth'. Thus dyslexia as a discourse may be constructed due to sustained albeit regulated processes. Dyslexia specialists must accept that what they know about it is derived not from some incontestable empirical evidence but rather as a core of knowledge 'constructed in a specific matrix of physical location, history, culture and interests. It is the combination of resources available in a specific context from which an understanding might be constructed' (Sprague and Hayes, 2000: 673). Indeed, the social context in which knowledge is generated is directly related to how policies are driven, and moreover, how empowerment and disempowerment are maintained through institutional agencies. This is a discursive feature of what Foucault (1991: 227) calls 'the schema of power knowledge'; knowledge, as understood to be self-evidently defined and broadly accepted as truth, is objectified even when the means of its production are demonstrably social. The key players inside the discipline do not 'stand outside discourse' (Bacchi,

2000: 45) but are compelled to act in a manner that 'produces belief and establishes what, in a particular time and place, is considered true' (Danziger, 1995: 436).

Certainly what early Foucault presents is not an analysis of knowledge, but 'a description of the conditions that allow certain sets of scientific knowledge to emerge' (Kendall and Wickham, 1998: 61). A Foucauldian analysis and critique of 'dyslexia' is transfigured from being a review of relevant literature, to something more encompassing. Dyslexia becomes something not easily understood out of context; it becomes the context. The context is the interrelationship between the presentation and sharing of information, and the practices of authors and tutors. Kendall and Wickham (1998) summarise the Foucauldian method vis-à-vis scientific knowledge as the culmination of a series of 'practices in which the scientist is a multi-faceted entrepreneur, indiscriminately mixing economic, political, natural and cultural claims to construct truth' (1998: 77). To understand what the 'truth' of dyslexia is, is to understand how the many interrelated facets of the condition are in perpetual dialogue. Dyslexia is not understood in its present iteration were it not for its deficit model and all the attendant research contributing to either our understanding of its causes or its experiential effects. Whether one approaches dyslexia from a social or medical model misses the point; it is a disability because of the habituated nature of research and practice treating it as such. The 'truth' about what dyslexia is depends as much on how one understands different models of disability as well as the divergent areas of research that collectively contribute to the ideal of a disabling condition.

3.4 Concepts of truth in research

Theoretical positions regarding disability and dyslexia are complex. Goodley (2011) suggests that understanding disability is one level of the research enterprise; just as

pertinent is an equally clearly defined idea of research. The theoretical model one holds

on disability will influence the design and implementation of the research as 'How you

study disability will depend on how you define good research' (Goodley, 2011: 24). In

dyslexia research, Goodley's observation that 'Individualising moral and medical

models of disability have historically dominated the lives of disabled people' (Goodley,

2011: 24) can be applied in this context. Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) question

'whether biologically based reading difficulties exist' and focus on 'how the dyslexia

debate centres on the extent to which the dyslexia construct operates as a rigorous

scientific construct that adds to our capacity to help those who struggle to learn to read'

(Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014: 4). They state:

> All too easily a situation could emerge where either biological (dyslexia) or
> environmental (non-dyslexic) explanations are ascribed to an individual on the
> grounds of their social circumstances. The reality is that, contrary to the picture
> that is often promoted by clinicians, it is impossible to distinguish between
> neurobiological and environmental etiologies when considering the needs of
> individual children who have scored poorly on reading-related measures, and
> current biological evidence for a dyslexic subgroup does not yet permit
> diagnosis at the individual level (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014: 11).

Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) replicate previous debates on the various models of

disability, but refashioned as a discussion on the existence of dyslexia:

> In the case of research scientists (psychologists, neuroscientists, geneticists) who
> work in highly specialized areas that examine the acquisition of typical and
> atypical reading skills, such debate has sometimes been perceived as introducing
> nonessential complexity that serves as an unwelcome distraction from detailed
> and sustained pursuit of particular scientific inquiries. However, failing to
> acknowledge the conceptual and definitional complexity of the core construct
> runs the risk of each discipline producing highly esoteric and recondite
> knowledge that operates primarily within a narrow disciplinary silo and whose
> practical applications are unclear *(*Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014: x*)*.

The 'conceptual and definitional complexity' is at the heart of this research and how government policy has become enmeshed within the intricacies of ontological evidence and epistemological certainties. There is a premium on evidence 'for' dyslexia, as in the absence of any empirical data policies and practices would necessarily be rendered redundant as 'evidence based' pedagogy. For dyslexia support to exist empirical evidence cannot be divorced from practice. Text, context, inter-text and practice all serve the purpose of generating the power fuelling the discourse, which is pressed into the service of justifying the sort of support available.

This study is premised upon the idea that human knowledge is culturally produced. To that end, this approach leads to a conceptualisation of dyslexia as a social construct, due primarily to the interplay between the language of impairment and how that language may feed into a model of dyslexia re-presented by the authors of the textbooks and tutors within their practice. Many books on pedagogic interventions for students make references to quantitative data; here one can observe 'those ever-increasing and rapidly developing forms of knowledge and practices through which the human subject comes to understand themselves' (Goodley and Lawthon, 2010: 33) embed themselves so comprehensively in the everyday they take on 'the appearance and facticity of an objective phenomenon' (Berger, 1999: 58). Thus 'authoritative' textbooks and specialist tutors are part of this culture, reflecting back an 'unquestionable truth' (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare, 1999: 13). It is this 'unquestionable truth' that illustrates how specialists have arrived at their understanding of dyslexia as an objectified phenomenon, and frames the conceptualisation of support practices within this research.

With the idea that truth and reality are highly pertinent issues regarding concepts of dyslexia as intrinsic or extrinsic phenomena, the following section will detail the methodology of this research. It will detail how the interviews were conducted and the framework through which both the textbook analyses and data from the interviews were interpreted.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This research critically analyses textbooks to discern how they function as 'specialist' literature, and engages in semi-structured interviews with dyslexia support tutors to discern how their experiences collectively engage in the construction of dyslexia as a series of beliefs and practices.

Given the distinctive nature of the two research methods, it is worth reflecting on my positionality relative to the purpose of both research methods. This chapter will also examine my ontological position regarding the nature of dyslexia research. Although this research does not question the neurological, biological or psychological evidence that has been published regarding the assumed physical 'reality' of dyslexia, it does examine the manner in which dyslexia is accepted as an *a priori* truth both within the contents of the textbooks and the practices of support tutors. I make the point that my positionality has been informed by my previous experiences within literary textual analyses; that is so say my decision to undertake textual analyses is a continuation of this background, as is my position that all texts are inherently socially produced. In this context, therefore, my decision to conduct semi-structured interviews with dyslexia support tutors compliments both my positionality and the method of textual analysis. I take the position that knowledge is socially constituted, and that includes archaeological knowledge (Foucault, 2009) of books and the application of knowledge through practice. Thus, my ontological position is that dyslexia is a discourse which exists parenthetically between the physical objects of texts and the professional practice of specialist tutors.

With this in mind, this chapter will also reflect upon my position as a situated researcher. For example, I must acknowledge that this research is particular to my own

personal and professional circumstances. I acknowledge that a different researcher undertaking the same or similar research would bring to the enterprise a different perspective, certainly a point of view that has been informed by experiences and insights unique to them. Thus, even though I am part of the community I am researching, it is unlikely that another researcher exploring the same area of higher education would, firstly, choose the same combination of research methods, and secondly, draw the same conclusions as I. Although I did not intend to become a dyslexia specialist or work in this area of education, nonetheless I am and I do. Thus, I can only interpret the textbooks and relate to my research participants from this insider perspective. This inevitably means that any interpretation on my part will be equally as informed by my experiences working in this area as was my decision to engage in textual analysis as a complimentary research method to interviews. From this perspective any analysis of the discursive strategies of dyslexia construction will simultaneously reveal my own participation of that system, and may if unacknowledged, prompt one to question the extent to which this research either is disinterested in nature or contributes to the epistemology of the community it purports to be researching.

4.1 Positionality

Reflection has prompted me to question who I was relative to the research. My position is relatively simple; I am a white male, able bodied and employed in a relatively privileged position of 'expert'. To the extent that I am an expert in anything, I am regarded as an expert in dyslexia and as such am remunerated accordingly for the specialist advice I provide. I need to be aware, therefore, of the possibility that researching professionals not entirely dissimilar from myself may serve to reinforce the

status of all concerned (researcher, interview participants and authors). I need, as Rose (1997) suggests, to be transparent with myself as a situated researcher, to understand my 'place in the world' (Rose, 1997: 309) and acknowledge my own position in those areas when knowledge is produced through research. What this means in practice is that my experiences as a dyslexia tutor are integral to my research and the extent to which there is a pre-existing series of shared understandings between myself and research participants that would not have existed otherwise. My relative lack of academic background within the field of educational research has less impact on the research enterprise than the notion that my professional experiences (and position) may have bestowed upon me shared values and beliefs with the research participants regarding people with dyslexia.   What the research participants and I had in common was that our professional status was thrust upon us unambiguously because of the circumstances of our employment. In terms of disability discourse, we were professionals, indeed 'health' professionals. As far as research is concerned, even this uniting feature ran the risk of orienting the research towards a reinforcement of professional status (May, 1997), rather than an investigation into the conditions leading to particular attitudes and strategies to prevail. The fact that both researcher and researched heralded from the same area of employment meant I had to be aware of the argument that 'professionals have traditionally been seen to be 'oppressors' to disabled people and it appears pertinent to ask whether in consequence they are more ineligible than other groups to undertake research into disability' (Bricher, 2000: 781-2). That this research does not focus on disabled people is not immaterial. Dyslexic students are our *raison d'etre*, which makes their relevance to this research inevitable, but also risks underscoring certain beliefs that 'experts' see themselves in the role of empowered 'knowers' (Stone and Priestly, 1996). I acknowledge, therefore, that consciously excluding the dyslexic

student voice from this research may undermine its integrity, particularly should the conclusions indicate that the pedagogical activities of specialist tutors are indistinguishable from non-specialist study skills advice.

It is often assumed that within social science research there is the belief that 'it is the researchers who have specialist knowledge and skills; and that it is they who should decide what topics should be researched (Oliver, 1992: 23). And yet, 'there is a necessary presupposition concerning the starting point of the research. The researcher and researched must begin with some kind of (superficially) shared topic, verbalized in terms which they both recognise as meaningful' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 298). I acknowledge that because we shared the same positions, I would be conscious not to privilege the participants' contribution (Hurdley, 2010) in such a way as to base the foundations of this research on the assumption that we were 'experts'. This is, of course, easier said than done, especially as Stone and Priestly (1996) strongly suggest that this sort of disability research is inherently parasitic to the lived experiences of disabled students. Regarding my position, I am the arbiter of relevance, and there necessarily are shared understandings amongst the research participants, which of course would be very different had the student perspective been included. It is important, therefore, that for the research to maintain its integrity, I need to clarify my ontological position regarding how I investigate socially constructed practices in a manner that is academically acceptable and consistent with my previous and present experiences.

4.1.2 Ontological Position

My positionality vis-à-vis discourse analysis and the social construction of knowledge (be it as a research enterprise, specialist textbook or professional practice) stems from

my previous experiences as both a student and lecturer of literature. Coming from the arts and humanities into the social sciences it is worth mentioning that for my own part, 'research' and 'analysis' can mean the same thing in the context of research and analysis. Indeed, until such time as I enrolled on this doctorate, the terms 'research' and 'analysis' were at time interchangeable.

Thus my former academic background within arts/humanities has informed my approach to reading textbooks as products of a pre-existing discourse, but also to take the position that 'dyslexia' is a series of social practices from which the textbooks' authors have emerged. I have not approached the books as ''autonomous', as self-sufficient and self-contained unities' (Bennett and Royle, 1999: 3), but as texts 'shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. Texts are made out of cultural and ideological norms; out of styles and idioms embedded in the language; out of connection and collocative sets; and out of other texts' (Frow in Worton and Still, 1990: 45). The textbooks were read in this context. To understand what dyslexia support tutors do and why is to elucidate on the nature of these texts; in other words, to illuminate their contents and how they may contribute to a construction of dyslexia could go some way towards examining what may make the pedagogy of support distinctly dyslexia related.

In contrast with the experience I have with textual analysis, I have less experience undertaking social science research. It became apparent there was the possibility that one method (textual analysis) could dominate the other (interviews), thereby reducing the significance and relevance of both. Therefore, my function as researcher was to mediate between the professional application of knowledge and the circumstances allowing it to arise. This research examines how what is widely understood to be 'true' knowledge (particularly knowledge derived from the natural sciences) has been

absorbed by specialist practitioners via a highly organised set of circumstances including empirical research and following through to textbooks, and professional practice. However, one must be conscious that context is everything, and that includes my own. If knowledge is not 'automatically nonpolitical' (Said, 1995: 10), then by definition this must also apply to the knowledge derived from the act of research and analysis. It would be ill-judged on my part to assume the authorial role of arbiter of relevance. To approach the research is to be self-aware of one's own position. Discourse analysis is the study of implied meaning within the texts and practices, and how knowledge is repeated through practice. Yet, I cannot escape from what Eagelton describes as the 'insoluable conundrum' of criticism. As he says, [criticism's] 'task is to yield us the spontaneous reality of the text, it must permit no particle of its own mass to mingle with what it mediates' (Eagleton, 1993: 11). In other words, through the act of textual analysis and educational research, in which I attempt to examine the 'systematic bodies of knowledge' (Powers 2001: 18) as presented and enacted in the social relations between author, tutors and students, I cannot divest myself of my own values that will inform my own value judgments. Nor can I divest myself of my own history. Given that my formative academic experiences stem from building a skill-set of textual analysis through close readings it is worth clarifying this point.

I concede that 'it is difficult to see criticism as anything but an innocent discipline' (Eagleton, 1980: 11). Which is to say, I recognise I am 'necessarily part of a community of readers' (Bennett and Royle, 1999: 13) in which I interpret and issue forth pronouncements on texts and interview transcripts in accordance with the conventions of the interpretive community of which I am a part. This goes to the heart of my positionality; a doctoral thesis in the social sciences will invariably be produced according to the academic conventions expected for that discipline, but content analysis

and the decision to analyse texts, all herald from these earlier academic experiences. I cannot disassociate myself from the notion that, as Barthes (1973: 43) suggests, 'the book creates meaning, the meaning creates the life', which in another way can be understood to mean that people make sense of the world in relation to texts, and they comprehend and contextualise their experiences likewise. Thus I acknowledge that I must rely on the material conditions that have enabled me to respond to texts and interpret them.

This acknowledgement has a twofold effect on my professional practice as a support tutor and academic; I accept that 'interpretation is a function of identity and that all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves' (Bennett and Royle, 1999: 13). As a dyslexia tutor, my relationship with the texts, for example, is subordinate in that the professional practice of myself and the research participants, cannot escape their influence. Therefore, one could suggest that our epistemological positions are inherently conflated due to our active participation within the community of practitioners of which we are a part. What I do while supporting students has been driven to an extent by reading these books as much as working in collaboration with other dyslexia tutors, thereby replicating their content through my practice. Moreover, my academic relationship with them is steeped in the more sceptical tradition of the researcher. My academic instinct is to approach them as both social science data and as literary entities whose function is to 'materialize beliefs as practices' (Eagleton, 1993: 23), which customarily would be taken to mean that my response to them has been determined by the academic conventions of critical and textual analysis as well as the self-reflective positionality of the social researcher. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive; the literary critic and social researcher can

find common ground within a wider discourse analysis, especially if one acknowledges that 'although we cannot be sure of the independent existence of things, we can be certain of how they appear to us immediately in consciousness, whether the actual thing we are experiencing is an illusion or not' (Eagelton, 1993: 55). This quotation by Eagleton is given added prescience as dyslexia is the very embodiment of the immediate experience of consciousness. I cannot know what it is to have dyslexia, nor can anyone who has not been identified as dyslexic. Yet, specialists are tasked with enabling dyslexic students to experience their reality in a way that conforms to what is assumed to be 'normal', 'typical' or 'expected'. From this perspective, my *only* means of understanding why we know what we do about dyslexia can *only* come from the multiple sources of academic material (both research and guide books) that have established themselves as in some way authoritative. Thus, I cannot consciously understand dyslexia but I can determine how certain distinguishing features of it are regularly repeated within texts and practices, and also what linguistic and idiomatic techniques are deployed to underscore dyslexia's seemingly natural reality.

The idea that 'language is a source of thought in its own right, not merely an instrument of expressing the ideas of those who use it' (Gutting, 2005: 32) is a Foucaudian position. Using Foucault's methods of analysis as part of research enterprise on the nature of dyslexia texts and support practice coheres the seemingly disparate elements of the subject of dyslexia itself, particularly how the texts collectively organise themselves by utilising words and language to make sense of an apparently quantifiable condition.

In relative terms, this requires of the researcher an assumption that textbooks are individual constituents of 'a library or archive of information commonly and, in some aspects, unanimously held' (Said, 1995: 41).

4.1.3 Epistemological position

My ontological position is such that dyslexia is socially constructed and its nature is both perceived and made real through professional practices and shared assumptions. Epistemologically, I duly concede that my ontological position informed the choices I made regarding what I considered as acceptable knowledge in both the design and interpretation of the data. Here one must be clear that it would be simplistic to state there was such a thing as a unified and coherent Foucaultian position. Should one take one's cue from, for example, *The Order of Things* (2002), the emphasis of analysis would focus on the development of new ways of thinking and perceiving, as well as cultural classification. Empirical science and post-enlightenment formulations 'permits the reconciliation of resemblance and imagination that provides a foundation for, and makes possible all the empirical sciences of order' (Foucault, 2002: 78). This would be rather reductive, however, to the formulation of this research. The focus of the research is not limited to 'the emergence of new forms of thought and cultural classification' (Cashmore and Rojek, 1999: 157) but on the distinct manner knowledge is ordered and can be discerned through discourse. To that end, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is a more appropriate text to formulate a critical approach and positionality 'to explore the networks of what is said, and what can be seen in a set of social arrangements' (Kendall and Wickham, 1998: 25). For ultimately, if dyslexia is part of, or is itself a discourse, then a close reading of textbooks and an examination of how support tutors' experiences accord with the books' epistemological position, will draw out how dyslexia itself is 'contained and represented' (Said, 1995: 40), and go some way into lending insight into why specialists choose particular pedagogic practices.

<u>4.2 Methods</u>

The two research methods were textual/content analysis and semi-structured interviews. The research is an endeavour to learn about a particular discourse within a wider political and institutional establishment through examining the 'language and tools' (Kalof, Dan and Dietz, 2008: 105) the primary agents of that discourse communicate and understand one another. On one level textual or content analysis allows one to 'systematically classify words, phrases, sentences and other units of text into a series of meaningful categories' (Kalof, Dan and Dietz, 2008: 105), while interviews, on another level, open the pathway to explore in greater depth the cultural and social practices that occur within a particular community (May, 1997). Before commencing either I was conscious that as far as the approach to the texts was concerned the books would not be a random selection. Nor did I wish to analyse books I was already familiar, and I also decided not to interview practitioners whom I had been previously acquainted.

The participants were selected in response to an appeal put out on a specialist website for dyslexia specialists. Seven were chosen and a mutual colleague suggested one. The reason seven were chosen was to avoid 'research fatigue and the associated claim of being over-researched' (Clark, 2008: 954), and to avoid the likelihood of duplication if the findings from the interviews yielded data which was strikingly similar. The research, being for the most part qualitative, did not require a large sample size or the collection of data on a large scale. However, several potential participants agreed that should the interviews prove to be less than revealing then further interviews could be undertaken.

The email inviting participants to take part was published on the Association of

Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE) website on 14th August 2012.

Candidates were selected based on the institution they were employed by. All worked

in the north of England; these included institutions in the Yorkshire and Humber region,

north and south Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. It was important the universities should be

representative of the higher education sector as a whole. The participants were spread

across the Russell Group, Post-1992 new institutions, red brick/civic universities and

former colleges of higher education. Other criteria for selection were that part-time

agency employed tutors were excluded; that the participants were not known to me; and

none of the institutions had ever employed me previously as a dyslexia tutor. The table

below is a summary of the selected participants, including details of their background

and experience:

Research Participants' Background and Experiences

Participant	Background and Experience
Gwen	Qualifications: Diploma in Education Post-Graduate Diploma in Education Background: Teacher of basic literacy/GCSE Needs Assessor Dyslexia Support Tutor
Anne	Qualifications: BA Library & Information Management PGCE Supporting the Adult Dyslexic

	Learner in HE/FE Background: Library Assistant (HE) Dyslexia Support Tutor
Denise	Qualifications: MA Education Background: Further Education Tutor Higher Education Lecturer Dyslexia Support Tutor
Sally	Qualifications: BA English Literature and Education (failed) BSc Psychology PGCE (science) 7-12 Background: Research Psychologist School teacher SEN teacher Dyslexia Support Tutor
Robin	Qualifications: BA Communication Studies PGCFE in Further Education MA Education PGDip in Dyslexia and Literacy Background: SEN teacher

	FE Lecturer – sociology Learning Support Tutor (FE) Key Skills Tutor (FE) Dyslexia Support Tutor, HE (various institutions)
Christie	Qualifications: BA English Language and Literature PGCE (English) secondary education MA, English Language and Literature MA, Applied Linguistics and TESOL Diploma FE/HE Dyslexia Support Background: FE Lecturer VSO (Sri Lanka) Teacher ESL FE Lecturer – ESOL Dyslexia Support Tutor
May	Qualifications: BSc Psychology Postgraduate Diploma Dyslexia and Literacy Background: Supply teacher Clear-Links Dyslexia Support Tutor Dyslexia Support Tutor
Kelly	Qualifications: BA Politics, Economics and Social History

	MA, Inclusive Education
	MA, Applied Linguistics
	Postgraduate Certificate in Dyspraxia

A Sheffield Hallam University headed letter (see appendix) was forwarded to each recipient explaining the nature of the research, their right to discontinue at any time and assurances that anonymity and confidentiality would be guaranteed. All the interviews apart from one took place at the institutions the participants worked. One interview took place via Skype. All the interviews were recorded with the full acknowledgement of the interviewees, and all the interviews were transcribed shortly after they had been undertaken. The interviews took place between the 28th August 2012 and 3rd September 2012.

Full transcripts were forwarded to the participants on 15th March 2013; however, possibly due to the part-time and insecure nature of the position of dyslexia tutors, only three replied. On the 20th April 2015 all the participants were emailed inviting them to comment on the progress of the thesis (see appendix). Although three participants replied, only one read through the full work-in-progress. She queried a quote attributed to her, which was quickly amended.

The texts were chosen after the interviews had taken place. During the interviews a number of participants volunteered suggestions for books they either used regularly or had to hand. Six texts were chosen on the basis of the regularity of their recommendations; their function as tools of pedagogic practice; their focus on dyslexia and higher education; and the specialist background of the authors. The criteria for acceptability included how relevant the books were within HE in general and professional practitioners in particular. It was important their content should focus on educational matters, and include sections explaining dyslexia and were in some part in dialogue with empirical evidence. Most importantly, the books were chosen because they included strategies for the academic support of dyslexic. The selected books are:

Author	Title
Angela Fawcett (ed)	Dyslexia: Theory and Good Practice **Fawcett, A. (ed.) (2001) *Dyslexia: Theory and good practice*. London: Whurr Publishers.**
Morag Hunter-Carsch and Margaret Herrington (ed)	Dyslexia & Effective Learning in Secondary and Tertiary Education **Hunter-Carsch, M. and Herrington, M. (2001) *Dyslexia and effective learning in secondary and tertiary education*. Philadelphia: Whurr Publishers.**

David McLoughlin, Carol Leather, Patricia Stringer	The Adult Dyslexic: Interventions and Outcomes **McLoughlin, D., Leather, C., Stringer, P. and Mcloughlin, P.S. (2002)** *The adult dyslexic: Interventions and outcomes.* **London: Wiley, John & Sons.**
Ellen Morgan and Cynthia Klein	The Dyslexic Adult in a Non-Dyslexic World **Morgan, E. and Klein, C.L. (2000)** *The dyslexic adult in a non-dyslexic world.* **London: Whurr Publishers.**
Tilly Mortimore	Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioner's Handbook **Mortimore, T. (2008).** *Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioners Handbook.* **Wiley. Chichester.**
Gavin Reid and Jane Kirk	Dyslexia in Adults: Education and Employment **Reid, G. and Kirk, J. (2001)** *Dyslexia in adults: Employment and education.* **New York: Wiley, John & Sons.**

The presentation of the findings follows closely an interpretive discussion of their content, in which the 'categories, patterns or themes' (Hsiu-Fang and Shannan, 2005: 15) were derived through the analyses of the texts. It would have been impossible to approach the texts as quantitative data sets as 'there are no systematic rules for analyzing data, the key feature of all content analysis is that the words of the text are classified into much smaller content categories' (Elo and Kyngash, 2008: 109). As a method of data analysis, this approach allows the researcher to select the unit of analysis, which can include 'a letter, sentence, portion of pages or words' (Elo and Kyngash, 2008: 109), for the purpose of drawing out and examining the latent meanings behind the texts. Empirical evidence was a criterion for inclusion was that the texts do not exist in isolation and the 'words' or 'phrases', indeed the content of the texts are incorporated into a broader analysis of the relationship between different knowledge bases (Krippendorff, 2012). When presenting the evidence, one must be conscious of an important area of consideration; analysis and interpretation are almost inseparable (Sandelowski, 1995). Indeed, this goes to the heart of the issue of trustworthiness in a study incorporating as a method of research a strategy cannot be replicated (White and Marsh, 2006). Therefore, although I acknowledge my approach to analysing the content of the textbooks does not incorporate a reductionist element of quantification such as tabulation, nonetheless, the analysis is derived from how the data/content can 'provide useful evidence for testing hypotheses or answering research questions' (White and Marsh, 2006: 27).

The focus of the research is how a discourse of dyslexia support has developed. The focus of the interviews concentrated on tutors' previous professional experiences; their academic and professional qualifications; what they thought dyslexia to be; and what interventions' they used. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed the participants 'to expand on issues (almost) at will' (Gomm, 2009: 181) while also allowing the 'potential to reveal multiple, and somehow conflicting, attitudes about a given topic' (Marvasti, 2003: 21). This conversational approach, structured around predetermined topics, (Gomm, 2009; Denscombe, 2010) had the effect of drawing out how certain assumptions had been made about dyslexia and why particular strategies were used. It also enabled a greater exploration of the perceived similarities and differences to be made between dyslexia support and academic study skills support. The method allowed for an in-depth drawing out of the participants' insights, experiences and opinions (May, 1997) as the informal nature of the interview lent itself to 'both clarification and elaboration on the answers given' (May, 1997: 111). This was especially the case when the participants were asked to clarify their positions on the utility of specialist qualifications and reflect on why they thought dyslexia support was distinctive. The interviews presented an opportunity to analyse how the content of the textbooks could be juxtaposed with the insights of the research participants. Although both sources heralded from similar epistemological and ontological backgrounds, the manner one makes sense of either is influenced by two distinct factors; firstly, the texts 'are printed, they are taken out of the lived context and placed in another – the lived experience' (Lewin and Somekh, 2005: 41). This means any clarification and elaboration can only come from the researcher's skills of interpretivist analysis. Secondly, interviews can compliment the texts as they can be used as a means to dig

deeper into how the actions of professionals in certain lived social situations are justified, or at least are part of an internal logic that would conceivably make sense to others in their community. While one only has to hand the physical object of the text itself, the interpretation of its inherent meaning can be extrapolated by asking the participants why they act as they do and encouraging them to elaborate on 'the meaning and significance they give to their actions' (Jones in Seale, 2003: 257).

That said, however, while the textual analyses may be qualitative in nature, the fact the material is bound in hard copy makes it more immutable in nature than the 'social process' of interviewing people at any given moment (Jones in Seale, 2003). Therefore, both methods utlised coding to lend the research some structure to help organise and interpret the data. While it may be case that coding takes place 'by reading through the interview transcripts multiple times to obtain an overall sense of the data', in this case I had already developed 'ideas about themes early in the process' (Kalof, Dan and Dietz, 2008: 95). For this reason I focused upon the interviewees' personal experiences, qualifications, concepts of dyslexia and previous employment circumstances, while allowing for the discussions to elaborate on features that occurred during the interview depending on, for example, their respective positions, institution or length of service.

4.3 Ethics

The idea that 'social research should be value free or value neutral' (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 226) is given short shrift by Oliver (1992: 105) who states that 'disabled people have come to see research as a violation of their experience, as irrelevant to their needs and failing to improve their material circumstances and quality of life'. This study does not focus on dyslexic students, but that is not to say they do not figure indirectly or that the research is wholly irrelevant to them. I chose not to include dyslexic students because they have been the subject of research from innumerable disciplines previously. It would be unlikely any inclusion of dyslexic students would have yielded relevant data, or indeed would have duplicated findings published elsewhere. However, this is not to suggest the research does not fall outside the auspices of disability, especially in the context of the suggestion put forward by Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare (1999: 213-14) that 'the primary focus of disability research is on the mechanisms and processes which influence people's understanding of disability'. In this case, it is the role of the specialists in the lives of students who are the subject of research, and the 'mechanisms and processes' that have influenced their own understandings of dyslexia.

No vulnerable adults participated in the research, mitigating against the possibility of harm being caused through the research process (Bell, 2005). Although the research should not be viewed 'as a potential source of change and empowerment for the research participants' (French and Swain, 2008: 191), nonetheless, in as far as the interviewees were concerned the research was with their cooperation, and they were included as much as possible. Because of the sensitive nature of the discussions, the

privacy of not just the participants but also the identity of their students was a serious factor during the preparation and transcript stages (Gomm, 2009). During the interviews none of the participants directly identified any of their students, but I was nevertheless careful throughout the whole process of the possibility of what journalists call 'jigsaw identification'; a number of the students who had been previously supported by the interviewees were currently or had been enrolled on postgraduate degrees at my own university. There remained, therefore, the possibility that inadvertent identification could have occurred.

Although I am a dyslexia support tutor, I was conscious of the possibility of there being a conflict of interest during the research (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2001). I avoided including participants whom I was already acquainted, or who worked at my own university. This led to an equal relationship between interviewer and participants, especially as the research was conducted 'professional-on-professional' as it were; this reduced the chance for the researcher to lead the witness' (Alston and Bowles, 2003: 112) and reduce the perception of a power imbalance that could have occurred had the research been conducted *on* clients *by* a specialist. What the research possibly lacked, however, was a greater diversity of participants (Alston and Bowles, 2003) that could have reflected more the range of lived experiences of support tutors. In the end it was decided diversity should be achieved by type of institution rather than background of participant. Therefore, a variety of Russell Group, post-16 and former colleges of higher education were included as it was felt this would reflect the greater diversity of university student experiences than that of the range of tutors presently on offer. The intention was to examine dyslexia support in higher education more broadly, therefore limiting oneself to a particular type of university, e.g. Russell Group, post-1992 etc,

may have revealed more about the employment and recruitment practices of those

institutions than anything that could be generalized within the sector as a whole.

What follows are the findings from the research. The next section will examine what is

known about dyslexia, and will pay attention to what the dyslexia tutors assume

dyslexia to be, and how these assumptions parallel with the explanations and

representation of the condition within the textbooks.

The aim of this research was to explore the construction of dyslexia, focussing particularly on dyslexia support in higher education. Analysing the content of specialist textbooks and the interview transcripts helped to understand the epistemological framework from which the rationale for policy and practice are derived. However, a Foucauldian methodology immediately draws one's attention to the fact that identifying even the possibility of a starting point is a matter of interpreting the multitude of contingencies that make up any discourse. It is certainly the case that evidence from this sort of research can be assembled and presented to reveal how a discourse operates in its present iteration, but from a Foucaultian social constructionist perspective the societies, and by extension discourses, are dynamic entities, which do not lend themselves to the notion that there exists any foundational body of knowledge (Foucault, 2002). This chapter examines the discursive practice of dyslexia support; which is to say the research has revealed the assumed rules for understanding the manner in which dyslexia as a condition requiring assessment, supervision and cure (Foucault, 2009) is located within its own epistemological field, which in turn allows that knowledge to be acted upon. The question as to what dyslexia specialists know about dyslexia is broadly answered through an examination of the manner in which language is used in the titles of the textbooks and the explanations of what the support tutors think dyslexia is. Although the research has revealed some minor inconsistencies in the respective positionalities of the specialists, the findings are that dyslexia support is accepted as a deficit/medical model.

5.1 Policy and Definitions

The year 1999 illustrates how wider historical contingencies have contributed to the development of the discourse of dyslexia support. Coming four years after the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) published recommendations in the *Guidance for base-level provision for disabled students in higher education institutions* report. The HEFC report was one of the first documents of real substance to be published that laid the groundwork for universities to put policies and practices in place that supported students with disabilities that were aligned with the DDA (1995). Certainly it is no coincidence that about this time the creation of new disability departments were established across UK higher education, as was the inception of new members of staff dedicated exclusively to supporting disabled students, and in time tutors directly responsible for providing specialist support for students with dyslexia. Although students with disabilities, including dyslexia, were being supported to an extent by HEIs prior to 1999, it is arguably the case that the implications of their legislative obligations were not fully realised between the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act and the HEFCE report. Moreover, there were few substantial documents published between 1995-1999 that had any real significance upon the sector, and certainly any policy documents published prior to 1995 are of little relevance to this research, as until then the prohibition against discrimination had not been legally established. Also, 1999 as a year to focus upon a policy review is interesting as it comes eleven years before the introduction of the 2010 Equality Act. Although the Equality Act (2010) clarified a number of areas that had not been fully addressed by the DDA (1995), particularly the varied levels of active, associative, direct, indirect and perceived discrimination, it was the clarification that

reasonable adjustments to an education curriculum could include alterations in content,

delivery and assessment that, one could argue, makes for relevant implications. For

example, the HEFCE report made the recommendation that 'Each HEI should ensure it

has access to networks of suitably trained support workers' (HEFCE, 1999), which in

this case could be interpreted as educational practitioners with some sort of background

in dyslexia. The Equality Act (2010), however, 'applies one trigger point at which there

is a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people′ (University of St

Andrews, 2017). This, of course, raises questions as to whether the availability of 'a

suitably trained support worker' is in itself a reasonable adjustment, or if the

continuation of this role is entirely necessary in the light of the broader pedagogical

implications of the Equality Act. How one defines 'suitably trained support worker' is

to an extent the aim of this research, particularly as 'suitably trained' implies that

responding to dyslexic students is contingent upon whether tutors accept and

incorporate specialist qualifications, primary evidence and shared assumptions about

how dyslexia affects students into their practice. In other words, researching '*suitably'*

trained support workers focuses on whether their knowledge and understanding of

dyslexia is what makes them suitable rather than their capacity to support. By 2001

HEFCE's *Providing Learning Support for Students with Hidden Disabilities and*

Dyslexia Undertaking Fieldwork and Related Activities states:

> As participation in higher education (HE) increases for groups which were
> previously under-represented, so expectations are changing about the scale and
> quality of learning support which should be available for students with
> disabilities. If such students are to receive improved learning opportunities, it is
> important that an awareness of these changes is not confined to disability
> specialists. Discipline-based academic staff and others directly responsible for
> student learning also need to understand the new priority being given to
> disability issues. Academics, support staff and others working in Higher
> Education Institutions (HEIs) need to consider what measures should be taken to
> further improve the quality of learning opportunities for students with
> disabilities (Chalkley and Waterfield, 2001: 1).

The authors acknowledge there is a need for a change in the teaching and learning environment to accommodate students with disabilities, and continue that supporting dyslexic students should not only fall within the purview of 'disability specialists' but ought to be the collective responsibility of the HEI. Yet even by 2001, one can identify a focus towards dyslexia support as something distinct. Chalkley and Waterfield (2001) go on to state that as dyslexia is a neurological condition linked to difficulties processing language, information and short-term memory, support practice ought to include what one could reasonably interpret as general study skills, but with the proviso that academic tutors delivering the course should liaise with 'experts' from Disability Services. The authors do not specify whether these experts from Disability Services have expert knowledge of neurology or academic conventions, an ambiguity presently being capitalised upon in the recent BIS (2015) consultation document (see Introduction).

There already existed by 2001 an assumption that there is a quiz of teachers or educational specialists trained to support students with dyslexia. Implied is the additional assumption that there is a marked difference between supporting dyslexic students with students with more general learning difficulties. For students to be supported they require more than an inclusive learning environment; specifically they require a particular form of intervention, one with its own unique skillset and established body of knowledge. Crucially, the support should be delivered by what Foucault (2009; Oliver, 2010) would assert are those people bestowed with the moral authority to do so.

In as far as moral authority is concerned, the findings from this research have revealed a complex picture. The complexity is focused on the relationship dyslexia specialists have with each other regarding who primarily can claim 'ownership' of the true knowledge of dyslexia. Ownership is a contested area in that although there is widespread agreement about what dyslexia is (or should be), much of the tension is based upon how that knowledge has been derived. Yet, before one examines these complexities, it is worth answering the question, as best as possible 'what is dyslexia'? More precisely, it is not necessarily the case that it is even possible to explain what dyslexia is; more accurately would be the case that what the research has revealed is the epistemological field in which dyslexia is comprehended. The charity Dyslexia Action define it as:

> Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects memory and processing speed which impacts on literacy development, mathematics, memory, organisation and sequencing skills to varying degrees. Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual development. It is neurological in origin and is seen to run in families. It affects up to 10% of the UK population at some level and can affect anyone of any age and background. (Dyslexia Action, 2014. np).

Here one can discern a coalescence of distinct ontological positions; it is educational and its affects manifest in specific educational contexts (e.g. literacy development and mathematics). Also, dyslexia is 'neurological in origin', which suggests its causes are attributable to physical impairments. Moreover, it is 'seen to run in families', indicating that as well as being neurological in origin, dyslexia is also genetic, affecting as it does 10 per cent of the UK population's ability to engage fully in formal educational environments.

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) similarly present their own definition. Taking

their cue from the 2009 Sir Jim Rose report *Identifying and Teaching Children and*

Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties, they present what they call a

'description' of dyslexia, but under the heading 'Definitions of Dyslexia':

> Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in
> accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.
> Characteristic features of dyslexia are in phonological awareness, verbal
> memory and verbal process speed.
> Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.
> It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no
> clear cut-off points.
> Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor-
> coordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but
> these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.
> A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be
> gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well
> founded intervention. (British Dyslexia Association, 2014, np).

Here the emphasis is placed on dyslexia as a learning difficulty, but unlike Dyslexia

Action there is no mention of causes, only effects. The effects are understood to be

manifestly educational. This is exemplified in the descriptors that it occurs across a

range of intellectual abilities and its 'severity' can be determined by how well an

individual responds to 'well founded interventions'. It is these 'well founded

interventions' that sit at the heart of this research as how the professional practice of

dyslexia specialists is conceptualised amongst themselves may ultimately become 'the

property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared

enterprise' (Wenger, 1999: 45). In other words, dyslexia support may earn professional

credibility, as the specialists become part of a socially constructed community, complete

with their own professional status. This status will necessarily have to be founded upon

a knowledge-base which specialists can attest as being entirely their own. This research

has indicated that the pedagogic support strategies that either occur within the support

sessions or are suggested in the textbooks are justified as being part of the established knowledge-base for a community of specialists.

To that end, what follows are the processes that have contributed to the emergence of this community, or more precisely a community whose practices 'do not exist in the abstract. It exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with each other' (Wenger, 1999: 73). The first process in the construction of dyslexia is the linguistic and rhetorical techniques that establish the epistemological positionalty of that community, which in this case can be located in the titles of the textbooks.

5.2 Interpreting the Language of Titles

One obvious feature of textual analysis is that textbooks have titles. Titles are a good indication of picking out revealing epistemologies that collectively contribute to the process of reinforcing what is already assumed to be 'typically' dyslexic. Examining titles allows for an analysis of the epistemological framework with which dyslexia is communicated by specialists within that community. Indeed, Foucault makes the point that books themselves are caught in a system of references to other texts, which in this case can more easily be revealed as the titles all signpost the reader to the idea that dyslexic students need support and that trained and knowledgeable practitioners have to hand the necessary skills to aid their academic progress.

Firstly, many titles give some clue as to how the authors intend to orient their readers in their understanding of dyslexia. Tilly Mortimore's *Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioner's Handbook* is an example. 'Dyslexia and learning style' positions her as a specialist in dyslexia as a medicalised reality and someone who has insight into the very personalised, experiential nature of it. The title positions the author as an 'expert' specialist in the related but separate fields of dyslexia *and* learning style (education essentially), but also bestows upon her readers 'practitioner' status. The specific wording contextualises the professional credentials of support tutors as it assumes the dyslexia related support practices contained within are part of a student's wider educational experience, but nonetheless are distinct in their own right.

McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002) in their book's title *The Adult Dyslexic: Interventions and Outcomes* posit that dyslexia is a discourse that follows a particular chronology. The title emphasises the *adult* dyslexic, which inevitably leads one to conclude that the experiences of adult dyslexics differs quite considerably from their younger counterparts. On one level the title, with prominence given to the word *adult*, may invoke in the mind of the reader a sense that what is contained is a detailed account of the experiences of adult dyslexics, which locates it in a sort of social model of disability whereby the individual's immediate environment plays as much a part in the manifestation of dyslexia as anything diagnosed in a psychological assessment. Yet a close reading of the title reveals a deeper level of signification; the title focuses on the assumed necessity for specialist knowledge in supporting and responding to adults and not children. This study's interview findings suggest practitioners often criticise the paucity of courses and material available to them to support adults; they feel much of the research, courses and books are geared towards helping dyslexic children. This

book's title offers a signal that it does focus on adults with dyslexia, thereby suggesting there is a specilised knowledge base for professionals to work within. And yet, irrespective of this assumption, one can still identify a lineage of policy and practice going back to the original notions of children's 'special education'. In the same way that Mortimore (2012) presented the students' experiences within the overlapping frames of 'dyslexia' and 'learning styles', so it can be read that the 'adult dyslexic' is a natural continuation of school based 'special education', of which an understanding of educational and academic arrested development amongst children may be seen as an advantage for those wishing to enter the profession of dyslexia tutors in universities.

'Interventions and Outcomes' is very suggestive phrasing. The word 'interventions' brings to mind the sort of necessary interruption to a person whose lifestyle choices necessitate a much required medical/professional intercession. The authors' choice of the word is deliberate, invoking as it does the idea that specialist support 'means the intrusion into everyday life of medical interventions' (Morrall, 2008: 115) and an equally necessary and specialised remedy to a problem that is entirely contained within the body of the adult dyslexic. This view has parallels with Foucault's notion that specialists have the capacity and power to make direct interventions in people's lives as they are empowered to do so because of their perceived legitimacy. From a macro perspective the term appeals to an assumed sense of familiarity, in that the problems people experience in life can be remediated through the actions of qualified professionals, which in turn implies an expected model of behaviour from the recipients. In effect, it is 'about the cultural meaning of an intervention, which includes, amongst other things, your expectations, and the expectations of the people tending to you and measuring you' (Goldacre, 2008: 139). 'Outcomes' suggests a successful

resolution to the problem, while the title and sub-title work on a subtly cultural and psychological level being as it is a narrative of sorts. 'Interventions' (by professionals) and 'Outcomes' (successful treatments) is a very basic chronology, underpinned by the idea of both identifying normality and enabling people deemed to be not normal to overcome their 'personal failure' and 'get well' (Morrall, 2008).

Reid and Kirk (2001) have produced a book with the intention of being a practical tool to aid understanding of dyslexia related issues and offer utilitarian methods of support. *Dyslexia in Adults: Education and Employment* makes the link between education and workplace. Implied is the notion that one logically either leads on from the other (as though the skills required for education are preparatory skills for entry to employment), or that they are more closely related; education can be part of an employee's professional development. Either way, an implication suggests that adults with dyslexia require specialist interventions from appropriately qualified professionals. The notion of the 'intervention', whether displayed prominently in the title, or implied through the subtly of other linguistic techniques, implies difference. This is key to discerning the link between *dyslexia* as a condition pertaining to 'difficulty with words', and that difficulty requiring the assistance of specialists to help overcome the suggested impairment. It is possible to discern how repeatedly '*dyslexia*' is used to portray the experiences of having it as very much to do with difficulties and inhibited progress. Hunter-Carsch and Herrington's (2001) *Dyslexia & Effective Learning* impies the link between dyslexia and education, which is to say, they imply the link between dyslexia and ineffective education; why else would the title be worded the way it is if it did not suggest the necessity of educational remediation? Likewise, Fawcett's (2001) *Dyslexia: Theory & Good Practice* again places the word as the most prominent feature of the

title, while indicating that it must be at best a difficulty, and at worst a disability. In essence, for the kind of interventions necessary for the appropriate support of dyslexic students, there surely must be some sort of highly specialised theoretical underpinning behind it all to lend credibility to the pedagogy.

One could suggest that to the authors, dyslexia sits somewhere between the social and medical model. Interventions are required because of 'the objectivity of disease' (Morrall, 2008: 44), but the 'outcomes' are the end result of 'the treatment a person receives within a disablist society' (French and Swain, 2008: 28). Arguably it is the case that whatever the suggested teaching, learning and support strategies are that constitute a proportion of these books, what is implied is the notion of specialist knowledge coming from specialist practitioners. The ideal of specialised interventions is reinforced by the prevalent idea that dyslexics are one step removed from the mainstream of their wider society, and the strategies behind their support go beyond the academic to include, as identified in the title of Morgan and Klein's (2000) book, arguably the template epistemological dyslexia ideal – *The Adult Dyslexic in a Non-Dyslexic World*.

Amongst dyslexia specialists one can discern the process involved in the consolidation of the professional status of support tutors. Arguably, the nature of disability, whether it is labelling, policies or other means of identification, can be attributed to the 'exponential rise in the number of psychiatric, administrative and education labels over the last few decades' (Goodley, 2011: 1), which seemingly in the case of dyslexia, is rather at odds with the 'traditional' disability activist notion of organising against the

'oppressive regimes of medicine, science and professional control' (Goodley, 2011: 2). Put simply, without a professional diagnosis of dyslexia there can be no intervention with which to aim towards an outcome.

These regularly occurring titular themes underline the idea of the commonly accepted taken-for-granted characteristics of the 'typical' dyslexic profile. Certain linguistic features play their part in the contribution of a dyslexia ideal, and collectively allow for a context to emerge in which to play out these reified features. If experience and language can *only* be made sense of through context, then it makes sense for these texts to utilise context as 'a subjective construct that accounts not only for the uniqueness of each text but also for the common ground and shared representations that language users draw on to communicate with each other' (Paltridge, 2013: 77). This requires an acceptance of the idea that dyslexia excludes the individual from their environment. The titles emphasise difference and exclusivity as the starting point from which all else follows. For the dyslexia specialist, this is central to the justification of their own existence as 'expert knowledge is thought to be essential if professionals are to be autonomous, self-regulating and trusted. Those occupations aspiring to become professions attempt to define their own body of knowledge and to separate it from 'lay' knowledge and the knowing of other professions' (Swain, Cameron and French, 2003: 132). However, the construction of any discourse is rarely so smoothly established that there is universal acceptance on all its precepts. And dyslexia is no different. While the epistemological framework has been relatively easily identified, when it comes to articulating the characteristics of dyslexia, there are, as Foucault observes, differences in interpretations of social reality.

5.3 Interpreting Dyslexia: Disability or Difference?

The findings revealed that what the tutors know about dyslexia is consistent with the authors. Their perceptions fall within a broad category of differences and to an extent deficits, and also that dyslexic students will need specialist interventions. This is not to suggest this is because they believe dyslexia is inherently disabling. Christie explained:

> I'd say dyslexia is a difference in learning style, particularly in processing and producing language. It may have some neurological basis, but that doesn't seem clearly determined.

Similarly, May is of the view that in terms of 'causes', dyslexia is attributed to neurodevelopmental deficits:

> It intersects with other neurodevelopmental differences. And I would talk about it being a difference, not necessarily a disability.

The interviews revealed an aversion to associating dyslexia with disability. Most were forthright in their views that it is a 'difference' rather than a 'disability'. The interplay between 'who' is dyslexic and 'what' dyslexia is, is an issue that similarly has been played out in some of the research. Wadlington and Wadlington (2005: 29) for example suggest that most staff in universities 'believed that being identified as dyslexic to receive special services was beneficial', while others put forward the case that students who do receive special arrangements or support either run the risk of outright discrimination (Morris and Turnbull, 2007), or that their support may result in unreasonable adjustments being put into effect (Riddell and Weedon, 2006). This suggests that the support students receive would likely depend upon something

completely different to a universally accepted profile of dyslexia, which invariably will depend upon how dyslexia is understood by the main practitioners within their respective institutions.

So it is that amongst the tutors, although there is some agreement that dyslexia is neurological, there is a reluctance to associate their support as being relevant to the idea of 'disability'. As Sally explained:

> So my view of dyslexia is that it is a neurological processing difference, a neurological difference rather than a disability. It upsets me when people use the term disability. It upsets me that universities have dyslexia support under the Disability Services heading, because it's not a disability. It's disabling because of the fact that we have to write, we have to read, and that's the mode of operation. So I don't think it's a disability; I do think it's a neurological processing difference.

Many tutors dislike using or agreeing with the established definitions as they consider them too restrictive or not wholly consistent with their own views on what is or is not 'typically' dyslexic. All, to an extent, believe dyslexic people are unique, but in a way that seems to typify their uniqueness. Slight variations, however, run through their individual views. This may be attributable to both their academic backgrounds and, in a few cases, their own dyslexia. Christie suspects she may have dyslexia, and has gained empathy with struggling students due to her own academic struggles. Similarly, Sally and May are both dyslexic and come from backgrounds in psychology. May perceives that language is a continuously unresolved issue and makes the point that communication between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students is typically problematic. Likewise Sally perceives language to be a problem, but her insights regarding the 'student experience' have been gained through internalising her own experiences as a

dyslexic. Interestingly, Sally recognises language difficulties, but less in an academic sense, and more in how she personally 'translates' verbal information into something phenomenological. Christie similarly views problems with dyslexia as problems with language, but this is more attributable to her academic background in language/linguistics and TESOL.

The idea that dyslexia is perceived as a difference is a key finding, and establishes one of the first tensions amongst the dyslexia specialists regarding how and why interventions occur. The textbook titles establish the broad epistemic assumption that support is predicated upon the necessity of the label 'dyslexia', but this would appear too superficial for the tutors who are engaged in the practice of putting into effect interventions. However, what the research has revealed is the idea that how this learning difference is experienced by students is that it has an attributable cause in what is variously described as problems with information processing.

Robin stated that, "I think it's a specific learning difference. Not necessarily a disability. Often the profile is a different way of processing the information." This view corresponds with that of Denise who stated that dyslexia is "more clusters of behaviour", and Anne who suggested the condition "as being a learning style that's unique to that person and effects their ability to process and function in this environment".

In terms of locating this dialogue within a wider epistemological discourse, one that includes centrally driven policy as much as individual autonomy, it is worth reiterating that presently students with dyslexia are entitled to additional support because they have evidence which determines their status as 'disabled'. Chalkley and Westerfield's (2001) document indicated there are specialists in this field working within 'disability services' equipped with specialist knowledge. And this understanding that specialists provide a vital service has been continued in the latest policy documents from Business Innovation and Skills, which, in the light of proposed DSA funding changes, has not removed funding for specialist one-to-one tutors or support altogether. Although the present guidelines do suggest the amount of support may need to be monitored for the purposes of tracking students' progress to become 'independent learners', the support itself is maintained as:

> This one to one support addresses the issues which some students might have in acquiring, recalling and attaining information in written and spoken language, as well as the range of memory, organisational, attention and numeracy difficulties that students with specific learning difficulties often face when working in an HE context (BIS, 2015: 50).

The implication is that in terms of the power dynamic between the various stakeholders in dyslexia support, the professional practice of specialist staff must adhere to the deficit model of dyslexia. The funding for their practice relies upon the acceptance that specialists in this area are appropriately qualified and skilled in a way that excludes individuals outside their community. The necessity of consolidating and maintaining an established discourse on support for dyslexic students, therefore, becomes more urgent.

It appears the first stage in establishing a discourse of dyslexia is framing the epistemological schema through which any dialogue can be conducted. Although there appears to be some reluctance to associate with the term 'disability', there is less

reluctance to do so with the more general term 'difference'. The textbook titles do not incorporate this term, but their rhetorical techniques do emphasise *difference* as part of the nature of dyslexia. Indeed, strongly implied from the titles is the framing of the dyslexic experience as one of difference associated with deficits, but which can be overcome through timely interventions. The narrative offered from the tutors is consistent with this epistemological perspective. There is a similarly broad acceptance of the belief that students with academic deficits are 'different', but that this difference is not necessarily divorced from a medicalised pathology.

Similarly, notable charities, policy documents and central funding provisions hold to the view that deficits in cognition, working memory, literacy and reading are the primary characteristics that dyslexic students experience. In terms of establishing the epistemic foundations for the justification of support, these are the precepts which specialists must adhere should they wish to be included within their respective professions.

The belief is that dyslexia exists as an incontestable reality, but very particularly on a purely individual level. The titles, combined with descriptors from the charities and the descriptions expressed by the tutors, reveal that *what* is known is that it is something that can be understood as a series of identifiable symptoms. It is to an extent the case that a discursive strategy in the construction of dyslexia is to formulate a process whereby professionals outside the individual experience can comprehend the condition as something materially tangible. There are understood to be key characteristics that are considered typically dyslexic, but if one interprets the substance of these symptoms as educational rather than psychological, then one could suggest that *how* dyslexia is

understood by professionals cannot go beyond the aforementioned descriptions. In other words, describing dyslexia as a set of individual experience does not sufficiently substantiate a wider social construction of the condition. The broader social processes, as revealed in the findings of the next section, contextualise dyslexia beyond a set of descriptive symptoms to represent it specifically as a disability which cannot exist until such time as it has been confirmed to exist, irrespective of what visible symptoms may have presented themselves on an individual level.

If dyslexia can only be perceived as a series of symptoms or characteristics, then this understanding reduces the condition to something quantifiable and pathological. This would suggest all specialists, be they researchers, authors or tutors, would share a similar knowledge base. This chapter has indeed highlighted that conceptually dyslexia is understood as something linked to cognitive deficits, but the following chapter reveals a considerably more complex picture; one which reveals that dyslexia, quite apart from being cognitive functioning deficit, exists as a discourse not merely through a diagnostic assessment, but as a set of beliefs and practices that collectively capture the condition as an interactive discourse.

The previous section revealed what the assumptions and beliefs are regarding what dyslexia is considered to be. All professionals in this study were of the belief it is a cognitive learning difference which manifests in material ways. This was exemplified by how the titles represented the idea of difference as something distinct and identifiable, while the tutors consolidated this with their assertions that even if it was not a disability as they understood the term, it was nonetheless a primary constituent in the belief that to have dyslexia is to be different in some way. This difference was revealed to be an effect of a pathological cause, namely that were it not for neurodevelopmental difficulties certain students' educational profiles would be not as they were. Neither the titles nor the tutors' explanations appeared to concede that either the symptoms or manifestation of dyslexia could not be identified by qualified professionals with the skillset to enable them to do so. Therefore, irrespective of some differences of opinion relating to dyslexia as a language or psychological issue, the overwhelming belief is that what professionals know about dyslexia is it is something that separates students from their non-dyslexic counterparts. Dyslexia as a social construct is initially formulated as a series of shared beliefs by relevant authorities whom have the perceived legitimacy to issue pronouncements on the subject, and to distil the anticipated experiences of dyslexic students into a readily definable series of characteristics.

This section focuses on the discursive strategies authors and tutors employ when contributing to a construction of dyslexia, particularly the recurring themes of

labelling/diagnosis and the commodification of psychology/support. These themes

constitute the process through which dyslexia is understood as a social reality. It is the

notion of how dyslexia is represented textually and socially that fulfils the second

objective of this research of this research; to understand how dyslexia specialists in

higher education know what they know about it.

The research has revealed that how dyslexia is known by professionals is through a

process of establishing the means by which it is understood as something existing

outside of individual experience. Subsequent chapters will detail how the engagement

and incorporation of primary evidence establishes dyslexia as a simulacrum of

perceived reality, but in terms of dyslexia as a social construct, its essence is rendered as

a series of social interactions and institutional processes that furnishes professionals

with a shared understanding of dyslexia as a collaborative experience. The following

section reveals how the authors and tutors have articulated dyslexia as a reality that

exists through the mediation of professional practice.

6.1 Labels and Diagnoses in the Construction of Dyslexia.

The literature review suggested that within dyslexia support in higher education there is

a prevalent attachment to the notion of diagnostic assessments. Certainly, there was

little evidence from the research literature that dyslexia was not believed to exist as an

essential reality, and one which could be revealed through the mechanism of an

psychological test. Therefore, given that both policy and research accept that

psychological assessments are a necessary feature of students' experiences, one must

question the extent to which they figure as significant contributory elements of specialist interventions. This study as revealed surprisingly an inconsistent picture regarding the relevance and impact the diagnostic procedure has upon support strategies. There appears to be no coherent position regarding the purpose of being diagnosed with dyslexia or labelled with it. To clarify, 'labelling' will be taken to mean an individual's sense of self may be contingent upon being identified as belonging to a particular group whom may share similar behavioural, medical or educational characteristics. Labelling a person with a learning difficulty, for example, 'may not offer a universal explanation' (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 393) for their experiences, but it will be taken to indicate amongst dyslexia specialists there are certain parametres regarding the extent dyslexia can be known. Moreover, there is similar inconsistency regarding how, or whether, the support should take its cue from diagnostic reports or if the reports should be refuted as having little or no relevance to support practice. The previous chapter revealed that what is understood by the term 'dyslexia' is that it manifests as a set of symptoms, but the social processes involved in its identification and the subsequent support practices make it clear diagnosis is the point at which disability begins for students.

Nicolson, in the Introduction *Dyslexia: Theory and Good Practice* (2000: 5), begins with the notion of the indefinable as he elucidates on the subject being labelled dyslexic. Whereas previously he stated 'there is no single 'cure' for dyslexia' he later asserts:

> The advantage of the label 'dyslexia' is that it has no intrinsic meaning. It says nothing about the underlying cause, and is neutral as to whether the cause is visual, phonological, motor or some combination. The drawback (for educationalists) is that it has strong political and emotional connotations, that it suggests there is a single relatively uniform syndrome, and that dyslexia is somehow 'special'".

The term gives no indication of what the 'essence' of it actually is regarding cause and effect, but the inclusion of the idea that there are negative social qualities associated with it suggests the 'emotional connotations' are an inherent part of the support process. The research has highlighted the problematic nature of these 'emotional connotations'. Authors and tutors accept emotional problems are characteristics associated with dyslexia, but there is a dividing line between whether the emotional difficulties are intrinsic and should be part of the support, or whether they are extrinsic and should not be factored into support strategies.

By suggesting the 'advantage' of the label for dyslexia establishes the idea that the positionality is wholly neutral by virtue of the assumed positivist ontology. The foremost concern of the authors is to abstract the suggestion that dyslexia is an educational issue. Thus the label of dyslexia is necessarily an advantage because from this perspective it is very much included within the neutral, scientific fold, and, therefore, a different issue for educationalists to concern themselves with.

What is distinctive within the texts is that the words 'label' and 'diagnosis' are used as synonyms of each other. Morgan and Klein's *The Dyslexic in a Non-Dyslexic World* (2000: 21) do not outwardly discuss labelling, but epistemologically they are closely aligned with Nicolson and Fawcett:

> For the dyslexic adult, being diagnosed is at the heart of coming to terms with being dyslexic and can have a profound effect, making sense of years of confusion, frustration and failure. The fairly recent acknowledgment and willingness to address dyslexia in adults has largely been in response to an

expressed need of large numbers of adults for diagnosis and help. Dyslexic adults who were not diagnosed at school are more and more frequently seeking an assessment in later life. The impetus may be a return to education, changes in employment, the diagnosis of their children or an awareness and curiosity stimulated by watching a TV programme about dyslexia.

Morgan and Klein (2000) are not untypical in that certain facets of experiences (confusion, frustration, failure) are associated with the belief in the efficacious qualities of being diagnosed. While there are corresponding culturally loaded negative qualities about being labelled 'dyslexic', the positive (neutral?) effects are assumed to be intrinsically benign. It is presumably with this in mind that Morgan and Klein point out that in recent years 'large numbers' of adults have sought not just a 'diagnosis' but also 'help'. Of course, one possible drawback is that to the adult dyslexic, the diagnosis and subsequent help may not be the liberating experience some authors assume. According to the textbooks the process of experiencing failure and frustration (symptoms), followed by screening and assessment (diagnosis), and leading to intervention and outcome may run the risk of internalising the issue in the mind of the dyslexic and conferring upon them a new identity by virtue of the label now attached. As Goldacre (2008: 75) warns:

> - assertively and authoritatively giving someone access to the sick role can also reinforce destructive illness beliefs and behaviours, unnecessarily medicalise symptoms … and militate against people getting on with life and getting better. It's a very tricky area.

But as we shall see, even understanding what is meant by the term 'help' is inherently problematic depending on the circumstances tutors are employed and funded.

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The overlapping of diagnoses, labels and personal experiences is central to the

construction, and it allows disagreements to emerge regarding the focus of support.

Nicolson and Fawcett (*Dyslexia: Theory and Good Practice*), and Morgan and Klein

(*The Dyslexic Adult in a Non-Dyslexic World*), believe the diagnosis/label is a corollary

of something phenomenological, or putting it another way, that the experiences of the

dyslexic individual cannot be made sense of until a diagnosis has been established.

Dyslexia, therefore, is as much a mutual engagement (Wenger, 1999) between

professional and student as it is a definition or description of educational problems.

Henceforth the essence or signature of dyslexia is that which is unknown to the

individual him/herself, but which is captured and quantified post-diagnosis through

interaction and collaboration. Reid and Kirk in *Dyslexia in Adults: Education and*

Employment (2001: 6) are illustrative of this, but their stance is less enveloped in the

positivistic paradigm. Their take owes more to an educationalist's perspective than a

scientist's. They are circumspect on the matter of labelling, but nevertheless share the

previous idea that diagnoses are a necessity for the progress of the dyslexic adult, and

likewise they are in agreement that individual experiences are inextricably intertwined

with deficit reduction:

> Rightly or wrongly it appears that a label is a necessary prerequisite for
> obtaining the type of help which can be beneficial. But quite apart from that, the
> existence of a label can offer to the person with dyslexia a useful explanation of
> the nature of his or her difficulty. Often labels attract funding and support – but
> that should represent the beginning not the end of the process. Acquiring
> support should not be the goal of the label but rather a signpost. The type of
> support necessary does not depend on the label but on a description of the
> difficulty and the strengths of the individual – in other words the learning
> characteristics and the needs of the person (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 6).

Reid and Kirk are not entirely accurate in their assertion that 'the type of support

necessary does not depend on the label but on a description of the difficulty and the

strengths of the individual'. Presently, legislation does not oblige universities to

provide additional support for students with deficits in academic skills, but it does for

students with a diagnosis of dyslexia. Support tutor Kelly makes the point that in order

for support to exist at all the label is absolutely necessary. She stated:

> The problem with something like this is the gatekeepers of the funding. So you
> have to have a label. But there's loads of students with similar needs who don't
> get the label and don't get the help. So this is the problem; it's all about
> funding! We need this label. So we'll often get ed psychs and I'll look at them
> and I'll think 'dyslexia? Really?' so if funding wasn't an issue it would just be a
> needs based thing.

Kelly is not the only tutor who makes the link between the requirements for a label to

enable support to take place. May similarly suggested "I'm sure the diagnosis per se

helps, but the accompanying DSA package definitely helps. But for DSA funding you

need a 'you are or you aren't dyslexic'". There is a striking overlap with Reid and

Kirk's stress on the 'needs of the person' and the previous emphasis on the intrinsically

value-less label of dyslexia. This research suggests there are strong cultural grounds in

which epistemological and ontological notions merge in the world-view of the dyslexia

specialist. If the label has no intrinsic value, then it is difficult to square that with the

associated benefits the authors and tutors have presented as a result of that label.

Moreover, Reid and Kirk (2001) typify the suggestion made earlier that diagnosis and

label are interchangeable terms; they state that 'a label can offer to the person with

dyslexia a useful explanation of the nature of his or her difficulty'. However, in

practice, according to my research, the function of the educational psychologist is a

symbolic formality; the first stage students need to submit themselves to for the social

construction of dyslexia to exist as a set of predetermined interactions. Kelly makes the

point that psychological assessment reports are a "very useful starting point; however, I

tend to find that they all look remarkably similar. The useful things tend to be the

graphs and the charts". The notion that educational psychologists and the psychological

assessment reports have much meaning *beyond* the necessity of labelling is reinforced

by many of the tutors' opinions of the relationship between the reports' contents and the

focus of the support. Anne stated unambiguously:

> I get a referral for a student, I get a bit of paper. I don't get their assessment of
> need, I don't know anything about them. Normally I just get a blank bit of
> paper with 'thirty-five hours a year. Go away'.

One can discern misgivings about the principle of labelling, but not to the point of

suggesting 'support' can be provided in a non-dyslexia manner. Reid and Kirk (2001)

stress that there is a distinction to be made between label and diagnosis, but only in a

way which aligns them to the idea that dyslexia specialists alone have what it takes to

make a difference:

> …if a diagnosis is to take place then the person's emotional needs should be
> taken into account and a detailed explanation of what dyslexia is, and how it
> may affect them, was seen as essential – more essential than the actual label
> (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 7).

Already one can discern inconsistencies in the accepted purpose of a diagnosis of

dyslexia. It is, by the authors, perceived as a means of providing a detailed profile of a

student's cognitive strengths and weaknesses, but in practice many tutors either refrain

from utilising the report or repudiate its findings. The practical application of a

diagnosis has been presented as a gateway to emotional support, with many of the

authors under the impression that, as Reid and Kirk suggested, 'the person's emotional

needs should be taken into account'. However, the research has revealed there is no

direct correlation between the contents of a psychological report and how support is

delivered. There is little to suggest emotional wellbeing should fall within the purview

of the support tutor. Yet, these findings are not wholly consistent. Christie gave an

interesting example of how labelling, diagnosis and support can be intertwined:

> One student emailed desperately because her father was very ill and she didn't
> know anybody else in the University to talk to. Now obviously my main thing
> was to arrange that I emailed her tutor, but that tells you something. Now I
> should have been warned by the report, you know, she has quite serious anxiety
> problems.

What is interesting is that Christie seems able to reconcile the personal circumstances of

her student with the belief that an educational psychologist could have anticipated how

anxiety problems under those circumstances would have adversely affected her

academic performance. More revealingly is the assumption that for Christie, the

negative emotional aspects of dyslexia are quantifiably part of the condition. Similarly

Sally disclosed that:

> I would say about forty-five per cent of the time is pastoral care and mentoring,
> and I do have students now who I just mentor. I don't actually do any academic
> support because we don't have mentors here.

However, because some tutors engage in emotional support does not indicate this is the

sort of practice prevalent or indeed distinct amongst all tutors. May, for example,

pointed out that "There is some suspicion that everyone is doing different things and I'd

love to know what everyone is getting up to in their face-to-faces", which is a sentiment

echoed by Robin who also admitted that "one of the problems in our work is because

it's been unregulated it just kind of evolved. The fascinating thing about our work is

that it's grown exponentially". Indeed, this lack of consensus is illustrated by the

different emphases placed on the importance of supporting students' emotional

wellbeing within the support sessions. Irrespective of the label and the possible

identification of emotional issues as a consequence, not all tutors are in agreement that

that aspect of support should be factored into practice. Anne, for example,

acknowledges depression and anxiety as characteristic of dyslexia, but does not see

these characteristics as relevant to her practice:

> I'm not a counselling service, I don't want to be. I couldn't handle that for all
> the students that I see. But I do refer a lot of people onto counselling; a lot of
> my students are getting counselling for depression and anxiety … you've got to
> know where to draw the line and where to refer people on … But it obviously
> makes them feel better getting it off their chest, and if that is what it takes to
> open up their mind a bit to do the work they need to do then fair enough. But I
> make it really obvious to people that they can't just come and talk to me for an
> hour, sign my invoice and go because that's not what the sessions are for.

This academic approach to support is echoed by Denise, who stated that in terms of

support tutors offering emotional support, "That's overstepping the boundary of the

role". She continued:

> If they've got emotional difficulties that can be better supported by the
> Wellbeing team because it means counselling or it needs a chat with somebody
> to talk through those issues, then definitely that's where the student should be.
> If they came to me and wanted counselling, I wouldn't know how to do it
> properly and I would do more damage than help.

Certainly for the individual tutors, the diagnosis/label facilitates support and drives

specialist practice in a very particular direction. However, it appears there is no

uniform agreement as to what that support should be. The label and the diagnosis can

provide a way into the mind of the student, but this is not to suggest all *specialists* are as

easily polarized. Mcloughlin, Leather and Stringer in *The Adult Dyslexic: Interventions

and Outcomes* (2002: 19) are keen to point out that being labelled can have its

drawbacks, but not necessarily so:

> The 'label' sometimes gets in the way, and it can be more important to focus on
> specific needs and solutions. At the same time, professionals must recognize

that labels can empower people by allowing them to identify with and learn from others through their shared experience.

Becoming empowered through a shared experience is not so easily achieved if those specialists delivering support are inconsistent in their practice. While it may be an epistemological position that prompts certain authors to assert that 'professionals must recognize that labels can empower people by allowing them to identify with and learn from others through their shared experience', the professionals themselves may prohibit this from happening depending upon how they direct students to experience their dyslexia. These issues are pertinent to how professionals respond to the labels they attach to people as it is assumed 'they are judged to have demonstrated their fitness to make valid pronouncements on the 'cases' with whom they deal' (Swain, Cameron and French, 2003: 12).

Not all authors hold the belief that being labelled and diagnosed necessarily leads to specialist interventions. In fact, as in the case of Alan Hurst's foreword in Hunter-Carsch and Herrington's *Dyslexia and Effective Learning* (2001: xiv), the call is for less specialist hegemony and a different take on the idea of shared experiences:

> Certainly, in the case of higher education, students 'belong' to the academic departments and faculties responsible for the programmes they are studying … perhaps what we should do is point out that shared responsibilities are shared – in that sense only can they be described as 'our' students. The emphasis is on learning in an inclusive context with minimal attention drawn to differences.

This sentiment is echoed by Tilly Mortimore in *Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioners Handbook* (2008), who takes issue with the idea that dyslexia is more than an educational matter. Her positionality, as a higher education dyslexia support

specialist, is that of an educator who sees it as her duty to reclaim the essence of dyslexia away from the multiple specialists and back into the classroom:

> The picture has in some way been complicated by debates as to the appropriateness of medical terms such as 'diagnosis' within the context of the drive in the United Kingdom and across many other continents to implement inclusive practices within education. This position suggests that to see dyslexia in terms of a series of symptoms underpinned by biological deficits which can be 'diagnosed' and 'treated' is to medicalise it. This represents people with dyslexia as vulnerable victims of their own flawed biology, places them at the mercy of experts who will label them and stigmitise them and who will take control of the delivery of 'treatment' and 'cures' (Mortimore, 2008: 14)

Mortimore's position is clear; she has reacted to what she sees as the objectification of dyslexia at the expense of the individual. Her sentiment is similar to Pollak's (2009: 34) notion of the dangers inherent in the separation of dyslexic students from non-dyslexic students as 'when a specific learning difference is present, this complexity can be inadvertently masked by a diagnostic label'. In other words, the diagnostic process can identify difference rather than highlight diversity. Particularly she perceives the primary sin to be the sustained belief that to support dyslexic students is to support people who are, as she says, 'vulnerable'. One can see how this notion has played out in the previous examples regarding the benefits of labelling, especially the acceptance that support should transcend the academic and encompass a wider, holistic, emotional perspective. However, while Mortimore presents a forthright case for the educational reclamation of dyslexia, it is the nature of the texts that compels her to become that which she objects. Her use of language reveals her positionality as someone not entirely unlike those 'experts' who have taken delivery of students' 'treatments' and 'cures'. The preface to Mortimore's (2008) text focuses on providing support for dyslexic students. Her aim, as she states, is 'to continue to chip away at the academic and social barriers confronting those individuals with dyslexia who attempt to realise

their potential. I hope this book will contribute in some way to their emancipation'
(Mortimore, 2008: ix). 'Emancipation' is a strong word, containing as it does
associations of institutional oppression, hegemony and liberation, and it raises the
immediate question as to its justification in this context. Her emancipatory practice can
be read in the same way as the other texts. Without the diagnosis and label of dyslexia,
the authors would have no cause to publish their books. Mortimore (2008) may adopt a
self-conscious position as someone aware of the 'unequal power relationship between
professionals and disabled people' (Swain, Cameron and French, 2003: 122), but to
follow this through with an assertion of emancipation suggests she is advocating
students submit themselves to the 'mercy' of experts. This position has previously been
highlighted in research into the commodification of autism (Mallett and Runswick-
Cole, 2012) in which 'experts' advocate the social model. This notion, combined with
the findings from this study, point to the attachment many tutors and authors feel
towards experts, which in this case is the educational psychologist.

For the tutors there is disagreement regarding whether the process of diagnostic
assessments either reveal the secondary symptoms of dyslexia, i.e. anxiety and stress, or
whether by labelling a student those symptoms occur as a result of the diagnosis. These
are more than differences of opinion; they inform how and why tutors choose to engage
in particular areas of students' profiles and focus their attentions on specific aspects of
support.

In relation to how dyslexia is textually constructed, there are similarly diverging
opinions on the values attached to the label 'dyslexia', and the extent to which the

diagnostic process serves as either an enabler of support or a window into the functioning of the students' cognitive abilities. It would be simplistic to make the case that dyslexia as a social construct exists exclusively through the medicalisation of the label and diagnosis. From the point of view of the tutors' perspective on their practice medicalisation may inform how they choose to undertake pedagogic strategies, but the crucial point is it does not have to. Across the higher education sector support does not follow any particular model, and within specialist literature the authors are equally sanguine on the utility and practical application of the diagnosis.

This of course raises questions about the extent evidence based practice is a factor in dyslexia support. The fact that funding for support comes after a diagnosis has been made by a qualified educational psychologist suggests this would be the evidence from which practice is derived. However, this research suggests otherwise. The tutors do not necessarily share the broad assumptions of the authors that a diagnostic report has any substantial value beyond acting as a gatekeeper between students who can and cannot access support. A closer reading of the BIS consultation document yields a possible explanation for this. Certainly an educational psychologist is the professional from whom the permission the access support must be obtained, but a closer reading of the document declares an acknowledgement of the ambiguity between who knows what about dyslexia and how. Once the label has been officially attached students are entitled to 'specialist' one-to-one study skills support. This is the crucial term as it is what constitutes 'specialist' support that appears to go to the heart of the social construction of dyslexia rather than the diagnostic procedure of being labelled dyslexic.

What this research has identified is a diversity of opinions and meaning behind the label 'dyslexia'. There is no agreement on the utility of either the label or the educational psychological assessment. Yet one needs to focus on what common features *have* been identified. The students' experience necessarily requires them to submit themselves to full educational psychological assessments, apply for government funding to finance their support, and from thence to present themselves to specialist dyslexia tutors. As has been mentioned, there does not need to be consistency between the contents of the report and the contents of the support sessions, yet students cannot access the latter without permission from the former. But the fact that dyslexia support is funded on the basis of diagnosis rather than any particular criteria for specific interventions suggests that the social construction of the condition exists, from a Foucaldian, perspective, as a discourse based upon a formal way of thinking and interacting. According to Foucault power and knowledge are interrelated and all personal and professional relationships are a negotiation of power (Kendall and Wickham, 1998; Gutting, 2005). How power is negotiated in this instance is that the system of thought governing dyslexia specialists allows for tensions to exist within established boundaries (Foucault, 2002) and which from there governs the rules the specialists must operate under. Therefore, as was mentioned in the Introduction, 'power' should not be confused with dominance (Oliver, 2010), but understood as the source of the continuing momentum of the discourse as it functions in practice. The policy that allows for tensions to exist between different specialists in dyslexia support, enables a justification for resistance to occur by the tutors who perceive their knowledge of dyslexia as more relevant to their support of students than anything that may be highlighted in a diagnostic document.

Furthermore, by applying research and analytical methods influenced by Foucault one can discern how psychology itself, and its multitude of screenings and assessments, works very much in tandem with the overall commodification of dyslexia. The next common feature in the experience of a student with dyslexia is the fact that they are enrolled in higher education institutions; it is therefore inescapable that the process of one set of professionals (psychologists) capturing those elements of the students' existence which deviate from the norm, and a second set of professionals (specialist tutors) guiding students towards 'normalcy' would be interconnected with the idea of commodification. If one takes the view that the body and the mind do not act independent of any discourse or system of knowledge, then it is the material conditions that bring about ways of knowing that should form the locus of this research. The discourse of dyslexia, therefore, is caught up in how the formal way of perceiving the condition from a psychological perspective is also bound in the market driven manner in which the assessments and support occurs. The epistemological position is that dyslexia is a neurological deficit that in turn can be understood within the context of the medical model of disability. Moreover, this medical model comprehension has influenced how funding policy has been driven, which in itself has yielded the conditions in which private psychologists and private tutors can flourish. It follows, therefore, that an exploration of the epistemological and ontological significance of psychology is required to explain how the discipline itself has been established as a framework through which interaction, policy and practice are all derived.

6.2 Psychology and Social Interaction

This research has seen how the belief in 'neurodevelopmental disorders' has featured prominently in the epistemological world-view of many of the stakeholders in HE dyslexia support. This research has uncovered the requirement of psychology to provide a reason for dyslexia support. A key research finding research is that dyslexia support, and indeed dyslexia itself, is constructed around the idea that psychology bestows upon the specialist the authority to assess, examine and supervise dyslexic students against seemingly naturally occurring criteria. This section reveals how the discourse of dyslexia is beheld by specialists, but also demonstrates how the epistemological foundations for understanding the characteristics of dyslexia contribute to the commodification of both the assessment and the support which follows. The section will highlight the discursive beliefs in the primacy of psychology as a fundamental agent in the diagnosis and support of dyslexic people insofar as it yields a useful insight into the 'power behind sciences and other cognitive authorities that present themselves as grounded in nothing more than the force of disinterested evidence and argument' (Gutting, 2005: 51).

Many specialists, be they authors or support tutors, have psychology as their academic background or associate their texts to a recognised authority on dyslexia who heralds from a psychology background. Throughout the texts for example, there is a disinclination to challenge the psychological community in their contribution to understanding dyslexia. There is a direct relevance in these findings as they correlate with the earlier suggestion that funding provision for support must be evidence-based; so if that evidence has a general air of indefinability about it, then one could suggest

there would be a much reduced justification for that specialist support to continue. The consensus that dyslexia is fundamentally rooted in the individual psychology of the student 'provides an excuse for legislators to adopt a medical model of learning disabilities and ignore other problems in our education and social systems that contribute to various students' learning difficulties' (Ho, 2004: 86).

Psychology, however, is useful in establishing it as the bedrock of knowledge for the community of dyslexia specialists. This research has identified this in two particularly unique ways; firstly, the psychological community has supplied the world with something singularly exclusive – the psychological assessment as a means of diagnosing dyslexia. The identification of dyslexia as something intrinsically psychological is necessary for the sort of support that can result from a confirmation of a diagnosis. To that end the texts and tutors incorporate this into their discourse as the majority make the case for the psychologist to be the foremost professional in the life of the dyslexic person. Secondly, academic weaknesses and accomplishments by students are unified into a general dyslexia profile through the description of what are presented as primary and secondary characteristics. Putting the two together suggests that the acceptance of dyslexia as being in some sense pathological locates any subsequent support as contingent upon dyslexia recognised as an impairment within the medical model. For those receiving support, this paradigm makes all the difference to how their personal experiences are driven; even if the support tutor is inclined to perceive their roles as academic advisers than outright dyslexia specialists, nonetheless, access to the tutor is only permitted once educational psychologists have determined the causes of the students' problems. This is, to the psychologists as least, necessarily so, as 'causes are important, because they affect the recommendations one would make regarding

appropriate help or support' (Beech and Singleton, 1997: 1). Although, as has already been revealed, this assumption is not necessarily the case in practice.

Reid and Kirk in *Dyslexia in Adults: Education and Employment* (2001) attempt to model a 'theory to practice' representation of what the function of the psychologist is. Focusing on assessments gives a certain credence to the idea that discerning dyslexic traits within a wider (cognitive) learning profile is a role only few are trained and knowledgeable to do:

> It is essential that those conducting an assessment are fully trained and experienced with the adult population. Being an educational psychologist in itself does not necessarily equip one to conduct an adult assessment. (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 26).

Although Reid and Kirk (2001) do not suggest that all educational psychologists are able to conduct dyslexia assessments, they certainly do not suggest that any formal diagnoses can be conducted by anyone other than educational psychologists. Indeed, they are fundamentally adamant that something as profoundly important as administering a dyslexia assessment should be completely in the hands of psychologists:

> Additionally, yes/no checklists can be administered without assistance from qualified professionals and, given the implications of finding out that one is dyslexic, this is not a desirable practice. It is important that only professionally qualified and experienced people administer screening and interview schedules. (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 33).

From a professional practice perspective Reid and Kirk (2001) establish the role of the psychologist as in the commanding position over the more subordinate dyslexia tutor.

For example, on the subject of screenings (as opposed to full diagnostic assessments) they suggest:

> There is undoubtedly a need for a valid and reliable screening system for adults with suspected dyslexia that can be used speedily and by personal without a great deal of training (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 35-35).

What is meant by 'a great deal of training' is presumably extensive training as a professional educational psychologist. As screenings only provide an indication as to the likelihood of dyslexia, it would not be unreasonable to assume whomsoever administers them are not required to have substantial specialist knowledge of that side of dyslexia. To bolster their assertion, they continue that 'While it is important that the person conducting or overseeing the screening has some training in dyslexia, this does not have to be administered by a psychologist' (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 35). The message is clear; a Foucaldian analysis would suggest that what Reid and Kirk are advocating is an acceptance of the moral authority to diagnose a condition and present it as something that should be accepted as an *a priori* reality.

Tilly Mortimore in *Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioners Handbook* (2008), however, understands the educational context of dyslexia support. Moreover, she determines that as far as the relationship between support tutor and psychologist is concerned the diagnosis only serves to support the early observational identification by the educator, and facilitate further pedagogic measures:

> It can be argued that dyslexia only becomes a disability when the learning differences are overlooked or when the support offered is inappropriate and results in a failure to thrive. However, if provision is proved inadequate and the student is still struggling, a diagnosis of dyslexia is frequently required,

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particularly at Further or Higher Education levels, for the learner to access special exam arrangements or other types of support (Mortimore, 2008: 58).

Being more focused on classroom practitioners Mortimore is clearly more sympathetic to the 'realities' of education support in that she does not in the first instance emphasise the primacy of the psychologist. However, the role of the psychologist is tentatively explored by implication. Mortimore reveals that amidst the concerted effort to spotlight the urgency to develop evidence based practice, psychologists remain central to the construction of dyslexia:

> Research has moved beyond both the limited definition of dyslexia as an unexpected difficulty with literacy or focusing on dyslexia as purely a phonological processing difficulty. It now indicates that dyslexia can cause a wide range of differences in information processing (Mortimore, 2008: 63).

Although Mortimore does not say it outright, what is implied corresponds with earlier suggestions that a person's immediate environment can and does play a crucial role in how their dyslexia affects them. 'Dyslexia can cause a wide range of differences in information processing' all rather depends on the sort of information one is obliged to process, and by extension under what circumstances. This point has previously been acknowledged by Beech and Singleton (1997: 4) who suggest that professionals 'need and acknowledge that there must be circumstances at home that must be responsible for a lack of literacy development'. And yet this acknowledgement of possible socio-cultural factors in the educational development of students diagnosed with dyslexia does not seem to have deterred the support community's enthusiasm for the efficacious quality of the assessment nor the role of the psychologist. As has been explored previously, particularly in relation to the titles, the order of statements within any given discourse underpins how those statements come to be repeatable. In this case it would

appear the construction of dyslexia is premised upon the actual statement of the label issued by an authority on dyslexia rather than an educationalist. Foucault (2009) would assert that these findings reveal an example of how the examination and assessment of students evokes a perceived truth about the individual examined. But while this may be narrowed to simply focus upon psychology, it is the interconnected network of specialists who further enable the repeatability of the belief in neurodevelopment disorders to contribute to a wider cultural construction of dyslexia. The purpose of the psychological assessment is, it would appear, to also position students within a network of practice and beliefs.

McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer's *The Adult Dyslexic: Interventions and Outcomes* (2002), for example, does not question the primacy of the psychologist, but they suggest that for the support tutor it is important vis-à-vis their own specialist knowledge base that they are more aware of, once again, that indefinable 'essence'. Moreover, they recognise that for support to be effective, the support tutor necessarily is required to be more fluid and flexible in their response to dyslexic students:

> Tutors and trainers need to be flexible and have a good understanding of the nature of dyslexia … It is important to be able to relate to and empathize with each individual, developing a knowledge of how they process information. Making use of that is more important than knowing subject matter. A detailed knowledge of the client's job or the topic they are studying is not needed, as the emphasis should be on process rather than content (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 37).

The recurring theme here is that it is assumed the psychologists' diagnostic reports are necessarily a vital tool to aid the pedagogic intervention of the support tutor:

> The principle of 'specificity', that is, the notion that dyslexic people have an underlying neurological inefficiency, is central to the assessment process. Even in screening some measures of general ability as well as specific processes such as working memory is important. Any procedure that fails to incorporate appropriate cognitive tests is likely to produce false positives: that is the incorrect identification of people who have low intelligence (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 44-45).

A close reading of the language of this text is revealingly positivistic and essentially 'pro-science'. Their insistence that students with the same symptoms of academic weaknesses be distinguished from each other (i.e. dyslexic from the non-dyslexic) through a complex process of 'appropriate cognitive tests' serves two paradoxically irreconcilable positionalities; firstly, they echo Beech and Singleton's (1997: 2) assertion that psychometric tests 'cannot be undertaken by the teacher but only by an appropriately qualified psychologist', which does in effect position the subsequent supporting pedagogies within a seemingly narrow paradigm. Secondly, to follow through with this model of psychological determinism reduces the scope of 'flexibility' support tutors were previously advised to take on board. The crux of this insoluble dilemma lies in the tensions between the validity of the 'science' required to justify the psychological model of dyslexia, and the inherently varied and subjective qualities that lay beneath its individual development. These tensions have indeed been recognised variously in relevant literature on the subject, and have not gone unnoticed by authors who point out that psychology, because of its deep-rooted association with society at large, simply cannot yield data or any sort of knowledge in the same manner as other sciences can. As Cohen et al state:

> There have been great efforts to scale all kinds of variables in order to achieve an exactness and precision characteristic of natural sciences. It is possible to see this in many forms of psychology with its focus on personality correlates, stress or attitudinal scales. (Cohen et al, 2007: 26).

This sentiment is echoed by Morgan and Klein's *The Dyslexic Adult in a Non-Dyslexic World* (2000). They see the report, and therefore the psychologist, as the touchstone of dyslexia knowledge:

> The diagnostic report, if written in a helpful way, which explains the results of the diagnosis, in terms of both the dyslexic person's strengths and his weaknesses, can be a basis for planning learning, identifying support needs in work or study, exploring effective strategies for dealing with difficulties and helping the person build self-esteem (Morgan and Klein, 2000: 43-44).

Indeed, Morgan and Klein (2000), and Mcloughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002), are in more or less agreement that the overriding purpose of the psychologist's report is to distinguish clearly between what is and is not an educational issue. Mcloughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002: 46) make this point very clear when they state there should be 'a clear distinction between dyslexia and general learning difficulties at the screening stage; the use of psychological tests by non-psychologists; and the need for clarity as to its purpose'.

Arguably the 'use of psychological tests by non-psychologists' that is at the heart of why dyslexia support tutors do what they do, and the extent to which there is autonomy in their practice. Largely this is an issue bound within the policy of HE disability support, as dyslexia support tutors are funded on the presumption that the psychological assessment report is an appropriate diagnostic document. Students recommended and funded, for example, thirty hours 'non-medical support study skills sessions' are only done so if the psychologist *has* distinguished between general and specific learning difficulties. Praxis in this context is the inevitable synthesis of policy and a combined field of professional practice. The fact that, post-diagnosis, students can utilise the

recommendations in the report made by the psychologist as they carry more weight

institutionally than the support tutor, is a significance not lost by the authors of the

texts. Morgan and Klein (2000), as an example, make the link between the rather

abstract notion of 'cognitive deficits' with the tangible realities that are the manifest

consequences of a confirmed diagnosis:

> A diagnosis of dyslexia opens doors to opportunities, grants, support and special
> examination provision. By shedding light on the reasons for past failure, it can
> also be personally enabling and affect self-esteem. (Morgan and Klein, 2000:
> 23)

Where Morgan and Klein (2000) diverge quite considerably from the previous authors

is that they question who in practice should diagnose dyslexia in adults and

interestingly, who ought to take ownership of the diagnosis. As has already been

alluded to, in terms of policy, this is presently very much in the realm of the educational

psychologist, but nonetheless, Morgan and Klein do make the case for a closer

association of identification based on context. Morgan and Klein of the mind that

educators, quite apart from being lightly trained or inappropriate, are in fact ideal

candidates to conduct diagnostic assessments:

> A recognition of the problem inherent in diagnosing adults and an acceptance of
> the need to rely on the 'clinical (or professional) feel' of dyslexia supports the
> view that those working within adult education or training
> establishments/environments may be the best placed to diagnose dyslexia in
> adults (Morgan and Klein, 2000: 34).

Epistemologically, this research has identified the prevalent belief that it is the function

of *psychology itself* to distinguish between different types of struggling students, but

moreover to establish the epistemological and ontological framework which mediates

how policy and practice coalesce. But what this research tells us about dyslexia is of

less concern than what it tells us about the cultural discourse regarding the 'reception, acceptance and development of science [depending] on a great extent to a series of practices in which the scientist is a multi-faceted entrepreneur, indiscriminately mixing economic, political, natural and cultural claims to construct truth' (Kendall and Wickham, 1998: 77). In this case, the current policy of excluding students from the support process with all its attendant funding, places a primacy upon the role of the psychologist (the scientist) as quite literally an entrepreneur. Moreover, the prevalent acceptance of the requirement of the diagnostic procedure seemingly constructs the notion of dyslexia as something that must exist only from the point at this stage of interaction. In doing so the condition inevitably becomes accepted as a commodity as the belief in the value of the psychologists' contribution is at the heart of both the epistemological foundation of *what* dyslexia is, and also central to the deficit model understanding of its effects which primarily drive funding for support. It is for this reason that using Foucault's methods of analysis has revealed an understanding on the nature of dyslexia in higher education; namely that the human interactions and processes 'going on in the minds of scientists, philosophers, *et al*. – is less important than the underlying structures that form the context of their thinking' (Gutting, 2005: 33). Essentially, this means that the psychological assessment is a commodity which is almost universally accepted by all specialists without question, irrespective of its 'use-value', but awarded a legitimacy due to its 'exchange-value', i.e. 'what the object [the assessment procedure and report] will fetch in exchange on the market' (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 103).

6.3 The Commodification of Dyslexia

In a market economy it is possible to observe from this study's findings how Foucault's (1991) notion of the panopticon has allowed the embedding of dyslexia as a commodity so comprehensively within its own discourse. It could be argues that central authority has relinquished accountable responsibility to the discipline of psychology for the purpose of forming a disciplinary society in which surveillance and monitoring of individual students is done so through the mechanisms of seeking an assessment from a private practitioner and channeling funding for support to specialist tutors whom must justify their position *as* specialists. There is a widespread belief that teachers who may observe particular educational deficits only function as one step in the construction of dyslexia, as their professional practice is removed from them at the point either a screening or psychological assessment occurs. The fact that the psychological assessment needs to be paid for means the label and the support cannot be divorced from the commodification of the condition. As central policy stipulates that a full educational psychological assessment report is the key which unlocks funding for support, then this has, it appears, contributed to dyslexia as a construction within a capitalist paradigm.

But also, even though the assessment may be only obtained through the willing acceptance of free market economics, amongst the specialists, there are strong misgivings about commodification occurring within the DSA funded support. This is not to suggest that the tutors are against the idea of dyslexic students receiving DSA funded support from tutors whom may be employed by private agencies (indeed many

of the research participants either have been or are still employed by private suppliers of specialist support), but more that the general consensus is that it is the nature of the social interactions amongst staff and students within an institution that constitutes the perceived enhancement of the specialist nature of the tutor. Moreover, dyslexia itself is constructed as a social practice in which the tutors can enact their role more comprehensively than would be case if support was divorced from the wider educational environment.

Kelly makes this point very clear. She stated that:

> The number one thing is, I have access to the departments. If I had, for example, a history student, I could go to the history dyslexia liaison officer and tutor and talk to them. We can have a case conference to sort things out. You get to know people. I have all these things at my fingertips, so I become part of the network.

Indeed it is being part of a network which is widely perceived to be the primary means of contributing to the specialist nature of their practice. Presently, although students are funded through their DSA for study skills support, students do not have to choose embedded university employed dyslexia tutors, but can elect to direct their funding elsewhere to private companies. Although no misgivings were articulated regarding the private arrangements between practicing psychologists and students seeking a diagnostic assessment, when free market economics was applied to support tutors, this model appears to be considered detrimental to the quality of the support available. This is not due to the actual quality of the support, but due to the fact that the construction of dyslexia does not, it appears, lend itself easily to this sort of commodification. Put simply, working for a private supplier limits the potential for interaction, which in turn reduces the manner in which dyslexia is constructed through institutional practice.

Christie expressed serious reservations about how dyslexia support could fall victim to this practice.

> I am currently doing some Clear-Links support, and it's not bad. But then I have to think, if I've got a student, or a parent, or a partner – a stakeholder in that situation would I really advocate it? And the answer is no. We're absolutely forbidden from having any contact with the university, including the disability department. Now to be honest, I think I do a reasonable job and have a reasonable working relationship with that student. But it's the education as consuming; they buy in so much of the product, and education is not a product, it's a process.

One can certainly take Christie's statement to mean that her reservation of being forbidden to have anything at all to do with the university are bound to the idea that support must be more than what goes on in the support sessions. May, for example, has also worked for Clear-Links previously, but did not have any specialist qualifications or experience to undertake the role. As she said, "When they took me on Clear-Links they asked me would I do one day a week? And I had absolutely no idea whether I could do it. I'd been in nursery and primary all my life, but I'll give it a whirl". However, like Kelly, agency support may or may not be similar pedagogically, but it is the social interactions that drive the practice. May stated that "As a tutor who works in the university I get to liaise in schools, I get to liaise with the study skills tutors and build awareness. That wouldn't be possible if I were an agency tutor".

Almost universally the role of the support tutor in higher education was perceived to be unique and distinct in a way that commodified agency support was not. Robin made the point that agency staff may provide a 'service' but "as a model they are very reductive

because the other thing about our work is there's more to our work than what goes on in the room. So often with the contracts you're just paid an hourly rate. That means you don't get any reflective time with what you've done with the student. It also means you don't get any time to do any professional liaison with academic staff".

The interesting revelation here is that 'professional liaison with academic staff' is seen as more than the key to good practice, but is intertwined utterly with both what constitutes dyslexia support as specialist, and how that specialism enhances the reputation of the tutor. Sally, for example, typifies this belief. She stated that:

> In fact the academic staff here are almost too reliant on me; they always say to students 'Sally will sort you out'. Not pass the book so to speak, they liaise with me but they're very dependent on me and my knowledge.

The question, therefore, is 'what is this knowledge?' Cleary tutors such as Sally are of the opinion that for academic staff to become dependent on her knowledge then her knowledge as a specialist must be demonstrably substantial. So far the research has not yielded any particular insights which could be identified *as* specialist knowledge; certainly the inconsistent focus upon the function of a psychological assessment report, the different emphases placed upon either the primary academic characteristics or the secondary more emotional characteristics of dyslexia, or indeed the disagreements regarding the practical affects of diagnosis and labelling suggest that 'knowledge' may be something gained elsewhere.

What this research has identified are two conceptual frameworks that run in tandem with each other in practice. The first is that dyslexia cannot be a purely educational

issue in higher education. The primary characteristics of dyslexia as they relate to academic arrested development are necessarily presented textually as issues pertaining almost exclusively as a cognitive deficit, and therefore patently disabling. This conceptual paradigm of dyslexia is, it appears, a requirement for the justification of funding and specialist support to be made available for students diagnosed by a qualified and well remunerated educational psychologist. However, the research has, as mentioned earlier, not yielded any information which suggests there is a direct correlation from the psychological paradigm to the practical application of specialist support. Thus the second conceptual framework regarding the construction of dyslexia is based upon the notion that irrespective of differences in support practices, dyslexia can only exist through the interactions that occur between various professionals. In short, the analysis of the textbooks has highlighted the epistemological paradigm dyslexia must be accepted as a distinctly psychological problem, and the findings from the interviews has revealed the belief that in some way specialist tutors can only resolve these problems if the have access to inter-departmental interaction; yet moreover have the legislative legitimacy to do so. Fundamentally then, dyslexia is captured in higher education via the coalescence of the belief in the primacy of psychology; the manner in which cognitive deficits are framed as a series of statements focused upon the experiential context of being identified with dyslexia; and the acceptance of the fact that to experience dyslexia on an individual level is driven by the authority of the support tutor.

The main point here is that both psychology and the embedded nature of directly employed support tutors allows for dyslexia to exist as a cultural discourse in which custom and knowledge play their part in how understanding the condition is transmitted

amongst professionals. In this case psychology certainly allows an ontological

foundation, but it is in the very act of being diagnosed, that is to say, the interaction

between student and psychologist, which enables dyslexia to become manifestly

material. The fact that the research has identified no clear connection between the

diagnostic report and the support sessions, but merely an assumption that it is probable

a connection exists, suggests that pedagogically this is a set of behaviours very far

removed from the ideal of collaborative pedagogic partnerships (Crawford, Horsely et

al, 2015). The fact that this practice has influenced both the policy of funded support

and the manner in which professionals provide their services goes some way to explain

how these contingencies have driven the systems of thought which exist to predetermine

the experiences of dyslexic students in higher education. These systems have not been

deliberately or intentionally created but rather 'they are the product of the activities of

human beings [in which] particular ways of acting or thinking presuppose a specific

pattern of knowledge' (Oliver, 2010: 20-21). Therefore, what has been revealed is that

the practice of constructing dyslexia as a social discourse continues as a series of

diagnostic and support practices all of which are firmly established so one set of

professionals necessarily relies upon the other. For example, for the psychological

assessment process to have any value it necessarily relies upon the support which

follows. This support is bolstered with the notion that the greater the opportunity for

interaction amongst other professionals, the more tangible the dyslexia. This

corresponds with the Foucauldian view that everything is discourse and nothing can

exists outside the parameters of the discourse. That tutors perceive dyslexia support to

be made more manifest the greater the opportunity for interdepartmental liaison

suggests that the pedagogy is immaterial; it is the social process of transferring and

reinforcing particular beliefs that establishes dyslexia as a combination of actions and behaviours.

But this leads one back to the original question; 'what is this knowledge?' Sally articulated what the other tutors and the textbooks alluded to; dyslexia specialists seemingly know things others do not! The following chapter will explore what and where this knowledge comes from, focusing primarily upon how textbooks almost universally are in dialogue with primary, empirical research, and value/social capital attached to specialist training and experiential learning.

In previous chapters, the research findings revealed that within the dyslexia support profession there is a broad belief it is a condition that exists independent of any environmental or external mitigating circumstance. Moreover, dyslexia's characteristics constitute a classification of unique elements. This was illustrated in the belief that dyslexia specialists have a legitimate authority to classify and diagnose dyslexia, and that it is a solvable problem with the right recourse to an appropriate knowledge-base. This research suggests that in being labelled dyslexic there are *extrinsic* solutions to the *intrinsic* problems inherent in being diagnosed.

This chapter examines the research findings as they relate to the foundation of specialist knowledge amongst dyslexia professionals. The question raised in the previous chapter 'what is knowledge?' is of course is an impossibly esoteric question to answer. Nonetheless, answers of a sort can be derived should one focus upon not what knowledge *is* but what sort of evidence there is to justify the scope of influence of educational psychologists and dyslexia specialists. To that end two features of the research have revealed themselves from a close reading of the textbooks and the interviews; the first is the recurring incorporation and engagement with primary evidence within the books, and second the complex and at times ambiguous relationship the tutors have with specialist qualifications. Both the recourse to include and engage in primary research within the field of dyslexia and the importance placed upon the premium of gaining a specialist dyslexia qualification serve the same purpose; they reinforce professional status. Taking one's cue from Foucault, I argue that dyslexia is

not an *a priori* pathology but rather a complex and interconnected array of contingencies that involve 'mapping the relations of power that led to the problematisation of the characteristics the diagnosis describes' (Campbell, 2013: 10). To put it another way, the nature of 'power' applies in this instance to access to specialist knowledge, and how that knowledge has practical applicability in two ways; ameliorating the worst effects of dyslexia and reinforcing the notion that specialists can manage the problem experienced by individuals diagnosed. The research suggests that *what* is known about dyslexia has considerable bearing upon the manner in which it has *become* known – which is of course very much in keeping with the nature of discursive formations, chiefly that they 'limit what can be enunciated in a particular statement' (Campbell, 2013: 13).

7.1 The Function of Evidence within Specialist Textbooks

There is an assumption, as revealed through this research, that evidence is vital for professional practice. Evidence and allusions to it lend themselves to professional status. Indeed, within higher education dyslexia support, the acceptance of some form of evidence is an essential requirement. The UK Higher Education Academy, for example, in their report on accessibility for dyslexic students, initially make the point that 'specialist study skills support' will be 'offered by the disability or welfare officer in each institution' (Lockley, 2001: 2). Although the report suggests that, as far as disabled students are concerned, all efforts must be made to ensure courses are adapted to suit their individual needs, the implication of referring to 'specialist' support is that dyslexic students can only be guided by qualified or experienced professionals. But more than that, those professionals will be best equipped to undertake the support

practice because their unique knowledge will fully comprehend the implications of 'research' which shows 'that dyslexia is much more complicated than simply a difficulty with words' (Lockley, 2001: 1). Research and evidence, and professional training and status, therefore, are instrumental in the justification of support. Moreover, when combined reveal the almost imperceptible mechanisms through which the construction of dyslexia is established and maintained.

The professionals, be they authors or tutors, rely on evidence, some more so than others, and some more skeptical than others, but evidence is a seemingly perennial constant in the minds of those in the dyslexia community, as without it professional practice is bereft of its *raison d'etre*. Irrespective of what variations of pedagogic interventions there may be as suggested by the authors and practitioners, implicit is 'the belief that a characteristic or deficit is inherent within an individual and is likely to have biological rather than social causes' (Riddell in Barton, 1996:84). But the relationship the research participants have with the *type* of evidence reveals something altogether more nuanced. Tilly Mortimore's text (2008), for example, is wholly skeptical of much academic (scientific) research in dyslexia, particularly the disciplines concerned with genetic and biological causation. Fawcett (2001), however, includes chapters that are considerably more engaged positively with the contribution of primary research to the collective knowledge-base of dyslexia. The divergence in their respective positionalities may be a consequence of their own professional status; Mortimore is a dyslexia support specialist; Fawcett is not. Fawcett, as a practicing research academic, would, one assume, reify the extensive academic material available to other researchers and those seeking evidence for their evidence-based practice.

Professionals who work with students tend to either keep the inclusion of primary

research data to a minimum, or like Reid and Kirk's text (2001), concentrate instead on

typifications as suggested *by* the research. However, even Reid and Kirk (2001), whose

text focuses mainly on advice for professionals working with dyslexic adults, do

nonetheless concede the necessity of referring to an 'essentialist perspective' (Riddell in

Barton, 1996: 84) to highlight the dyslexia specific nature of their pedagogy. Thus,

while Reid and Kirk (2002: 148) do acknowledge that 'there can be some overlap and

confusion between the difficulties associated with dyslexia and the difficulties each of

us experience in the course of life events', they go on to state:

> There is now growing evidence that the dichotomy between left and right
> hemispheres may not be as clear and as distinct as believed some years ago and
> there is still some value in examining the skills principally associated with each
> hemisphere. [Understanding the right/left hemisphere of the brain] highlights
> some of the possible strengths of dyslexic people and provides some guidance
> on how they may learn more effectively (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 148).

From a Foucauldian perspective, one could interpret this statement as suggesting that

'characteristics that were previously unproblematic become pathologised' (Campbell,

2013: 4), which itself is a discursive strategy that has the effect of legitimising the

concept of the condition through disciplinary practices. Or, as French and Swain

suggest, 'Either the problem lies with the person so is viewed through an individual

model, or the problem lies within the environment so is understood within a social

model of disability' (French and Swain, 2008: 24). Either way, whether the

intervention is one-to-one support or a comprehensive overhaul of the wider

environment, it is necessarily premised on evidence to support the pathological effects

of a recognised 'disability'. But more presciently it illustrates the epistemological framework through which dyslexia is understood and discussed.

Fawcett's text (2001) presents research as vital to the understanding of dyslexia. The primary chapters concentrate for the most part on detailing the essentialist perspective of the dyslexia paradigm before shifting focus to make evidence-based pedagogic suggestions. This is apparently necessarily so as, according to Morrall, 'Arguably this may be one way of perceiving dyslexia, as a pathological issue and genetically determined, but already it is possible to discern the epistemological and ontological framework the condition is conceptually founded upon. Essentially, science is presented as the 'explanatory paradigm'' (Morrall, 2008: 37) for dyslexia.

Similarly, Snowling's text (2000: 36) constructs her own dyslexic profile with its foundations planted firmly within an empirical research based model. To her the evidence for dyslexia can and should be used to clarify and quantify the experiences of dyslexic people with a view that such understanding will inevitably improve the quality of support currently available. To that end, evidence can inform practice because 'a primary aim of research on dyslexia is therefore to describe the pattern of difficulties observed in affected individuals and how these difficulties change with age' (Snowling, 2000: 27-27). The fusion of 'difficulties observed', 'affected individuals', research and its implications for support practice are to Snowling all rather self-evident as:

> The finding that dyslexic readers are impaired relative to age-matched peers is of note. Furthermore, verbal short-term memory difficulties characterize adults with dyslexia, even when their reading problems are fully compensated. In short, there is no compelling evidence that verbal short-term memory reaches normal levels of performance as time progresses; the memory deficit cannot be dismissed as a facet of 'developmental delay'. The simplest interpretation of the memory impairment in dyslexia is that dyslexic readers are less efficient than

> normal readers when required to recruit phonetic memory codes (Snowling, 2000: 36-37)

The key phrase in this passage is 'developmental delay', which suggests that dyslexia is indeed a permanent disability and therefore impervious to the best efforts of qualified support tutors. And yet, authors such as Mortimore (2008) highlight how inconclusive primary evidence can be. This also yields another interesting facet of the inclusion of evidence; whatever their respective relationship to it is, its inclusion is perceived to be vital to the sort of support and teaching practices that accompany the texts.

Mortimore's (2008) own contribution to this inter-textual mix is at once unquestioningly accepting of the dyslexia model, a model that is with its own internal coherence and epistemological boundaries, while also straining to be distinguished as something set apart from the rest; as though her specialist knowledge is originally different from all the dyslexia writers who preceded her. Her position, from a Foucaultian perspective, is irreconcilable with the position her text must take within the established canon of works on both the scientific research into dyslexia and the growing number of publications dedicated to providing dyslexia specific teaching and learning strategies. This is borne out quite evidently in her ambiguous relationship with evidence. Her skepticism is apparent throughout the text, and arguably much of her questioning of the data may owe itself to her own agenda of sustaining her professional standing. On the subject of research and its application to dyslexia support practice Mortimore asks a simple, yet effective question; 'Is there reliable, empirical research to support the contention that dyslexia may frequently carry with it talents in spatial, mechanical or visual skills?' (Mortimore, 2008: 84). There are two areas of

signification here; firstly, she is doubting the extent dyslexia specialists can lay claim to the compelling nature of the overall research data. But secondly, she asks the question in a way that distills dyslexia into what can be described in terms of observable characteristics – 'talents in spatial, mechanical or visual skills'. Later in her text there is much discussion on the 'gift' of dyslexia to compliment the 'curse', so although she largely rejects vast swathes of research data, she does not follow through and reject the notion that dyslexia can be typically characterised by the recurrence of seemingly persistent traits. She evaluates the evidence on its merits and concludes either in the affirmative or negative (usually the negative) on whether it has veracity:

> There is little evidence that weakness in one type of processing will automatically produce strength in the other. Handedness studies do not seem to provide any real support for the linking of visuo-spatial skills with dyslexia. To date there is insufficient collected data to come to any firm conclusions about the predominance of high visuo-spatial scores among dyslexic individuals (Mortimore, 2008: 87, 90 and 91).

However, Mortimore *needs* evidence. Possibly due to her own position as a dyslexia support practitioner, as well as someone with an academic background in education and psychology, she tends to gravitate towards the highly empirically positivistic:

> The consensus among researchers is that the evidence from behaviour, genetics and personality research (Blakemore & Frith, 2005) suggests that brain pathology provides individuals with a range of potential that can be shaped and developed as they interact with the opportunities the environment presents (Mortimore, 2008: 7).

Interestingly, this passage highlights both the epistemological and ontological division that appears to exist amongst the authors. It is significant, for example, that Mortimore alludes to primary research, which suggests brain pathology can be shaped and developed with the right interventions – something that appears to contradict the

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positionality of Snowling's text vis-à-vis her reference to 'developmental delays' being

permanent impediments. The research for this thesis indicates that although *what* is

known about dyslexia may cohere around particular statements regarding learning

characteristics, there is no such broad agreement amongst the professionals regarding

the legitimacy with which that understanding has been acquired.

The authors, whether through genuine acceptance, or critical engagement all

nevertheless include scientific evidence within their texts. Fawcett (2001) includes

several chapters by numerous authors detailing specific areas of scientific, medical

contexts of dyslexia. Indeed, whole sections of her textbook are dedicated variously to

'Biological Bases' and 'Cognitive Processes' before arriving at the final section,

'Interventions'. As if to underline the medicalised language, Fisher and Smith (Chapter

1) present the case for, as Mortimore (2008) would suggest, a 'consensus':

> The isolation of gene variants that may be involved in developmental dyslexia
> remains a major challenge for research into this important trait. The potential
> benefits of achieving this goal include early diagnosis of individuals who are at
> increasing risk for reading disorders and the identification of novel biological
> targets for therapeutic intervention. Such research promises to provide a firm
> foundation for exploring how environmental factors may interact with genetic
> predisposition. The ultimate aim of these investigations is to gain insight into
> the neurological pathways that underpin our ability to learn to read. (2001: 39).

Irrespective of the divisions that exist amongst the authors regarding the sanctity of

primary research into causes of dyslexia, all the authors in choosing to incorporate and

engage with evidence lay the foundations for what is the location of context within the

dyslexia discourse. If, as we have seen, the first step in the construction of dyslexia is

the establishment of the idea that there are multiple agents involved in the support of

students, and the second is the acceptance of the necessity of labelling/diagnosing those

students, then the third is the presentation of evidential legitimacy. The difficulties of

this arise, however, when it becomes apparent that even to specialists in the fields of

biology and psychology the nature, or 'essence', of dyslexia is profoundly complicated.

Many authors get around this conundrum of inconclusiveness by instead of presenting

the research data, they represent evidence through a discussion of the implications of

the evidence. Fisher and Smith (2001: 42) in Fawcett's text make the point clearly:

> Unfortunately it is clear from many studies that dyslexia is a 'complex trait', a
> phrase used to refer to any phenotype that does not always display a classical
> Mendelian inheritance pattern – one that can be attributed to a single gene.

The first noticeable thing here is their use of the word 'unfortunately', which reveals an

acceptance of the inherent unknowability of dyslexia, but also an unwillingness to

entertain the idea that dyslexia and genetics may not be strictly relevant to support

practice. To an extent, this reductionist view suggests that to many dyslexia specialists

there is a 'failure to recognise the sheer complexity of humans as biosocial creatures,

shaped by both evolutionary and social history' (Rose and Rose, 2013: 2). Their overall

discussion is an interesting example of how the positivist paradigm is administered into

a conceptual apprehension of dyslexia. Their technique is a typical example of how

research is refined into discourse and how, thereafter, discourse is condensed into

practice (praxis):

> A trait like dyslexia may show considerable variability in nature and severity
> between different affected individuals, particularly with respect to age, because
> dyslexic adults tend to compensate for their overall reading difficulties.
> Furthermore, there is not yet a strong consensus about exactly what constitutes
> the core deficit in reading disability, although it is clear that visual problems,
> phonological differences and/or impaired temporal processing are likely to be
> important factors (Fisher and Smith in Fawcett, 2001: 43).

Despite the dispute over whether there is or is not consensus on what exactly constitutes a core deficit Mortimore and Fawcett's texts agree that scientific methods (observation, hypothesis, testing, verification) hits a stumbling block with dyslexia. Fisher and Smith (in Fawcett, 2001: 43) acknowledge this as they concede that 'comparison of linkage data from multiple studies can be difficult, and it is not surprising that independent groups are often unable to replicate linkage findings'. This contrasts with Chapter 2 in Fawcett's text, *The sensorimotor basis of developmental dyslexia,* as Stein, Talcott and Witton (2001: 65) state 'that reading problems are a consequence of impaired development of a system of large neurons in the brain (magnocells)'. Here there is much more confidence in the science as the authors present the case for the wholesale acceptance of genetic and biological determinants:

> It is well known that dyslexia runs in families; and twin studies have shown heritability of 60. The wide ranging manifestations of this syndrome together with the strong evidence for its genetic basis suggest that, biologically speaking, impaired literacy is probably a by-product of a much more fundamental neurodevelopmental syndrome. (Stein, Talcott and Witton in Fawcett, 2001: 66).

Despite not being in complete agreement regarding the relevance of scientific data, it is nonetheless interesting to note that there is universal engagement with it. Collectively one can discern the reason why there is an engagement with evidence, even when there is such widespread difference as to its utility or indeed accuracy. This thesis has already alluded to the fact that for practice to exist, particularly government funded practice, there necessarily must be some form of material substantiation of dyslexia to exist outside of the system of personal and social interactions, so although there is no agreement regarding the conclusiveness of the evidence to identify dyslexia causation, the function of evidence is that it is 'mediated through interpersonal communication processes between patients and doctors or other practitioners' (Morrall: 1998: 84). To

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that end any form of specialist literature which engages with primary evidence does so because it is 'important to the development of the social relations that made a diagnosis such as dyslexia technically possible and bureaucratically useful' (Campbell, 2013: 38). Being 'bureaucratically useful' does not require of the professional conformity of opinion, but rather opportunities to operate within a considerably more flexible system. Indeed, the differences of opinion regarding evidence, as highlighted in this research, follows the Foucaultian notion that resistance is integral to the development of a discourse. There is no classical episteme in relation to dyslexia, wherein 'all the possible kind of living things are predetermined in total independence of historical developments' (Gutting, 2005: 37), but there is an accustomed way of thinking about dyslexia which is broad enough to incorporate a diverse array of positions and opinions.

This raises the question as to whether there can be such a thing as a discipline of professional practice that is particular to dyslexia support. Politically the answer can be answered very much in the affirmative; this is evidenced in the material reality of DSA funded support. However, in terms of the construction of a discourse of dyslexia the answer is wrought with complexities, not the least of which is the manner in which those who purport to *know* about dyslexia lay claim to that knowledge from sources far removed from the research presented by the authors. The growth of professional dyslexia specialists has occurred through circumstance, not design. Their growth and influence have, in real terms, 'gone hand in hand with government policy' (French and Swain, 2009: 45), whereupon the invocation of evidence has allowed the situation to develop where they have 'followed medicine's lead in espousing a scientific justification for their role and prestige' (Morrall, 1998: 70). Amongst the tutors and authors, professional status is a legitimising force bestowed upon practitioners either

through the acquisition of specialist qualifications or the job they happen to be employed to do. But the findings suggest these elements alone do not constitute the bulk of how they know what they do about dyslexia. The next section examines the complex interrelations between professional status, specialist training and manner in which these contribute to the belief in the uniqueness of dyslexia support practice.

7.2 Practice as Social Construction

Before we examine the perceived impact professional qualifications have had on a wider knowledge base, it is important to consider what other factors may have contributed to what specialists know about dyslexia. The texts themselves are treated ambivalently, variously described as 'interesting' or 'useful, but only in as much as they offer the same thing as Cottrell', or else as 'looking in the wrong place'. This ambivalence is surprising, especially given how many books there presently are in the personal possession of the tutors. Many tutors acknowledged that at various times they had referred to the texts, but often either at the start of their careers when pedagogic support strategies were not tried and tested in practice, or occasionally later on, as a sort of validation of technique than recourse to any kind of foundational knowledge base. The relationship between author and text, and text and reader, is one which denotes symmetry of practice; 'experts' with access to 'evidence', whom have status bestowed upon them by academic credentials, bring forth into the world a text whose notional duty it is to guide other experts in the same field via a process of similarity through acclamation. It is in effect a reciprocal relationship in which the texts become an instrument of reproduction, in this case a reproduction of pedagogic practice.

And yet, probably because of the inherent individual nature of dyslexia support practice, there is a conscious effort to hold the texts at arms length by the tutors. This is not necessarily surprising as dyslexia support, as a social construct, is constituted through multiple practices and procedures, all of which may have their own method of operation, but which are nonetheless fused with the practices of other groups of professionals. Therefore, support tutors consciously resisting the agency of these publications is entirely in keeping with Foucault's notion that disciplinary practice 'may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology' (Foucault, 1991: 215). In as far as the texts offer guidance and support in the initial stages of a support tutor's fledgling career, the tutors' own insights through personal experience have yielded a *perceived* individualised approach to the practice of support. Despite much criticism, occasional rejection and at times outright hostility to the books, the books nonetheless act in part as a sort of canon of established literature in which all else must in some small way pay tribute. The majority of the tutors hold to the ideal dyslexia profile as contingent on having a 'neurological difference' which in higher education causes information processing difficulties. But the manner in which they have arrived at this general consensus is primarily experiential.

Basing one's judgement for good practice on primarily one's own personal experiences can lead to many ambiguities and uncertain positions. Firstly, there is the belief that what dyslexia support tutors do is professional, equal to comparable professionals such

as social workers, nurses and teachers. But unlike social workers, nurses and teachers, there is not yet the call for the sort of training one would normally be expected to receive pre-service. Robin for example recognised that the problem may lie with what he called "the myriad of different courses, all offering varying degrees of provision and training". Likewise, Anne, despite herself having a high level post-graduate qualification in dyslexia, is similarly uncertain of the relationship between specialist courses and her own practice. She complained that both the texts themselves and the course content "all sounds a bit too clinical or it all sounds a bit too vague". Indeed, Anne is not untypical of many support tutors who perceive the inclusion of any other disability/dyslexia specialist perspective as almost an intrusion on the 'purity' of her practice. As she stated subsequently, "When I first meet people I don't like to look at their needs assessment or their diagnostic paperwork; I like to meet them a couple of times before I even go down that route because I'd rather gauge what I think is going on from speaking to them rather than from what the paper tells me they are and what they do, because that is not always correct".

Indeed, this research has found that learning through experience and developing one's own support strategies are, to an extent, seen as exemplars of good practice. And yet, considering the growing prevalence of dyslexia support in the UK higher education sector the necessity to actually know anything about dyslexia is not considered as high a priority for tutors as knowing how to respond to people with dyslexia. This is a case in point made by both Denise and Gwen who consider support to be wholly within the purview of educators. Denise, for example, admitted to having a particularly low opinion of much of the other dyslexia professions. Despite conceding that there, perhaps, should be some sort of professional code of practice, she nonetheless stopped

short of pinpointing explicitly any reasons as to why. Moreover, from her own observations of dyslexic students particularly in higher education, much of the worst examples of the so-called 'primary' and 'secondary' characteristics have for the most part long been mitigated through a combination of pre-university support and the students' own desires to overcome any pathological impairment to their academic development. She is cool on the idea that support tutors need to know about dyslexia to any great degree (or indeed be appropriately qualified) because "by the time they come here they've worked out their own strategies. You need a dyslexia qualification if you're dealing with eight year olds". This position contrasts with the notion presented previously in the textbooks that dyslexia is a permanent impediment with strong biological and neurological origins, as well as a cognitive learning difficulty as detailed previously by the tutors.

Gwen similarly rejects the notion that to understand *dyslexia* is to understand dyslexia support, but takes this to the next logical step by suggesting that even the material already out there (psychological, genetic, neurological, educational etc) is, rather then being helpful, in fact the cause of considerable confusion. Like Denise she does not see specialist qualifications as particularly useful or necessary. And like many support tutors, her own road to higher education dyslexia support began in further education Basic Skills – essentially educational. It may be easy, perhaps, to conclude at this point that there is a correlation in attitude between those who have qualifications in dyslexia support (for them) and those who do not (unnecessary). Yet there is a clear mix of those with and without with no clear consistency either way. This is not to say the idea of having a dyslexia qualification is rejected out-of-hand (as we shall see later, quite the

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opposite in fact), but more that experiential knowledge is valued much higher than professional training in terms of the perceived efficacy of pedagogic practice.

What is evident from the textual analyses and the interview findings is that the professional status of each expert or professional practitioner is not one that readily concedes ground to another in a related area. An example of this can be observed in a very indirect interaction between the authors (in the role of 'experts') and the tutors (in the role of professional practitioners). Snowling and Fawcett, for example, are both active researchers in the area of dyslexia screenings and assessments, as well as being the authors of textbooks on the subject. Interestingly, their recommendations for support and interventions extend beyond their textbooks into their research papers, many of which provide some sort of empirical grounding for additional adjustments. Both of these writers assert the necessity of more specialist knowledge, in particular their own so that 'appropriate support programmes can be put in place' (Hatcher, Snowling and Griffiths, 2002: 119), but moreover because 'It is important to increase the evidence base on which recommendations can be made about the support dyslexic students need and the allowances they may require' (Hatcher, Snowling and Griffiths, 2002: 120). Fawcett goes much further in that she puts forward the case that accurate screening and assessments (those very procedures rejected by Anne) should be used to influence wider university policies on how institutions should respond to not just the diagnosis of dyslexia, but the symptoms also. As she states:

- there is a requirement within the University to make recommendations regarding special examination provision. We consider it appropriate to recommend extra time in examinations not only for students with ADL of 2.5 or more, but also for students whose performance is low borderline who also show particular difficulties in, for example, speeded performance, spelling or writing (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997: 80).

Here one can observe both a tension and similar positionality between the authors and the tutors which perhaps explains why there is a reluctance to engage with the diagnostic reports that actually facilitate support. This research indicates that each specialist is protective of their own status; therefore, researchers/experts such as Fawcett and Snowling may feel perfectly justified to discuss how their evidence should be incorporated into others' professional practice. But evidently amongst the tutors this may be considered something of an imposition. More noteworthy is the collective unspoken but alluded to notion that even with Snowling's additional evidence base, Fawcett's recommendations that symptoms should be treated as equally as diagnoses places support, perhaps unwittingly, back in the hands of professional educators (described by Fawcett as a 'lightly trained professionals such as a university support tutors' (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997: 82)) and away from the experts. Thus there is an overlap between the authors, as revealed in their own research papers and the tutors; as mentioned Mortimore's text has previously stated that 'It is important for research to compare the perceived difficulties and needs of students with dyslexia with those who have not been diagnosed, since higher education makes demands upon all students' (Mortimore, 2008: 237), which is ontologically similar to Fawcett's suggestion that non-dyslexic students be supported in the same way as dyslexic students. This in itself further raises the prospect of questioning not only the specialist status of dyslexia support tutors, but also the whole of dyslexia support policy as it relates to the funding of 'specialist' study skills support for one set of students with dyslexia, but not others whom may experience similar disadvantages but have not been formally diagnosed by an appropriately qualified professional.

But all is not quite so simple and straightforward as it would seem. Gwen, being as she is more senior than the other tutors in that she also has responsibilities for coordinating and recruiting other dyslexia tutors, states that when employing staff, having any sort of dyslexia specialist qualification is 'desirable'. Essential to employment is having a teaching qualification. This is despite her own relatively high level academic expertise in the area of dyslexia support. Kelly, however, considers the requirement to have a specialist qualification as very essential; she would "definitely" agree that to have one is vital to good practice. Indeed the level of qualification, she suggests, should be "a masters' degree in dyslexia and some sort of literacy". This is a rather unusual position, especially given that previously she had indicated a skepticism about dyslexia being so closely associated with organisational difficulties, and even that she considers the overlap between dyslexia support and generic study skills support to be more or less indistinguishable. In as far as her own knowledge base is concerned, she stated that "the biggest resource in my case has been the students".

Seeing students as 'resources' is a common theme to emerge from the interviews. The mostly one-to-one nature of the support lends itself easily to good practice being linked strongly with reflective practice. Sally also holds that experiential knowledge is the primary resource of acquiring specialist knowledge for the support tutor, followed closely by the available texts, and lastly professional qualifications and training. Being dyslexic herself, plus her own experiences working with students, has contributed more effectively to the quality of her work than any course presently on offer by, particularly, Dyslexia Action. As she answered on the subject of her own specialist qualifications:

> Nothing at all! My previous Dean – we've talked about it at academic
> appraisals, not that she's ever forced me to, but we've looked into it. And every

time I do look into it, like Dyslexia Action qualifications, I look at the material and I look at what they're saying they offer on their course, and I just think 'you're not getting it, you're just not getting it!

What 'it' is, is what she considers to be Dyslexia Action's model of dyslexia as a deficit model and what she says she has been told is their "attitude towards the disability of dyslexia". In any case, as there is at present no professional code of conduct, or standards by which funding bodies such as SFE or the NHS will agree to fund support sessions, then universities and tutors are under no obligation to assume their way of support is not the *only* way of support. As Sally says, "I don't think you necessarily need a Dyslexia Action qualification to do what we do. So I do think my psychology background and more so the fact that I'm dyslexic, has helped the service to be as respected as it is".

Personal experience, and the interaction with students that comes with the one-to-one approach, is also a feature of May's knowledge base. Again, being dyslexic has played its part in the development of her own support practice, but she is aware, possibly because of her own degree in psychology, that "understanding dyslexia is a top thing". Where exactly this understanding of dyslexia comes from, however, is another matter altogether. Her own dyslexia has, of course, provided some useful insights into the experiences of being dyslexic in higher education, but on reflection she would identify other fields. "I think a lot of my skills come from other places; being a nursery teacher is surprisingly useful", but when pressed to consider professional training, accreditation and particularly qualifications, she replied "I'd say it's a minimum. A very minimum." It would be fair to say, therefore, that a dyslexia qualification 'dealing with eight year olds' would be more than acceptable to some tutors.

What is apparently consistent within the findings is the premium the tutors place on their own personal experiences while learning on the job. This largely ties in with the positionalities of the texts' authors, many of whom similarly draw on both their own academic and professional backgrounds to carve out their unique take on dyslexia support. A striking similarity between authors and tutors is that all agree on the cognitive differences that are either characteristic or attributable of dyslexia, and all assume that how they have organically developed their own practice is somehow uniquely insightful and utilitarian. The fact that the substance of their insights has derived from the trial and error process of their support practice has largely contributed to the reasons why there is an overriding ambivalence to the texts as well as the educational psychological assessments and any other contribution made by other professionals. What they know about dyslexia, it seems, is that it is predominantly an individual experience, the formal enactment of which goes on inside the one-to-one support sessions. Thus, understanding what dyslexia support tutors know about dyslexia is inextricably bound to how they know what they do about dyslexia. On a very superficial level they are all in agreement that it is cognitive in origin and leads to difficulties with processing information, but their reluctance to attach themselves more firmly to anything substantively defining is arguably to detract from how they think what is in the best interests of the students follows on from how they understand the manifested symptoms of dyslexia. To question how dyslexia support tutors know what they know about dyslexia is to suggest that the answer lies somewhere between orthodoxy and self-reflection. But while there are clear distinctions to be made between those tutors who actually do know more about dyslexia because of their high level qualifications and those whose knowledge is considerably less substantiated, what they

have in common is the acceptance of difference. Although they do not like to use the words 'difficulty' or 'disability', there is nevertheless the acceptance that dyslexia equals difference.

But this is simply an assumption made on their part. In the same way the authors constructed a cognitive profile based on perceived primary and secondary characteristics, as well as attempts to link quantitative evidence to human behaviour, so the tutors make certain assumptions that what distinguishes dyslexia is its difference from the 'norm'. It is thus that the function of primary evidence and the contribution of educational psychologists become apparent. Within the dyslexia community as a whole runs the assumption of difference from the norm, which in real terms can be identified and categorized. In effect the epistemological framework through which the discourse of dyslexia can be articulated is premised upon the assumption that normality and pathology have been distinguished from one another through quantitative procedures. To the extent, however, that either primary research evidence or educational psychological assessments are accepted or rejected by authors or tutors there is a broad agreement that difference can be identified. Thus, disciplinary practice allows for beliefs, assumptions and conclusions regarding dyslexia to be drawn from multiple sources without undermining the integrity of the discourse. As Campbell states, 'the norm is a technology through which power is articulated in a variety of different disciplines. When deployed in these different sites the norm operates in assemblage with a large variety of technologies of power' (Campbell, 2013: 35). Arguably, insights from personal experience are less insightful than the tutors would like to believe. Firstly, it is impossible to make a claim for difference if one's personal experiences do not include supporting non-dyslexic students to compare; and secondly, despite their

protestations that professional courses and textbooks offer an irrelevant perspective of dyslexia, it is apparent that there is much in common in all their respective epistemologies. Therefore, what they know about dyslexia very much does come from these primary sources, more so indeed than their own insights, but it is the extent to which they are accepted as at all relevant that confuses the issue between what they know and how this should inform professional practice.

7.3 Accreditation and Professional Status

A process of trial and error through experiential knowledge is one thing, but another common feature amongst the tutors is the tangled manner in which they found themselves in their present position. It would not be unfair to state that most dyslexia tutors never originally set out to support students with specific learning difficulties but instead fell into their roles through a combination of circumstances and opportunity. The relevance to this study lies in the fact that dyslexic students in the UK are funded through their Disabled Students Allowance for what is often referred to as 'specialist study skills support'. The key word here is 'specialist' as this does not include subject specialist support. Implied is the assumption that specialist support is dyslexia specialist support, so much so in fact that government funding routinely denies funding for dyslexic students' study skills if it subject-specific. So what makes for specialist support exactly? There are no criteria, so presently it seems what exactly constitutes a 'specialist' is either someone who just happens to be working in the position of a dyslexia support tutor, or is deemed to have the capacity to do so. The interviews have revealed again a strange ambiguity in the self-perception of the tutors; on the one hand what they do is accepted as uniquely specialised, but on the other not all accept the

appropriateness of specialist qualifications, especially when the training for those qualifications differs epistemologically from their own experiential knowledge base.

The authors, however, place considerable emphasis on proclaiming their own status as experts as conferred upon them by their own academic credentials. Indeed, McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer provide a unique insight into how the social capital that comes with academic credibility reveals a sort of hierarchy of status amongst professionals. There is, in the front section of their book, a detailed presentation of each author's scholastic achievements, something often left out of more general study skills texts. The sequence in which the authors are revealed is hierarchical and based on the social capital accorded through their qualifications. Thus we have David McLoughlin first, followed by Carol Leather second, and lastly Patricia Stringer, which obviously means their positions were not determined alphabetically. David McLoughlin is placed at the apex of this micro-hierarchy as his academic achievements include a Ph.D alongside his position of 'Visiting Professor, Department of Psychology University of Buckingham'. He is also credited with a CPsychol and AFBPS. The message is clear; Professor McLoughlin is a bona fide expert in the psychology of dyslexia. Carol Leather is similarly credited with an appropriate professional status, but as her highest academic qualifications are her BA (Hons) (subject unknown), PGCE (age group unspecified) and a 'Dip SPLD', the reader must assume the social capital that comes with her curriculum vitai does not carry as much weight as McLoughlin's. Lastly, Patricia Stringer's academic achievements are presented. She is not a graduate but is revealed as someone with a background in education with a Cert Ed, and the same Dip SPLD as Carol Leather. The hierarchical status reveals the belief that dyslexia is located within the fields of both psychology and education; however, with

McLoughlin's primary status established, it becomes clear education-and-dyslexia are subordinate to psychology-and-dyslexia. This suggests those charged with a responsibility of supporting the educational development of dyslexic students can only do so effectively under the guidance of psychologists.

Regarding the support tutors, in the majority of cases their experiences began with early careers in education, often but not exclusively education support. Sally had already declared she has no dyslexia related professional qualifications, but this does not imply she is wholly bereft of scholastic achievements. Interestingly her first choice of degree was in English Literature and Education, which unfortunately she failed to complete as she says "due to my dyslexia." Sally has a particularly unique perspective on the experiences of dyslexic students given that she has personal insight of all that could go wrong without support, or indeed recognition. "I got thrown out after my first year. I passed my education component and failed my English Literature component. And then retook it over the summer; failed it again apparently. And then they threw me out! They said that I was illiterate, I should go work in a factory and consider myself lucky to have a job". Eventually she graduated from a different institution with a degree in psychology and subsequently a PGCE for 7-12 year old with a specialism in teaching science. Her road to higher education dyslexia support began with voluntary work in a women's refuge, post-graduate work as a research psychologist and later as a school teacher before moving to the north of England where she was eventually employed by a local county council's Emotional and Behavioural Support Team. It was through an acquaintance with former colleague that she was offered the position as dyslexia support tutor.

May's academic and professional background is very similar in that she also has a degree in psychology and a background in childhood education, in her case nursery care and as a primary school teacher. Unlike Sally she does have a Post-graduate diploma in dyslexia and worked as an hourly paid support tutor for a private supplier of non-medical help before being employed by her current institution.

Robin similarly came to dyslexia support via an educational route. Although not school based his background nonetheless has an emphasis on student support. He originally graduated with a BA in communication studies before training for a PGCFE, and MA in education and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Dyslexia and Literacy. His first position was as a teacher of adults with SEN before moving to another FE college as a learning support tutor, then as a key skills tutor before becoming employed on an hourly basis in HE support until eventually he was employed full time in his present position. Robin's academic and professional background matches closely with Christie who graduated with a degree and MA in English Language and Literature and has also a further MA in applied linguistics and TESOL and a PGCE in secondary education. Her background has more than most informed her understanding of dyslexia as "a difference in learning style, particularly in processing and producing language". Interestingly there is a common element in how their academic backgrounds have informed what they perceive dyslexia to be; Sally and May both are psychologists by training and consider dyslexia to be "a neurological processing difference" according to Sally that to May "intersects with other neurodevelopmental differences". Although differing in terms of academic

underpinning, Christie's background as a language and linguistic expert has clearly driven her own approach to the condition.

Kelly has an interesting take on what dyslexia is perhaps because unlike the other tutors she has had experience supporting students previously with general learning disabilities as well as specific learning difficulties. As she states unambiguously, "I don't know what dyslexia is because I can't see a difference between a student who doesn't have problems and one that does". In many ways this echoes the sentiment expressed earlier by the authors that the study skills aspect of dyslexia support should not necessarily be confined to just dyslexic students, as well as research in this very area which similarly states that 'applying the label dyslexia is not particularly helpful in terms of devising interventions that tackle the specific problems experienced by those with dyslexia' (Taylor, Hume and Welsh, 2010: 193). Kelly's background is similar to the others in that she has a degree in politics, economics and social history and like Christie has tended to inform her view of dyslexia from a linguistic and educational background, as opposed to May and Sally's psychology specialism. Kelly has two MAs; one in inclusive education and another in applied linguistics, as well as a post-graduate diploma again in inclusive education and a postgraduate certificate in dyscalulia. Like Robin and Christie she worked in FE support before specialising in dyslexic adults, and from thence to drawing on her training and experience as a tutor in higher education supporting students with general learning difficulties to becoming a dyslexia support tutor.

Anne and Gwen are perhaps the most unusual in terms of background and qualifications. Anne's original degree is in library and information management and she has a PGCE in supporting the adult learner in HE and FE. Before arriving at her current position she began her higher education career as a library assistant from which, through a confluence of circumstances, she found herself in the position of offering advice and guidance to students with disabilities before moving more formally to supporting students with dyslexia. Gwen similarly comes from a professional background as a teacher of basic literacy before moving into the higher education disability area as a needs assessor and from there to dyslexia support tutor. Unlike the other tutors she never graduated with an undergraduate degree, but does have a diploma in education and dyslexia qualifications for specialist teachers. Her intention was to complete a master's degree in education but "I wanted to do my dissertation in dyslexia but they wouldn't let me because I'd done too much on dyslexia." Too much specialism it would appear is not a good thing.

Within dyslexia support there is a range of background and experience. Indeed one could say there is so much diversity in background and experience it renders the notion of 'specialist study skills support' as somewhat lacking in definition. Unlike mainstream teaching there is no requirement to be a graduate to have a specialist dyslexia qualification. For this reason we have the unusual situation of tutors such as Sally with a degree and PGCE but no dyslexia credential working in the same position as Gwen who does have dyslexia certificates but has not graduated with a degree. What became evident throughout the interviews was that even though most participants were directly employed by universities, they are not representative of the profession as a whole as many tutors are employed part time or through agencies. This would naturally

mitigate against heavy investment in specialist training and professional development as the time and expense it would take to acquire the necessary qualifications would not be off-set with any additional time spent with students, or indeed guarantee any improvement in the quality of service.

Given the almost overwhelming attachment the tutors have to the perceived purity of their professional and personal experiences it is not altogether surprising that there is an ambiguous relationship with the professional and specialist qualifications. The main issue seems to be not necessarily what practical value they have for higher education dyslexia support, but more the extent to which having one bestows professional status. As we have already mentioned, many tutors are employed part time or infrequently, and on the few occasions they are mentioned in academic material it is only in passing reference to being 'lightly trained' or offering not much beyond basic literacy skills. Yet within the dyslexia community lies an altogether more complex picture. Many tutors displayed an almost antagonistic attitude to qualifications, in particular those accredited to Dyslexia Action. Sally in particular took a firm stance in opposition to their courses:

> What rankles me is when they talk about it as a disability. They seem to have a disability model of it. As a deficit model – and I am totally the opposite obviously. If I see that I'm just going to be put off by it and I've researched other people who have got that qualification and I heard such bad things about the attitude that they have towards the disability of dyslexia. And it just doesn't fit with me at all. So I've really fought against it.

Her position reinforces her belief in the psychological model of dyslexia, namely that it is internal. It would be easy to interpret this hostility to Dyslexia Action as no more than the reactions of a person who has experienced deep personal distress due to her

own dyslexia, and moreover, as a dyslexia specialist with no specialist accreditation.
But paradoxically her attitude to professional qualifications is not wholly dismissive.
On the one hand, when asked if it was considered essential that a dyslexia tutor have a
specialist qualification she answered:

> No! We haven't put it in there. We've mentioned that it would be an
> advantage. The question was, was it essential to have a dyslexia qualification,
> and the answer is no.

However, when pressed to consider whether having a specialist qualification would
conceivably go some way in legitimising professional practice, her answer was far less
certain, "I think it does, I think it would give us some professional standing."

Although, it must be stressed she does, despite this concession to social capital, reiterate
that "It's not the qualification that makes us professional, it's the practice".

The issue may not necessarily be the idea of appropriate courses in general, but more
the quality on offer by Dyslexia Action in particular. Gwen, in her analysis of the state
of current qualifications, perceived the problem more to be with the state of the current
industry. Qualifications, she said, "is a minefield, and increasingly so because there's
not really anywhere doing affordable or decent dyslexia tutoring qualifications at the
moment". When asked to elaborate what she meant by 'decent dyslexia tutoring' she
answered:

> Well, from what I know, I'm not naming names but I'm going to have to – from
> what I know, people who have done their training through Dyslexia Action view
> that very much a child based course that's been tweaked to have an adult slant
> on it. So they've not always found the whole of it appropriate. Even though I
> like the people who work at Dyslexia Action I refer to them as Dyslexia Fascists
> because I think they've got this really regimented route in, and I don't think the

people I work with necessarily fit all the guidance and the routes in and out that they seem to think exist.

Similarly Robin expressed certain misgivings about his own specialist qualifications, especially in reference to its practical application in higher education. When asked how useful his qualifications were he was no less critical of Dyslexia Action:

> I was very critical of the postgraduate diploma with Dyslexia Action. I'm not saying that all of them are like that, but the term that I use is that we have a very kind of fragmented, almost wild west approach. There are a myriad of different courses, all offering varying degrees of provision and training. I think the courses were very good if you work with children. With adults, at a squeeze they were good for FE students, but even then I thought that they were inappropriate for HE students.

Clearly, there seems to be an acknowledgement that some courses offer more than others, but one must always be alert to the notion that what the tutors may be objecting to is a course that may not match their own personal experiences or expectations. As the one-to-one, individual nature of the practice lends itself to the self-belief in one's own expertise, there may very well be irreconcilable differences between how their practice has developed and what they are being taught. But like Sally's theoretical concession in the bestowing of professional credibility of a specialist course, Robin does acknowledge that attaining one is actually vital:

> I'd like to see a big, proper postgraduate diploma or certificate for a dyslexia specialist in higher education. That's what's desperately needed.

Robin actually went much further in his commitment to the essential nature of specialist qualifications. Unlike Sally who categorically stated that experience and good practice constituted sound professional practice, Robin took the opposite position. Asked about

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putting together his own ideal job description for the purposes of hiring potential

dyslexia tutors he answered:

> I think there would have to be some form of postgraduate qualification in
> dyslexia and literacy that has specialist components". [Why postgraduate?]
> "Because normally you would have to have a degree to get on the qualification
> in the first place. And I would be looking for certainly a rigour of academic
> experience.

Anne sits somewhere between the two; dismissive of Dyslexia Action, but aware of the

potential benefits some courses can have on both the career and quality of practice of

tutors.

> The course I did was distance learning, it was over two years, it was really
> hardcore. It was supposed to be fifteen hours a week, but I probably did about
> thirty… But there was a real reliance for you to have your own population of
> students to tap into. And if you didn't have that it would be really difficult to
> get into that qualification.

Perhaps the main reason Anne was more positive towards her specialist qualification is

that acquiring it was based upon how she developed as a practitioner. Prescriptive

courses, of which Dyslexia Action is seemingly the prime example, are at variance with

many of the tutors due to what they see as a different conceptualisation of dyslexia. But

on a deeper level, as the general attitude amongst the support tutors is not one of

overwhelming enthusiasm one must question the perceived necessity of having one.

Professional status appears to be the overriding imperative, as though acquiring the

credential bestows upon one more than the learning of a specialist skill-set, but as a

marker denoting the right sort of commitment and right kind of attitude. Certainly the

prevalent view is that Dyslexia Action courses are not relevant to support in higher

education, while other courses are of limited but not essential utility. Indeed, finding

the right sort of candidate with the right sort of qualifications and the right sort of

experience has proven difficult for those tutors responsible for recruiting new colleagues within their institutions. During the selection process there is a delicate negotiation to be made between a potential candidate's previous professional background and what accreditation they have. As Anne stated:

> People just aren't out there, and we're getting primary school teachers. People coming to interview are talking about classroom management behaviour for kids and things. Just not adult based at all. So we've had a real big debate because of the qualification situation, i.e. nobody being able to get one because nowhere is delivering at the moment. We've said you've got to have a post-graduate teaching qualification with a dyslexia qualification as an additional thing. Or a dyslexia specific teaching qualification. So we would let people in with a teaching background if they had done a lot of one-to-one that had a dyslexia crossover, but only if they get trained and properly qualified. To me that denotes a passion for the job and a commitment to it, to put yourself through that.

Higher education is, of course, a significantly different learning environment than a school and college. Since the introduction of the widening participation agenda, as well as the elevation of many professional courses to degree level status, there has inevitably been an increased diversification in the student population (Jelfs, Nathan and Barratt, 2004; Dhillon, McGowan and Wang, 2008). Thus, supporting students in this more pluralistic environment would require the support tutor to be both adept at negotiating the multiple teaching and assessment methods in a university and be cognizant of the barriers to learning from students from so-called 'non-traditional backgrounds' (Bailey and Thompson, 2008). Becoming as familiar with the institution's teaching and assessment procedures was often overlooked in the interviews by the participants perhaps because of the fact the very nature of their practice was so concentrated on the student experience. In this context one could conclude the reason such widespread lack of enthusiasm exists towards dyslexia qualifications is because they are (paradoxically) simultaneously too generic and too specific; too generic towards a pre-conceived notion

of a dyslexia ideal, and too specific in the model of support they are understood to

provide. Kelly articulated this problem when asked to consider the adequacy of her

own specialist training:

> The problem is if you've got a dyslexia qualification but if it tends to be generic.
> So the OU one deals with school children, further education, higher education.
> But the needs of a five year old child are completely different from a Ph.D
> student who needs some help structuring his Ph.D. And I don't know whether
> the answer is to make them more specific, so like the dyscalculia one which is
> for further and higher education, or whether to separate them off. So for
> example, we had a member of staff here but he was specialised in schools. He
> found it difficult for the transition; so people who concentrate on school based
> things like sounding out syllables, phonetics, that kind of thing, which is useful
> when you're starting out but not very useful when you've got a deadline and a
> student says 'I've got this essay needs done in three days. Can you help me with
> it?'

Interestingly, Kelly picks up on the theme of transition. Transition can, in this field, be

applied to both the support tutor and the students, which is not something that is

completely unanticipated in students (they all heralded from beyond the university at

some point), but perhaps is for the tutors. The findings have identified the, at times,

rather convoluted manner of their eventual arrival in higher education dyslexia support,

so with this in mind it follows that wherever they themselves came from there will

invariably be a transitory process that goes deeper than what one would normally expect

when moving to a similar position elsewhere. This would explain why such

inconsistency exists on the subject of dyslexia qualifications and training; regardless of

what their own qualifications are and who validated them, 'true' professionalism lies in

how one conducts oneself in the one-to-one session. Denise made the point that how a

tutor adapts to the higher education environment is more relevant to practice than

accreditation and the social capital that comes with it:

> Specialist in people is probably more relevant. I think it would be useful, I think
> it would be across the board if tutors had a dyslexia qualification. Now I don't

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know what goes on in other dyslexia qualifications to be honest with you. But, like I can go on a Master's module in 'inclusion' and learn about autistic behaviour. I can also sit and read about it. I think the key to dyslexics is working with the individuals. I think the thing that's missed is that they're not all the same.

Denise's positonality, however, is one borne out of experience. Unlike the majority of the tutors she has a higher education teaching background and divides her time between lecturing and support. Like Sally she does not have a specialist dyslexia qualification and does not feel the need to acquire one. As she said: "I think it would be for my own understanding of myself, the way I do things. But not for other things". But in many ways she echoed Kelly's sentiment that in higher education the application of theory gained from the qualification into practice can actually be a dangerous thing:

> You need a dyslexia qualification if you're dealing with eight year olds who are obviously having problems and struggling. But when you're dealing with someone who's developed their own strategies, I mean, I used to do things for example like as I write I'd flatten my words.

To Denise, perhaps because of her position as lecturer and support tutor, there is less to distinguish a dyslexia related intervention with an alteration of teaching methods to suit the learning style of particular students. She clearly recognises that students with dyslexia require some sort of differentiation in teaching and assessment, but not necessarily to the point of providing an altogether unique service. To be qualified in dyslexia support in higher education is not the same as being able to support anybody with dyslexia, which, to Denise at least, makes the transition from schools and colleges support to university all the more difficult especially if one does have that kind of specialist training.

Christie, conversely, conflates her own experiences and qualifications into what she perceives as *the* model from which to operate. Despite the differences in approach, the overriding similarity is that the tutors have concluded that their backgrounds alone make them particularly qualified to provide support. Christie absolutely does agree that dyslexia support tutors need specialist qualifications:

> Well yes. If you needed a specialist qualification to teach English as a second language you certainly need it for dyslexia … You have to look at language as the subject you're teaching. And that's very definite. And some people try to teach study skills on the basis that they were good at it. I think you're better teaching things that you're not good at. So it's the language that you definitely need training in. And you certainly have to read ed psych reports – which you certainly don't automatically do.

Christie's position has been driven by the combination of her own experiences and subject specialisation. Her primary area of academic interest is TESOL, which like dyslexia is focused on language and its interplay with educational development. What is striking about her position is that she does see the necessity of having an accredited qualification for dyslexia specialists, but also that in itself a qualification absolutely will have a beneficial effect practice. Here she equally emphasises dyslexia support as the teaching of study skills, but in the context of overcoming developmental disorders, hence her allusion to reading and understanding educational psychological assessments. Despite her complete advocacy of specialist qualifications, however, not all support tutors are in complete agreement. Gwen is similarly in agreement that dyslexia support equates to higher education study skills, but like Sally, Denise and Kelly does not see it as completely essential:

> It's an advantage, but we've just done some study skills recruitment. That particular qualification is a desirable on the application form. So it's not essential. A lot of places say it's essential. I mean, it's great if they've got that qualification, and it's an added bonus, but it's not an essential criteria. Our

criteria is teaching qualifications and experience of working with disabled students. Preferably in an HE setting.

The research suggests that there is no single source whereby higher education dyslexia specialists gain an understanding of the condition. Rather the collective knowledge-base is an aggregate of primary research, specialist qualifications and training, and most revealingly personal insight based upon their respective experiences. But more pertinent to this research is that finding that these sources of information are part of a collective whole; in effect they frame the discourse through which statements on dyslexia can be articulated. It has already been discerned that how dyslexia itself is broadly understood as a cognitive difference, but it appears unlikely that this insight would have been arrived through personal experience alone. There are a number of reasons for this; none of the tutors provided any insight based on their experiences that corresponded with the notion of a cognitive learning problem. Certainly they would not have been able to provide any conclusions to this effect as supporting non-dyslexic students is not part of their professional remit, thereby denying them an opportunity to compare the cognitive functioning with a control group. That said, many of the tutors have had considerable previous experience in adult education, so it was significant that their experiences with dyslexic students was not drawn upon as a comparison. And yet, there is the persistent belief that cognitive deficits and brain functioning lies at the heart of both dyslexia and its attendant support.

This belief may have come from their professional training, but this is also unlikely given the broad criticism levelled at many of the qualifications some tutors had

completed. Indeed, the research indicates that *what* is known about dyslexia was largely pre-conceived before any training had taken place.

Similarly, a close reading of the textbooks has revealed a similar assumption regarding the cognitive or educational differences between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students, but no coherent indication as how that understanding has been arrived. In particular the value placed upon primary evidence did not suggest universal agreement as to its acceptability as a satisfactory explanation for dyslexia. Yet the belief is that it is neurological in origin and affects learning in particular ways, specifically concentration, reading and writing. Therefore, if support tutors' knowledge of dyslexia comes from primarily personal experience it follows that their specialist interventions would be discernably specialist. Moreover, as the textbooks also contain suggestions for the pedagogic support of dyslexic students, a comprehensive review of their strategies would, presumably, reveal the unique nature of dyslexia support practice.

The following chapter examines the support techniques as presented in the textbooks and practiced by the tutors to determine the extent to which specialist interventions may or may not be specialist at all.

The previous chapters revealed that an initial stage in the establishment of dyslexia as a discourse relied upon framing it epistemologically as a marker of difference. Specialists understand dyslexia as a series of symptoms focused upon cognitive deficits. It is perceived to exist through the social processes in which the primary characteristics of the condition are only accepted as truly dyslexic after a psychological assessment has confirmed the diagnosis. As far as specialist intervention is concerned, however, before the student is either funded or supported, further stages in the construction of dyslexia are necessary. The previous section highlighted, for example, the ontological bedrock of primary evidence that is incorporated into the textbooks and the value attached to specialist qualifications. Both, one could suggest, act as signifiers of specialist knowledge and by extension evidence based practice.

This chapter examines how these processes and signifiers have practical applicability. Specifically the focus will be upon three examples of pedagogy that are of particular relevance to the dyslexic student experience – metacognition, and the strategies employed in the development of reading and writing skills. This research suggests that metacognition appears to have developed as a signature style of support particularly focused on helping dyslexic students. It is often put forward as a framing technique through which students can be guided by specialists towards a better understanding of their learning style, and as a strategy for students to internalise their own place within the culture of a university environment. The previous chapters revealed that the discourse of dyslexia is framed within the schema of difference, and so it follows that

the strategies employed by specialists to support dyslexic students continue this notion in practice. The research findings from the textual analyses and interviews suggest this is predominantly focused upon the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the use and application of metacognition, particularly in the areas of acculturation and objectification. This chapter will detail how the epistemology of metacognition is applied as a means of reinforcing the notion of difference on a cultural level, and ontologically as a strategy that effectively objectifies students' own experience of their dyslexia.

8.1 Dyslexia and Self-Perception

Meta-cognition is a self-assessment process whereby students are encouraged by teachers to become 'self-directed learners who are capable of goal setting, self-monitoring, self-assessment and self-correction' (Mok et al, 2006: 416). 'Meta-cognition' is a term derived from psychology which when directed in an educational context facilitates a particular sort of self-directed, internal analysis, but focused primarily on evaluating the development and progress of the learner. Applied to higher education teaching and learning Mok et al (2006: 419) state that 'individuals who have better knowledge and awareness of their learning-selves, including their knowledge status and learning targets, are more able to engage in regulating their own learning which in turn has positive effects on learning outcomes and self-efficacy'. They suggest that higher-level study skills can and should be incorporated into the higher education curriculum and form a part of the learning process that can enhance the academic abilities of all students. With regard to evidence-based practice, studies have purported to show that metacognition is beneficial to students with learning disabilities.

Trainin and Swanson (2005: 269) concluded that students with learning difficulties improved their average grades and 'achievements were found to be related to increased metacognitive learning strategies'. Similarly Reis, McGuire and Neu (2000: 124) suggest that using metacognitive techniques 'and problem solving skills to process information faster and more effectively is associated with gifted students'. Moreover, they also highlight that previous research findings in the motivational attitudes of dyslexic students who do use metacognitive strategies indicated that students showed 'the desire and effort to gain control of one's life. A greater degree of control indicated more likelihood of succeeding in life ... Remediation of their learning disability was not a major factor' (Reis, McGuire and Neu, 2000: 124).

This research has indicated similar but different approaches to the use of metacognition as a dyslexia related support strategy. Tilly Mortimore's approach to the strategy is very much in accordance with the notion that it is an intervention primarily intended to allow students to take control. As she states in her book:

> The emphasis here is on the use of metacognition or conscious knowledge of one's own patterns of behaviour in a learning situation. This should allow particular skills and approaches to be selected intentionally rather than automatically and encourage students to take personal responsibility for making use of their learning strengths ... Developing knowledge of one's own mental processes, or metacognition is seen as a major part of personal development and essential to the acquisition of learning strategies (Mortimore, 2008: 9 and 99).

The interviews and textual analyses indicate that contextually metacognition is at once a teaching and learning strategy, but also a process of acculturation. Its function is to allow the dyslexic student access to certain higher education conventions that their learning difficulty may otherwise have prevented them from acquiring. For example,

Hunter-Carsch and Herrington's text (2000: 170) objects to 'a deficit paradigm of dyslexia, based on a medical model of disability and on some rather simplistic ideas about literacy 'skills' and their relationship with academic ability'. McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002: 150) similarly state that 'it is rarely lack of ability that causes a dyslexic person to struggle at university: it is more often due to a lack of understanding the task demands', and Morgan and Klein (2000: 5) state that 'If dyslexia involves a difference in high as well as low level processing, then the thinking of dyslexic people may indeed be different from that of non-dyslexic individuals'. These statements reveal the internal logic behind the epistemological foundations of metacognition, certainly one that follows directly from the circumstantial and social contingencies of this study's previous chapters. In as far as the *why* metacognition is used as prevalently as it appears, the combination of empirical research within the textbooks; the social capital attached to specialist qualifications, and the role the educational psychologist plays in diagnosing and labelling students gives the idea of metacognition some verisimilitude. The research suggests its purpose is to enable students who are not considered naturally part of the wider academic culture to be included. Whether they have neurological cognitive differences or are simply inexperienced academically is not the point; metacognition facilitates specialist directed self-reflective learning as a means of enabling entry into a particular educational environment than it is a technique designed to overcome disabling barriers. And for that to happen it is necessary that *difference* has already been established some time before support begins.

Reid and Kirk's text (2001, 73), for example, express the idea of metacognition as a vehicle for acculturation rather well. They fuse the two paradigms of deficit and environment:

> Many leave school with little or no academic qualifications but many of these people enroll for courses later in life and often perform exceptionally well. At that stage they are usually highly motivated and may have a more detailed knowledge of their dyslexic difficulties and the most appropriate coping and compensatory strategies … It is our view that people with dyslexia have poor metacognitive awareness, which means that they often need to be shown the most effective way to learn (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 73).

Metacognition is also utilised by many of the tutors, and the epistemological position is consistent with a paradigm of difference. Sally assumes that the key to good learning is supporting the student to 'fit in':

> The difference [between study skills support and dyslexia support] is in the normalisation of the student experience and the visual-spatial skills that I use when I'm teaching, they don't tap into, and that they don't have access to. So I would explain something in a very visual way or with an analogy or using my hands.

Clearly, the belief in cognitive differences is prevalent in her focus on visual-spatial skills, as well as her use of the word 'normalisation'. But this is not to suggest that Sally is entirely convinced by what she perceives as metacognition:

> I think it's a big word that is just designed to bamboozle students. I know it's not obviously meant for students. I think if I wasn't dyslexic the idea of meta-cognition might be even more important than it is in the sense that I would be encouraging the students to see – by normalizing their experience of dyslexia.

This ambiguity is perhaps not as illustrative of the complexity behind dyslexia practice as one might assume. The distinction to be made between metacognition in general

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study support and more specific dyslexia support lies in the objective of the strategy; to Sally it is used as a tool to maintain differences. As she said:

> We work in small study groups, as well as one-on-one tutorials, or even as a whole during the AGM [annual general meeting], because all the dyslexic students get together. We'll do sessions together.

Practice here becomes the means of reinforcing those differences that are fundamental to the notion that supporting students requires one to assume a distance from what Sally calls 'neurotypical students'. She may think she has strong misgivings about metacognition but this is not reflected in practice.

May likewise adopts a process of acculturation into her metacognitive practice; indeed amongst the tutors there is a similar ambiguity between their acceptance or rejection of meta-cognition and what they actually do with students. The notion of differentiation plays a key role in the configuration of how and why support tutors take the premise of that difference and incorporate it into their support. May, for example, begins her support with the assumption of difference and takes things from there:

> Understanding how you individually learn and function is essential. I think it's really good for dyslexics to realise that we are totally unique in those ways in which we learn and function. A lot of dyslexics have communication difficulties when communicating with non-dyslexics. The SpLD student needs to find a way of moving without upsetting the rest of the world.

'Moving without upsetting the rest of the world' is a revealing phrase as it identifies the belief in the urgency of promoting the concept of difference, which in turn assumes that should one actually upset all others, then the blame by definition lies with the dyslexic student. Although not quite as explicit in his position that blame should be apportioned

to students who not quite fit in, Robin does, however, adopt a similar stance with regards to encouraging students to use meta-cognition to understand their problems:

> Students with dyslexia need metacognitive skills even more arguably than their non-dyslexic peers, albeit metacognition is a fantastic tool for all of us, including students and tutors. They have to get that because they have to overcome some specific barriers to their learning. They don't always fully understand how it is affecting them. Metacognition is – if they can learn what their dyslexia and learning style is they can then start moving forward.

Again, the onus here is on the student and how they are part of the problem, and self-directed, internalisation is part of the solution. Robin did not suggest outright that students should be blamed for upsetting anyone by not fitting in, but his position is all but identical, especially as he believes "students not only need a metacognitive appreciation of how they need to change, but they might not know what to do". The requirement for the student to change and be told 'what to do' appears to be fundamental to the epistemological underpinnings behind metacognition especially in the context of not just differentiation but within a wider paradigm of specialist knowledge and how that may be put into professional practice.   French and Swain make a particular point on this issue when they suggest that there are 'stakeholders and what is 'at stake' is far broader than a simple definition of disability: professionals, jobs, professional status, values and beliefs, social power and control, social identity, and disabled people's everyday lives are implicated' (French and Swain, 2009: 23).

8.2 Objectification of Dyslexia

As a tool for supporting dyslexic students metacognition appears to be primarily focused epistemologically upon the notion that the difference believed to be inherent in

the students' educational profile is bound inextricably to their perceived status as excluded outsiders. What appears to have been revealed is the cognitive dissonance amongst dyslexia specialists who, on the one hand, accept that being excluded may be the result of academic inexperience or general learning difficulties with, on the other hand, the affirmation that the support they provide is uniquely complimentary. A Foucauldian perspective would accept that even within a discourse in whose truth was almost imperceptibly self-legitimsing through practice, there was the opportunity for inconsistency. But this inconsistency does not undermine the observation from the research findings that this particular intervention is hinged upon the idea that dyslexic students necessarily require support to enable them to 'fit in' to a higher educational cultural environment.

But while this epistemological position reasserts the idea of difference, the interviews and analyses suggest a further specific feature of metacognitive practices. The cognitive dissonance makes more sense after a close reading of the textbooks and a detailed understanding of how the social processes previously examined in the construction of dyslexia play out in tutors' practice. We know, for instance, that *what* is known about dyslexia is that it is a cognitive disability which affects people in areas such as reading and writing and information processing. Moreover, this belief has been reinforced through the major role an educational psychologist plays in the student experience of dyslexia as well as the myriad research papers and qualifications that make up the foundation of a support specialist's knowledge-base. To that end, this research has revealed a consistent vein running through a dyslexia specialist's epistemological position vis-à-vis support. Namely that because dyslexia is a cognitive learning disability, then how students think has been objectified in a way that

pathologises their own internal experiences, thoughts and feelings. Premising support upon the assumption that how students 'think' and by extension make sense of the world, objectifies both the act of directing the students' thought processes as well the reasons as to why this is being done. Indeed, in the context of higher education, and more particularly higher education dyslexia support, this approach serves to construct knowledge and awareness 'in a specific matrix of physical location, history, culture and interest' (Sprague and Hayes, 2000: 672).

The specialists' objectification of thinking and thought processes initially leads to an inconsistent view of what they do and why. The cognitive dissonance is deepened in the light of how the specialists make sense of how their professional practice makes them uniquely specialised. By way of illustration the information from the research on the secondary characteristics of dyslexia reveals how professional practice and the justification for it pivots on specialists effectively cherry picking the elements of dyslexia that best suit their own style of support.

Despite the specialists accepting that dyslexia is a neurodevelopmental difference, the idea of supporting students' secondary characteristics through metacognition does not always sit comfortably with some. It is much more widely accepted that on the whole support should concentrate on the primary characteristics of more general study skills. Christie for example expressed it thus:

> There is scope for doing this for group things, where this would be particularly suitable. But basically we're there to help the students fulfill their academic potential by overcoming those difficulties related to dyslexia. I think you have to have it there as an emergency tool kit, but it isn't your day-to-day. In the end

you will be judged by whether their marks improve and whether their degrees are consistent with their ability.

This sentiment was echoed amongst the tutors in particular; their overall purpose was to understand how dyslexia affects students but only in a very limited capacity, that capacity being the primary, study skills related effects of dyslexia. Anne stated:

> For me the one-to-one sessions are very much a means to an end, and a practical solution for moving things forward. I think it's fine to do a session or discuss things that are peripheral to support, like stress management type of stuff. But I really don't view that as the role of the tutor.

Indeed, offering pastoral support and focusing self-reflective study strategies can be seen as examples of bad practice as, according to Kelly, there could be a danger of "blaming everything on the dyslexia. Some people are bad at organisation or time management, and it may not be because of dyslexia". Kelly extended her critique of metacognitive strategies, criticising them as being peripheral and unrelated to the primary reasons why students attend university; to be educated and then supported, not vice versa:

> I would like them [dyslexia tutors who incorporate metacognition] to explain how they would like to effect metacognition, because it's quite easy to say metacognition. And I'd like to know what specific strategies they would use. Because at the end of the day, we're not counsellors, we're not mentors. I would have some serious issues; we're getting into Brain Gym territory now. We're academic - our job is to give the students the strategies to succeed at university.

Repeatedly the tutors expressed misgivings about working outside certain parametres of their specialism. Metacognition, as a pedagogic tool, may be used unwittingly as a general tool to enable dyslexic students to focus on sequential processing and

coherence, but as a method of alleviating the worst manifestations of stress, some tutors were reticent. As Gwen observed:

> If they've got emotional difficulties that can be better supported by the wellbeing team because it needs counselling or it needs a chat with somebody to talk through those issues, then definitely that's were the students should be. If they came to me and wanted counselling, I wouldn't know how to do it properly and I would do more damage than help.

And yet the research has yielded a not entirely consistent picture. A close reading of the textbooks suggests that the secondary characteristics of dyslexia, in particular stress, anxiety and low self-esteem, are so symptomatic of the condition that authors such as Hunter-Carsch and Herrington (2001), Reid and Kirk (2001), Morgan and Klein (2004) and McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002) all advocate that counselling or knowledge of models of counselling should be a significant part of the support tutor's knowledge-base. But it is also significant to note that the textbooks do not put forward any advice and guidance on how this might be done; that is to say, the authors do not present strategies that are directly linked to counselling, instead leaving it up to the professional dyslexia support tutor to objectify students' emotional state in relation to their dyslexia. Hunter-Carsch and Herrington (2001: 182), for example, state explicitly that:

> Students are usually looking for a 'place' to experience release from some level of anxiety … This can be achieved with close listening as students pour out accumulated anxieties in a peaceful and sometimes humorous atmosphere … questions about the relationship between cognition and affect in dyslexic students are an ongoing feature.

McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002) also urge counselling as a key intervention. They go so far as to include a whole chapter on the subject. But this is not to suggest they see counselling as a primary skill to be acquired for dyslexia tutors per se, more

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that professionals working with dyslexic students would find it 'useful for them to understand and adopt some of the fundamental principles and practices of counselling' (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002: 85). Again, however, the dyslexia itself, and by extension the counselling that goes with it, is entirely the object of the intervention. This is revealed in their following assertion that 'professional counsellors working with dyslexic people need to understand the nature of dyslexia' (2002: 85-86). In effect dyslexia-specific counselling is a metacognitive strategy in which students are encouraged to accept the synthesis of their learning difficulty as intrinsic to their feelings. Reid and Kirk (2001) similarly objectify the synthesis of neurodevelopmental difficulties with emotional wellbeing. Their textbook, for example, specifically states that tutors should support students in the emotional domain of learning, which is subsequently linked to the teaching of metacognitive strategies. They state that 'people with dyslexia have poor metacognitive awareness, which means that they often need to be shown the most effective way to learn' (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 73). In effect students need to be 'shown how to learn' (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002: 98).

The specialists may be largely in agreement that enhancing academic ability is the focal point of their practice, but despite some differences in opinion regarding the nature and function of metacognitive strategies, there is much wider agreement on the specialist quality of the support. This was illustrated when asked if they saw themselves as specialist dyslexia tutors, or whether they could transfer what they did with dyslexic students to non-dyslexic students. The fallback position, it appears, is once again to assume that *difference* from non-dyslexic students is key to good pedagogy. Gwen, despite previously asserting that metacognition was not strictly relevant to dyslexic

support practice, later stated that actually dyslexic students do learn differently and therefore do require a specialist approach:

> But students with disabilities, particularly dyslexia and dyspraxia, the traditional methods of tuition haven't worked anyway. So it's really rigid not to be important like that. [Gwen was asked if there was a difference in practice between a study skills and dyslexia tutor] Yes, it's a different approach, although we do have people here who do both.

On the subject of articulating and elucidating on the subject of specialisation, Kelly similarly adopted an assumed position of being somewhere between a medical interventionist and an academic:

> I think it's important we don't get lumped in with mentors and seen as just support. We're more specialised than that. And also try not to get hung up on dyslexia like it's the only thing in the world. We need to be equipped to help students with other issues. We need to be looking more at specific learning difficulties. What we found as well is that we seem to be getting students with general difficulties and I don't think we're equipped really to do those.

It is interesting that Kelly specifically does differentiate between a student with dyslexia who may require academic support, and students without dyslexia who also requires support. Clearly it is assumed the cause of support will necessarily result in a different type of practice. Likewise, Robin also stated a distinction between dyslexia support and study skills support, but not necessarily in terms of the actual practice, but more how the practice was implemented:

> But yes, I think there are some real, significant differences that need to be explicitly teased out, because one of my main concerns about – because we haven't been clear about our practice in HE, it can be misconstrued, misunderstood, misinterpreted that it is like study skills, that it is like being a support tutor. And although I think there are huge correlations I don't think it's the same.

Robin expanded on this with reference to the primary characteristics of dyslexia (poor short term memory in particular) as his caveat to explain how what dyslexia tutors do is not generic support for anyone, although he did concede that "you have to make your teaching explicit, you have to revisit it, you have to go over skills over a period of time. These all kind of overlap with non-dyslexic students, but they need that slight more emphasis".

Sally, however, was less decisive when asked if she could transfer her skills to more general study support:

> I could – probably. The only thing that I wasn't doing that they [study support tutors] were doing, until recently I suspect that if a student was getting maybe to their final dissertation and I was concerned that they weren't being as critically analytical in their thinking and their writing as they would need to be, I would have probably have sent them to Learning Advice. I would send them to Learning Advice just to stretch them a little bit further. Sometimes I think I'm not doing it to the precise level, but I think I could be a Learning Advice tutor.

Sally is not entirely sure of the differences between what she does as a professional practitioner and how that can be distinguished from a skills tutor. May, on the other hand, was more confident in her assertion that the differences between academic skills tutors and dyslexia support tutors was because of the diverging learning styles and metacognitive processing difficulties of their respective students. Like Robin, she considered the primary factor to be the neurodevelopmental differences associated with dyslexics:

> We have both here [study skills tutors and dyslexia support tutors] and although we often cover similar ground we have to cover it differently. The problem for a dyslexic student is that they're not getting it the way that it's been handed out. I've sat through some of the study skills lectures with the study skills tutors. And they're delivered to a group and they give the information quite directly.

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But when I'm doing it with my students it will be far more graphic; it'll usually be kinesthetic as well. It will be much more clearly linked to their own personal experience and personal background. So I'll use metaphors that they can relate to.

The research suggests there is a discernable lack of clarity amongst the specialists regarding what it is exactly that makes dyslexia support tutors distinctly dyslexia related. Their position vis-à-vis their study skills tutor counterparts yielded another ambiguous paradox; they mostly agreed that dyslexia support tutors and study skills tutors had much in common in terms of practice, but could not between them identify what exactly it was that made them unique. For those tutors who adopt metacognition as part of their professional practice, the evidence indicates it is done so for the purpose of either reinforcing difference, or at least as a means providing an epistemological framework through which students can evaluate their sense of place in both a higher education environment and as a student labelled as 'dyslexic'. The research suggests that dyslexia is the object of support strategies, one in which the received wisdom of it being a neurological difficulty has so permeated the consciousness of specialists that they appear to be able to hold mutually contradictory notions about it. This is evidenced by the tutors who, firstly, stated that dyslexia is cognitive and developmental in origin. But, secondly, that many university students have already developed their own coping strategies, thereby indicating they have independently overcome their dyslexia related academic impediments. Yet, this is difficult to square with the assertion that what they (support tutors) do is indeed specialised and unique, and certainly distinguishable from more general study skills support. The authors similarly express such dissonance; McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, as one example, stated that counselling and support should be geared towards helping the students to learn, while in the same text-book stating simply that:

Although adult dyslexics seeking help are presenting with problems they may wish to address they will already have developed their own way of learning and dealing with tasks (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2003: 106).

To the extent that there may be practical applications for these methods that could benefit any student is only partially the point. The textbooks and the tutors have been investigated in their wider social and political contexts, which by extension means that their significance as social objects is to recognise them as a 'discursive site of articulation, upon and through which subjectivities and identities are shaped and constructed. This involves both how we are positioned in the world and how we reflexively find our place in the world' (Gray, 2003: 25). Hence, metacognition is both a means of prompting students excluded from the higher education environment to reflect on the manner of their exclusion, and also as a strategy that is perceived to be directly linked with 'what' is known about dyslexia, i.e. it is a neurological difference that affects information processing. In this context, it is arguably the case that the *we* in 'we reflectively find our place in the world' includes dyslexia specialists in higher education as much as it does students. And yet, given the political nature of the predetermined experiences both students and specialists must go though, one could suggest that personal experiences are 'not authentic and original sources of our being, but part of a process through which we articulate a sense of identity' (Gray, 2004: 26). This, therefore, raises the question as to whether the strategies themselves can be said to be distinctively dyslexia relevant.

This research does not lend itself to being able to compare its findings with a control group. The self-reported insights of support tutors and my own analyses of textbooks are the very epitome of qualitative research. Nonetheless, there is a way one can

compare the pedagogy and interventions from this research with an external source of similar information. The tutors, and textbooks, made reference to Stella Cottrell's *The Study Skills Handbook*. I own a copy myself and have often made use of its strategies during my own practice. The following section examines some of the strategies suggested by the specialists and compares them with those put forward by Cottrell to determine what, if anything, can be identified as uniquely dyslexia related. The section begins with metacognitive strategies before examining the methods used to support students with their reading and writing skills.

8.3 Metacognitive Strategies

The research indicates that specialists either using metacognitive strategies or recommending them fall roughly into two areas; self-reflective guided questioning or developing a more subjective relationship with the students. Many tutors generally tend to prefer the latter, namely that metacognitive techniques are subsumed into a more generalized notion of getting to know students. It is for this reason that students have been referred to as 'resources'. Hence the idea that although counselling may not be something dyslexia specialists necessarily need to incorporate into their practice, developing a trusting relationship with students in a safe environment is. This is reflected in the textbooks also. Hunter-Carsch and Herrington (*Dyslexia and Effective Learning in Secondary and Tertiary Education*), for example, suggests that the relationship between student and tutor should be one whereby both 'must work hard to reconnect learners with their own resourcefulness and to develop their own 'voices'' (Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 173). It is unclear why they choose to place

inverted commas around *voices*. They do, however, state that this dynamic should involve not just:

> asking students what they want and responding with standard study skills methods. It does imply starting with the issue which the student wants to address and jointly analyzing how the student is thinking and learning (Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 173).

Avoiding 'standard study skills' is the key here, as their suggestion involves three elements of support; developing the support tutor's 'gaze'; the tutor's professional hinterland and the nature of the student/tutor interaction. The first element can be characterized as explaining the higher education context to students and being aware of academic conventions. This is illustrated in their assertion that tutors should be equipped to understand 'the culture of higher education in the UK' and 'Handling a department position which appears to be 'anti-dyslexic'' (Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 176). Crucially, they assert that:

> At the very least they should explain to students the basic philosophy and practice of learning support, both at the individual level and as it concerns changing the disabling contexts of higher education (Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 176).

Their second element of support in effect is designed to reinforce the role of tutor as an agent of professional practice. The professional hinterland as they call it requires not only specialist SpLD qualifications but also an expectation that irrespective of the resourcefulness of students, they expect tutors to be considerably more proactive in the development of students' development. As they state:

> I expect individuals to change over the time *I work with them* (italics mine. Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 177).

Their third element concludes with the practical pedagogy of standard study skills. The advice on 'structuring essays' is prefaced with a further assertion that dyslexic learners learn differently from non-dyslexic learners. Their advice for facilitating students' development in this area is to ask reflective questions on the academic subject being researched.

> What is the essay getting at? What is the issue?
> Why is it an interesting issue for this course?
> Who thinks what and why?
> Whose ideas challenge these positions?
> What do you think is the answer? Why do you think so? *(*Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 189*).*

Self-reflective questioning is repeatedly suggested as a strategy of metacognitive support. Reid and Kirk's *Dyslexia in Adults: Education and Employment* suggest this strategy should involve the encouragement of students to ask themselves reflective questions pertaining to self-direction, self-monitoring and self-assessment. Self-direction requires the student to ask questions such as:

> What is my goal?
> What do I want to accomplish?
> What do I need?
> What is my deadline? (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 83).

Reid and Kirk incorporate self-monitoring as part of their metacognitive strategies. They require students to ask of themselves 'How am I doing?; Do I need other resources?; What else can I do?' (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 83), and self-assessment suggests helpful questions such as 'Did I accomplish my goal?; Was I efficient?; What worked?' (2001: 83-4) will benefit the student. In essence, Reid and Kirk summarise metacognition as involving the 'ability to transfer previous learning to new learning' (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 84). Practically, therefore, how this applies within professional

practice is predicated on orienting students towards asking self-reflective questions. This naturally raises the issue of dyslexia specific efficacy; which is to say that one must question its utility as relevant and appropriate exclusively for dyslexic students.

 Indeed this issue was examined by Hunter-Carsch and Herrington who did acknowledge that they had concerns:

> … whether or not this is essentially different to what is necessary for non-dyslexic students coming to learning support sessions. Many of the issues raised by dyslexic and non-dyslexic students were identical. They formed a core curriculum for which the broad contextual analysis described here is particularly suited: academic practices (literacies, teaching methods, conventions of curriculum organization etc.) and personal transitions. However, dyslexic students more frequently raised particular vulnerabilities with regard to affect/cognitive relationships and with particular aspects of literacy and speech (Hunter-Carsch and Herrington, 2001: 191-192).

This passage is particularly illustrative as it aligns almost exactly with the tutors' previous sentiments that what they do and how they support dyslexic students may have some overlap with non-dyslexic students, but it is in essence somehow uniquely for people with neurodevelopmental difficulties. McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer' *The Adult Dyslexic: Interventions and Outcomes* compound this belief with the re-assertion in their textbook that metacognitive strategies can help increase confidence and deal with low self-esteem. Similarly they posit that self-reflective questioning is useful in this matter. They encourage students to be asked:

> What is the aim? What is the task? What do I already know? How best can I do it? How long will it take? Is this the right way? Is this the best way? Should I change something? What was the result? Was it good? Was it bad? How can I improve it? (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 110).

These questions are prefigured with advice on using further metacognitive techniques called the 3M Model – for "Make it Manageable; Make it Multisensory; Make use of Memory Aids (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 110). What appears to be the case is that the practical application of metacognitive strategies, once references to the higher education culture and references to dyslexia/executive functioning have been removed, can be summarised as planning and organisation. Mortimore (2008) is again illustrative of this. She strongly asserts that 'it is essential to help dyslexic learners to develop these metacognitive strategies' (Mortimore, 2008: 113), which is summarised as an eight point guide for self-evaluation:

> Focus attention
> Give a general overview
> Introduce new terms
> Go through the procedure step-by-step
> Model the process – think aloud – introduce new frameworks of thought, the students also discuss the processes and teach each other
> Guide the practice – students repeat the instructor's strategy with support
> Independent practice
> Re-demonstrate the practice, if necessary to reinforce (Mortimore, 2008: 113).

When compared to 'standard' study skills, one can discern that there are distinct overlaps both epistemologically and pedagogically between study skills and dyslexia support. Cottrell (2009: 7) states that 'a reflective, active, self-evaluating approach to learning develops deeper understanding in the long term'. Although Cottrell makes reference to self-reflection, this is clearly the same sentiment expressed by dyslexia specialists. Unlike the dyslexia specialists, however, Cottrell does not claim that neurodevelopmental disorders are a unique feature of academic arrested development but more that 'universities do not provide much help at more basic levels to help you 'catch up' – they expect you to be ready' (Cottrell, 2009: 7). The assumption parallels with the points raised by Crozier et al (2008) and Hill et al (2010) in that as the student

population diversifies, that very diversity is not being fully reflected in the manner in which universities embrace different learning styles and cultural experiences. More pertinently, meta-cognitive self-reflection, as directed through the techniques suggested by Cottrell, identify students' *differences* as a comparison against the established norms of the university environment. In many ways, therefore, general study skills and dyslexia support are founded upon the notion of acculturation in higher education.

There are two reflective exercises in the first sections of Cottrell's (2009) handbook that are strikingly familiar with those found in the dyslexia textbooks. The first is a questionnaire/checklist of academic competencies, and the other is a self-evaluation of stresses and anxieties students may experience. Were this to be related to dyslexic students, one would see the immediate relevance to the primary and secondary characteristics of the conditions as revealed in the previous chapters. There are three questions on the first evaluation (out of a check list of thirteen) that stand out as particular examples of steering students towards directly contrasting themselves against required standards of expected academic behaviour.

> Put a tick against those that are true of you:
> You regularly read advanced text, such as a quality newspaper weekly and
> several books a year, whether by eye or using taped books.
> You are reasonably confident about being able to work on your own, without
> help, for most of the time (though the college may offer specific help for
> students from overseas or with disabilities, including dyslexia).
> You can translate your personal skills into academic skills (Cottrell, 2009: 23).

The first statement is lifestyle based and can be interpreted as being more concerned with 'correct' socialisation than the development of academic skills. The question immediately places students who choose not to read 'quality' newspapers or several

books a year at a self-perceptual disadvantage as anyone from a non-traditional background presumably may come away from this exercise feeling that those who do subscribe to this sort of behaviour automatically have a more legitimate claim to accessing higher education than those who do not. As an exercise in meta-cognition, it encourages the student to locate themselves in a liminal space between their own socio-economic backgrounds and the seemingly alien world of the university environment. Should they decline to 'tick the box' therefore then the only conclusion is that while at university, their personal background will be found wanting. Epistemologically, there is a distinct parallel with what Cottrell is implying and what Reid and Kirk (2001) state outright in their textbook:

> Many adults with dyslexia have not fulfilled their potential at school and may still have an inadequate level of literacy skills which will impede their opportunities for employment. Literacy skills are not only referring to the ability to read and write but also include a variety of other skills (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 72).

The second statement concerns itself with what is commonly referred to as independent learning. As an early exercise in self-evaluation, again it takes certain assumptions regarding the self and asks the student to speculate on how much they feel they will be prepared to struggle before seeking some sort of specialist assistance. Interestingly, the statement draws the reader's attention to the reassuring fact that dyslexic students may have access to their own 'specific help', who one assumes to be dyslexia support tutors, which in itself makes a further assumption that dyslexia support is indeed distinguishable from study skills support.

The representation of higher education, as constructed in Cottrell's text, as a place of difference, bears out the necessity of evaluating one's own independence as a learner due to the fact that 'some aspects of studying at university are very different from school or college' (Cottrell, 2009: 1), and that as far as the teaching is concerned tutorials 'may be the only time that a lecturer is able to help you with study problems' (Cottrell, 2009: 10). The notion of 'normalising behaviour' prevails through the question itself and Cottrell's textual construction of higher education. It is too general a statement to accept fully that all, or even most, tutors are not conscientious educators who care little for the academic development of their students.

University higher education is represented in Cottrell's handbook as something students absolutely need to be integrated into, whether that is via conscious attempts at acculturation or the culmination of childhood preparation through family, school and college. The transference of personal skills into academic skills is an example of this sort of epistemological underpinning behind the third statement. Like the objectification of thoughts and feelings within the dyslexia textbooks, it implies the self is object of educational development, wherein the individual becomes more than that what he/she is through a combination of formative training and a sense of belonging.

Cottrell (2009) guides the student through a process of self-evaluation while making references to skills such as 'working with others and problem solving' among others. The various check lists of self-evaluation throughout are intended as tools to draw out a deeper, more holistic perception of one's self as a potential student of higher education, which itself can be understood to mean that before students properly begin their course

they may be more conscious of themselves as a sort of higher education squatter than somebody perfectly within their rights to be there.

Moreover, as we have seen, dyslexia specialists are very much aware of the perceived symptom of stress and anxiety as a constituting feature of a dyslexic profile. Similarly, Cottrell provides an opportunity for students to reflect on not necessarily their stress, but some possible reasons for the cause of their stress. And like the self-reflective exercise in personal/academic skills, the implied causes of stress are more suggestive of one's background than ability. The checklist 'Self-Evaluation: Anxieties and Resources' (Cottrell, 2009: 17) guides the student through a series of questions that are intended to help the individual become cognizant of the external causes of stress, which here appear to be largely attributable to one's social and cultural background. Here are some particular examples from the 'Personal, family, work commitments';

> Tick the box besides any that apply to you, or add in others in the empty spaces:
> Making friends with other students.
> Coping with travel.
> Organising childcare.
> People treating me differently/'fitting in'.
> Coping with job requirements.
> Family responsibilities. (Cottrell, 2009: 17).

Pedagogically there is very little to discern the difference between the self-reflective, metacognitive techniques in Cottrell and the various strategies put forward by the dyslexia specialists. Moreover, epistemologically both share similar theoretical positions in that higher education is a place in which students must be encouraged to become familiar. In itself this is not a problematic position, but given that the metacognitive interventions are so strikingly similar the epistemological position of

dyslexia specialists does become problematic. Cottrell acknowledges that fitting into university can be the result of extrinsic problems such as inexperience in higher education or students enrolling from non-traditional backgrounds. Dyslexia specialists, however, identify intrinsic problems as requiring self-reflective solutions. Dyslexia appears to be constructed, therefore, as a cultural meme, one that has already been prefigured in earlier chapters regarding *what is known* about the condition and the social processes involved in being diagnosed dyslexic through an educational psychologist. The research for this thesis suggests that although acculturation may be necessary for a struggling student to progress in a university environment, their experiences of support will either acculturate them as students per se, or as dyslexic students with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

What follows is a detailed analysis on how dyslexic students are advised to overcome their difficulty with words, specifically in the areas of reading and writing. Again, Cottrell is drawn upon by way of comparison to determine the extent to which specialist support in these areas can be attributable to a knowledge-base that is specific to dyslexia tutors.

There are many academic skills students entering higher education need to master, not the least of which are the ability to read at an appropriately high level and convey one's subject knowledge coherently. But apart from reading and writing, students are also expected to demonstrate capabilities in areas such as critical and analytical thinking, independent research and referencing. Yet given the premium placed on the 'word' to both acquire knowledge and to disseminate it, the twin activities of reading and writing

stand out as fundamental to academic development. Whatever barriers there are to

reading and writing, the skills and strategies utilised by support students in these areas

are arguably the foundations of all the support that follows. Moreover, students with

dyslexia are regularly said to experience disproportionate stresses and anxieties as a

consequence of literary arrested development. To that end, what follows is an analysis

and comparison of the pedagogic techniques for supporting students in these areas as

suggested specifically by Cottrell (2009), with those put forward by the dyslexia

specialists.

8.4 Reading Strategies

Cottrell's (2009) section on reading begins with another reflective exercise in which

students are encouraged to ask if they are 'a smart reader'. The purpose of the exercise

is not to identify cognitive abilities, but to question one's approaches to reading and

comprehending academic material. The exercise itself is fashioned around a tick-box

series of questions designed to prompt reflections on the ontological nature of text and

context. For example:

> Do you have strategies for approaching your reading? Which of the following
> do you do? Know exactly what you are looking for? Have I considered what
> questions I'm trying to answer? Have I considered what information I need?
> (Cottrell, 2009: 116)

If the student answers 'no', they are encouraged to engage with Cottrell's following

strategies. The utilization of this reflective pre-reading exercise is not to underscore

their difference, but merely to identify skills weaknesses that can, with the right support,

be readily overcome.

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By contrast, McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer's *The Adult Dyslexc: interventions and Outcomes* (2002) begin their pre-reading passage with a re-emphasis on the typical behavioural and educational characteristics of a dyslexic student.

> Studying at an advanced level requires someone to be able to recognise sophisticated words quickly. Dyslexic people often over-read, focusing on word recognition rather than comprehension (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 154).

Like Cottrell (2009), McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002) introduce a reflective exercise before suggesting any pedagogic and self-improving strategies. But here the similarities of practice end; a reading of the wording of the questions exposes their underlying epistemological position:

> Before teaching any systematic reading strategy, it is important to ask students questions about their reading. These include:
>
> What is your reading like?
>
> What are the problems you associate with your reading?
>
> Is your main difficulty decoding the long words, reading aloud or comprehension? (Mcloughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 154).

The exercise is designed to direct students to think about their difference. Compared to the phrasing of Cottrell's questions, these examples are very loaded and could guide the student into assuming that 'difficulty decoding the long words' is the 'right' answer. McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer follow this up with a dyslexia caveat to temper any potential criticism of the loaded nature of their questions:

> Many dyslexic people tend to read in the same fashion, whatever the text. They are often not aware that there is much more to reading than decoding and remembering what is read. (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 155).

This caveat, following immediately from the reflective questions, can be read as an acknowledgement that, unlike Cottrell's information gathering exercise, the purpose of the queries was not to extract information but to buttress a preconceived ideal. Indeed, the notion that dyslexic students should begin their academic journey enveloped, as it were, in the garments of dyslexia figures prominently amongst the specialists. A common feature is to the constant reaffirmation of the significance of their learning disability before the actual business of study support begins. In a few examples, this positioning is actually similar to Cottrell, in that tutors are reminded that in higher education one is merely supporting students' own independent learning. Nonetheless, dyslexia is emphasised as 'adults with dyslexia have a responsibility to themselves to become familiar with their condition; to understand how they process information; to devise strategies to cope with what for them is a different way of thinking' (Reid and Kirk, 2001: 96).

Following reflective practices, dyslexia and non-dyslexia support proceeds to guide students around what is essentially the physical and educational act of reading. Reading is presented by both Cottrell and the dyslexia specialists as a series of activities that can be broken down into manageable chunks. Cottrell, for example, begins by urging the student to 'start with something general' because 'reading is easier if you have a sense of the context and a general overview. Read the most basic text you can find first. Familiarise yourself with the main issues and vocabulary' (Cottrell, 2008: 119). What follows guides the student in a way that is far removed from any prescriptive interventions. For example, after students have 'monitored their progress' by reading a few sentences, then stopping, followed by summing up what has just been read, they are then urged to ask of themselves 'specific questions to start off your reading' (Cottrell,

2008: 119). This technique places the student's own self-awareness as the lynchpin of their development. Thus, while Reid and Kirk (2001) state that dyslexics have a responsibility to understand their dyslexia caused strengths and weaknesses, Cottrell lightly infers that all students should similarly become familiar with how they process information. Her next steps are intended to alleviate the worst excesses of stress and anxiety that often comes with reading dense academic material, the sort of material that inexperienced students would, she acknowledges, struggle to cope with irrespective of dyslexia. Cottrell directs students to 're-read difficult passages; highlight key words and phrases; colour-code information and ask depth-questions'. These steps lock down the physical act of reading and are intended to put the student in a considerably more empowered position.

The dyslexia specialists mirror this intervention. For example, in McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer's (2002) text, chapter seven *Academic and professional learning skills*, 'reading interventions' the authors present the SQ3R or PARTS technique for reading. (SQ3R is Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Recall. PARTS is Perform goal setting; Analyse little parts; Review big parts; Think of questions you hope will be answered; State relationships). There is very little here to distinguish what Cottrell suggests and what McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002) put forward as specialist dyslexia interventions. Both require the student to be guided through reading small passages of text and reviewing the contents through re-reading and asking in-depth questions of the material.

Reid and Kirk (*Dyslexia in Adults: Education and Employment*) (2001), Tilly

Mortimore (*Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioners Handbook*) (2008) and Sandra

Hargreaves (*Study Skills for Dyslexic Students*) (2007) also suggest that breaking down

the reading into manageable chunks and using the SQ3R approach would be an

appropriate way in for struggling dyslexic students. Cottrell, likewise, draws her

readers' attention to the topic sentence. Indeed, she has produced an entire sub-section

on the purpose and function of paragraphs, which she says 'break up the text into

manageable portions' (Cottrell, 2009: 192). She also highlights the first sentence of a

paragraph as a useful way for students to see how the wider chapter is being developed.

The purpose of these exercises is that they allow an element of control to be

experienced by the students. Information is accessed in smaller chunks and enables

students to take on the academic material in a more methodical manner.

Whether or not the breaking down of reading material into smaller sections and

subjecting it to analysis via guided questions is of significant benefit to the dyslexic

student is immaterial. The general study skills and dyslexic specific techniques are so

nearly identical that one must question the extent to which they can be said to be part of

a specialist dyslexia related skill-set. The construction of the dyslexia support within

the bulk of the dyslexia texts would lead one to conclude that the pedagogy that can be

found within is necessarily a particular sort of specialised mediation between disabled

student and specialist practitioner. But in so far as reading skills is concerned, there is

no discernable difference.

Much the same can be said of writing. Cottrell (2009) goes into depth on the subject of writing for university. This is because 'writing cannot be separated from other processes such as reflection, goal setting, organisation and research' (Cottrell, 2009: 167). Again Cottrell begins with a reflective exercise, but unlike the similar one found in McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002), Cottrell instead focuses on self-evaluating how good students are, as opposed to agreeing with carefully worded negative questions. Regarding just essay writing, Cottrell dedicates roughly seventeen pages, beginning with 'Tricks for getting started' which is followed with a detailed breakdown on what an essay is ('a piece of writing which is written to a set of writing conventions' – Cottrell, 2009: 175), while also taking in a seven point procedure for writing assignments ('clarify the task, organize, collect information, enagage and evaluate, outline a first draft, work on first draft, produce final draft' (Cottrell, 2009: 176-7). The activities are designed around the premise that one should not think of academic writing as singularly large pieces of work, but as a series of much smaller engagements whereby the cumulative effect is the successful production of writing that is well researched, broken down into constituent paragraphs, using appropriate academic language while also demonstrating awareness of complex issues. What the research suggests is that the 'interventions' referred to in the titles of many of these textbooks give the wrong impression; they cannot be said to be part of a bedrock of knowledge with which disciplinary practice is based. Of course, Foucault was aware of this, especially when it came to conduct and behaviour within any system of thought. There is no rational, inevitability which allows one to conclude that careful planning in a

particular way will help dyslexic students with their writing any more than it would another student similarly on the periphery of higher education inclusion.

Similarly, dyslexia and study skills support make great use of visual aids such as mind maps. This technique is to help students 'organize concepts into hierarchies' (Cottrell, 2009: 187). No suggestion is made regarding how any of these strategies are of particular use to students with dyslexia. Their overall function is very simply as a standard utility that can be drawn upon to help students make sense of and arrange information. McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer (2002) go to some length to reassert the disabling condition of dyslexia amongst students struggling to write essays; it certainly may very well be the case that 'putting ideas on paper is the task that most dyslexic people find difficult as there is a high cognitive demand, involving not just writing skills but also organization' (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2002: 158). Likewise, Mortimore (2008) also identifies dyslexia as the primary cause of concern when helping dyslexic students plan and write assignments as 'either they have so many ideas they don't know where to start or their minds go blank when presented with the empty screen or sheet of paper' (Mortimore, 2008: 153). Although Cottrell (2009) is markedly more detailed in the level, depth and quantity of information and techniques she presents, there is nonetheless a distinct similarity between all the study skills and dyslexia related strategies in all the books. Apart from the many caveats within the sections pertaining to academic writing skills, when it comes down to the actual pedagogic practices, there is no difference between study skills and dyslexia support.

While the authors of both study skills and dyslexia support texts may be in general

agreement about the strategies for developing students' academic ability, the research

has revealed that also the tutors similarly engage in support practices that are not

entirely dissimilar to general study skills support. Indeed, not all dyslexia support tutors

are even of a mind to agree that what they do is dyslexia related anyway. Denise for

example readily conceded that dyslexia tutors should not "confuse dyslexia with the

inability to read and think well. I think dyslexia can be used as an excuse for actually,

I'm not saying being bright, but taking on some subjects well."

In terms of professional practice, what became apparent is not necessarily the practice

itself but the reaffirmation of the concept of dyslexia. In other words what dyslexia

tutors do with students is of less importance than why they do it, or more specifically,

why they think they do. Anne, for example, incorporates mind maps not because, as

Cottrell (2009) suggest, they are useful tools for breaking down large, complex subjects,

but because they offer a visual means of rendering students' thoughts on paper. As she

stated:

> A common thing for me from start to finish would be to talk to them about their
> essay, make something visual initially because most of my students tend to be
> visual. Even if they don't think they are, once we get going they seem to
> connect with those things. So making mind maps and plans of their essay, their
> structure, the information they know already, the stuff they've got to find out
> and mechanisms on how to find that out.

She goes on to explain that her subsequent sessions would include writing techniques

including sentence and paragraph structure as well as using assistive software, but

perhaps the most intriguing aspect of her work lies in how similar it is with that of a

general study skills tutor. Indeed, she conceded that the approach she would take for

dyslexic students "would be the approach that I'd take with everybody. There's this perception that you'd have your general study skills session and then you'd have to do something a bit special for the dyslexics." Despite this overlap her justification for it being dyslexia specific is because of the 'magnitude' of difficulties for people with dyslexia. This in itself appears to be mostly based on what she has accepted as the established primary and secondary characteristics of dyslexia than for any other reason. Again, however, the research suggests that as there is no consistency in the manner dyslexia specialists determine the 'magnitude' of students' dyslexia, one can only conclude at this juncture that it is a cultural assumption. The research itself has shown that more than anything there is a system of thought in operation which has been driven politically, and determined centrally by government policy, to oblige specialists into the belief that what they do is indeed specialist.

The emphasis on the students' academic work was repeated a number of times by the authors, which actually made for a somewhat paradoxical picture to emerge. Gwen was illustrative of this. As a manager she has overall responsibility for the support her institution provides, but like Anne is inconsistent with why, or least how it is professionally particular to dyslexic students. On the one hand, when questioned about the tutors her university would employ to support dyslexic students she replied that "It's more to do with staff being teachers. They're employed on an academic contract here; if they're academic they really need a teaching qualification of some kind or other. I'm very strict on that. It's one thing I won't compromise on". That said, however, one thing she would compromise on is the requirement for her organisation to employ support tutors with disability credentials, which she stated were 'desirable'. How this filters down into practice is that, like Denise and Anne, students' academic development

is paramount. But when asked about the perceived similarities between dyslexia support and academic support she replied that "It's a different approach – although we do have people here who do both, who support students with disabilities and support students without disabilities. And if you spoke to them they would probably say that what you do is not very different because they can do both." Precisely what she meant by 'can do both' is not entirely clear, as her concept of practice as being almost wholly focused on reading, essay writing, sentences and paragraphs would more accurately indicate that it is not the tutors who can provide a service to both sorts of students, but rather that both sorts of students could benefit from the same type of service.

The research has revealed that it is 'the approach' to dyslexia support, not the practice, nor the repetition of dyslexia characteristics or any previous training and professional experiences, that affirm the professional status of practitioners. Always it is in the perception of dyslexia that seems to answer the questions regarding the knowledge base of the support. Kelly and Robin, for example, see their initial practice as understanding the experiences and context of the students they support. Kelly emphasises how short-term memory can affect how one does one's support as "a student who is dyslexic may well go through things and may well understand it at the time, but will probably repeat the same mistakes". The inner workings of the mind is a useful way in to justify the dyslexia specific nature of the practice. As Robin similarly said:

> I think the techniques I use are the barriers, or the cognitive barriers, emotional barriers that my students face that are prescient to a dyslexic/dyspraxic profile. And they're usually significant problems with weak working memory, a likelihood of phonological differences, reading and processing of information, processing speed, working memory and the impact that has on reading, writing, spelling and research in an HE context.

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Likewise, May in the early stages of her initial support sessions concentrates her practice on essentially reinforcing difference, particularly the students' perceptual differences. Indeed, dissimilarity seems to be key to understanding the foundations of her own particular pedagogy. "One of the most successful sessions I do with students is talk to them about those very different communication difficulties. I talk in metaphors, I know it's not research based and I tell them as much. But I talk to them thinking in patterns, making giant leaps and sudden connections". While Kelly and Robin perceive the context of the students' problems to be pertinent to short-term working memory, May appears to understand dyslexia more as a manifested affliction of something altogether more physical. This is reflected in some of the ways she incorporates her own dyslexia ideal into her practice; it may very well be a specific learning difficulty, but some of the interventions can be quite physical themselves:

> So in the early sessions I will be particularly looking for anything that gives me clues as to what it is that the student, a misfit in traditional education settings – so I will get the coloured overlays even if they're a bit distant. If they're students that like to twizzle around I tell them to tape their lectures and listen to them whilst moving. I usually do experiments to ask the students to find out how and where they concentrate best when reading. Once we've got it optomised then I'll ask them to go away and read it, in stillness, in movement, lying on their tummy, sitting on a chair.

Although May is arguably an extreme example of emphasising the contextualisation of support, the belief that what she does as distinctly dyslexia relevant is a driving force behind her practice. She is not alone here as many of the tutors repeatedly reassert their position that what they do is distinct, indeed necessarily different, from the practices of mainstream teaching. And yet Cottrell (2009) also advocates the use of highlighting key areas of a student's essay plan with colour coded pens and basing research and overall structure on learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Identically, May

follows suit, but follows this up with her own caveat that this has been informed very much through professional training. As she said:

> I'd tell them to get out the essay brief, and the learning outcomes, and any marking scheme. This comes from the PATOSS course. We highlight in pink all the things that have to do, and we highlight in yellow all the things that we have to do to it. And if I have to do it with them, then that's a skill they have to learn to do themselves.

This sort of practice (or intervention) is repeated by other tutors, who attempt to advance the cause of purely dyslexia support, but who ultimately "break down the assignment into what you're being asked to do" as Kelly said.

In as far as support is concerned, it is apparent that there is a widespread belief that when a student is awarded 'specialist study skills support' by an appropriately qualified tutor, then that tutor will have a knowledge-base and professional status accorded to them through professional accreditation as well as substantial experiential insight. Amongst practitioners this belief certainly persists, but on a scale of subtly not anticipated prior to the research. The results strongly suggest that pedagogic support practice for dyslexic students can be applied to all students, or conversely, students whom may be struggling academically could benefit from dyslexia interventions irrespective of whether they had gone through the required process of screenings and diagnostic assessments.

Metacognitive and self-reflective practices have been revealed to be almost entirely identical in terms of the manner in which students are guided to evaluate themselves. Self-evaluative questioning is used by both dyslexia tutors and non-specialist staff to

help identify and indeed to reinforce differences. Whereas Cottrell's strategies could be interpreted as methods of identifying cultural and social differences, the reasoning behind dyslexia specific metacognitive techniques was as a means of reaffirming the cognitive differences between spld students and their neurotypical counterparts. But in terms of practice, there is nothing to distinguish them. The fact that this technique is so prominent amongst dyslexia specialists owes more to the belief in brain functioning and learning style, but the fact that it has not been demonstrated to be specific to dyslexic students in particular means that as far as 'specialist' support is concerned, this does not include this intervention.

Similarly the same conclusions can be drawn when comparing reading and writing strategies. The dyslexia specialists all use broadly similar techniques to help students, but when compared with more general study skills, there was very little to distinguish them. The implications of this go to the heart of this research; the research is focused upon what dyslexia specialists know about dyslexia and how that knowledge has been informed. The conclusion will elucidate upon these questions in relation to the findings as they have been presented so far and suggest how the research itself may have profound implications for the support of students with specific learning difficulties in higher education.

The aim of this research was to explore the construction of dyslexia within higher education; the objectives were to analyse specialist textbooks and the self-reported practices of support tutors to explore how these factors combined to construct dyslexia as a social condition. Regarding the former, it has been possible to discern how textual analyses have revealed the rhetorical strategies used by writers to underline the notion that dyslexia exists as an *a priori* reality, in which the contents of the books are assumed to be accepted independent of social context. In the latter, the self-reported practices of specialist tutors have reinforced the notion that what dyslexia *is* is not something that can be separated easily from what it is assumed to be. Thus the objectives of textual analysis and exploration of tutors' professional practices have revealed a consistently broad picture of unquestioning assumptions about what dyslexia is and how it affects students in higher education. Also that any interventions put into practice to support students are necessarily predicated on the idea that it is not the social circumstances that may contribute to students' academic arrested development but rather an intrinsic neurodevelopmental condition. The issues this raises is the extent to which dyslexia support can be identified as a uniquely specialist pedagogical practice. This conclusion will explore the relevance of this research upon UK higher education, as well as examine how my own professional practice may be directly affected as a result, and make suggestions for potentially relevant research in the future.

The relevance of this research upon the wider sector of HE student support has been given additional relevance following the BIS announcements regarding the changes to DSA funding. Presently all students identified with dyslexia/SpLD are guaranteed

funding to pay for specialist one-to-one dyslexia support. Soon this may change, with the emphasis instead being placed more prominently with the students' respective institutions as the providers and facilitators of support. The research has strongly indicated that students who have been identified with dyslexia in higher education receive support that is not specialist pedagogy. Moreover, in terms of the one-to-one nature of the DSA funded interventions, there is little evidence to suggest that students entering higher education would not equally benefit from a similar type of study support service, albeit one provided entirely as an educational service rather than anything exclusively dyslexia related. In relation to my first objective, a comparison between the recommended support interventions from the dyslexia specific textbooks and the more general study skills text did not identify anything substantially different between the two. Indeed, for the most part, many of the strategies included in both may benefit students who have no or little background in higher education, irrespective of any learning difficulties. All the texts under scrutiny here have made suggestions for techniques that can be utilised by all tutors and support workers, but in a way that emphasises the requirement on behalf of the student to comply with the culture of the institution than to overcome any particular learning impairment. Cottrell (2009) constructs in her text a version of a struggling student as someone for whom the university environment is something of an alien and hostile world. The purpose of her book, as well as suggesting basic study skills, is to enable the student to reflect on their difference as a means of overcoming it for the ultimate purpose of fitting into higher education culture and society. Likewise, there is a similar thread running through much of the dyslexia support books and the positionality of the tutors. Difference in this case is not assumed to be a deficit in study skills, but that the student has not been inculcated into the dyslexia fold sufficiently to embrace their identity as a dyslexic.

The idea of 'identity constituting' is interesting as it allows one to gauge more fully with how the construction of dyslexia through the combination of empirical research, text books and practice has coalesced around certain notions of practical improvement. The point at which disability and dyslexic identity are constituted is highly complex as some writers have pointed out that while having the label of 'disabled' or 'dyslexic' may go some way to posit individuals in a distinct social subgroup (Lipson and Rogers, 2000; Ganotti, Handwerker, et al, 2001), others suggest that the moment any support interventions take effect necessarily changes a fundamental aspect of that individual. Belshaw (2000), for example, suggests that 'where therapy causes the resulting psychology to be both radically and from the outset at odds with the way it would otherwise have been, identity will be compromised' (Belshaw, 2000: 267), which is itself an interesting position to take vis-à-vis dyslexia support practice. Therefore, what must be considered within the practice of support is what its overall function is exactly. For example, much empirical research, although in no tangible sense associated with pedagogy, nonetheless makes the case for particular interventions and therapies based on evidence that is wholly abstracted from the classroom. The assumption is that a wide enough body of knowledge can be utilised by professionals in particular disciplines and justified as 'evidence-based', which in turn serves the purpose of bestowing upon those receiving support an ontology that to some professionals is 'identity constituting'.

This has been highlighted in much of the research for this thesis; there is a prevalent belief that dyslexia is cognitive in origin and genetic in nature, and that the primary and secondary characteristics of it are determined because of its pathological origin. Needless to say, this has fed into a belief that any support provided by specialists is

inherently specialist on a number of levels. The first is that students being supported have been diagnosed by an appropriately qualified professional who has been given added status due to the specialist nature of what he/she does. Significantly, the specialists could not specifically identify how support practice matched the empirical evidence that had been previously undertaken on dyslexia as a cognitive impairment. Certainly there were numerous allusions and references to research, but not in a way that explained the difference between study skills deficits and neurological symptoms. Secondly, although there were strong misgivings about the status of professional qualifications, the belief amongst the tutors was predominantly that they were a necessary requirement for the professional status of their profession. The issue, however, was not that qualifications necessarily provided the tutors with adequate training to support students, but more that they acted as signifiers of a certain commitment to their field. Implied throughout the research was the broad assumption that dyslexia support was not something that was taken seriously by other specialists within the dyslexia community, and that merely having a qualification, irrespective of its actual relevance to practice, would go some way in legitimising the status of the tutors within their respective universities. This was furthermore evidenced in how the text books referred to dyslexia tutors as either 'lightly trained' or not appropriately qualified, or indeed as 'basic literacy tutors', while at the same time displaying prominently within the front sections of their texts their own academic credentials. Insofar as a culture of dyslexia support is concerned, one aspect of the research to stand out is that students who do receive some sort of intervention are by definition on a journey of self-improvement, of which there is a hierarchy of specialists at hand to proffer specialist support, advice and guidance.

The culture of support practice, as evidenced in the research, is not simply that it must take into account people from different cultures, but that professionals need to be conscious of the assumption that irrespective of cultural diversity within the client population, an absence of support reduces the individual's capacity to progress and improve. This is a cultural trope which figures largely in both textbooks and interviews, and has been identified by writers such as Engel and Munger (2007) who suggest that dyslexia/disability identity is not static and easily located, but is premised on the ideal of a personal narrative. Personal narrative in disability discourse and practice is a particularly Foucaultian notion. It takes the idea that support practice is absolutely transfigurative, but the only way in which it can be conceptually apprehended is as a cultural signifier, and that signifier is a narrative construct. Engel and Munger (2007: 85) suggest that disability and identity are inextricably intertwined with narrative and personal experience. It is no coincidence, then, that within the research subjects for this thesis, both the authors and the tutors perceive support to be such a narrative, in which the conclusion of the narrative is the achievement of end goals and an acceptance of oneself as a person with dyslexia. Furthermore, the theme of identity is related to the manner in which the question 'what do dyslexia specialists know about dyslexia?' was answered. The symptoms and the label of dyslexia, combined with the belief that there are differences in practice with that of study skills tutors, correspond with this theme. Dyslexic students, having gone through a highly structured process of screenings, educational psychological assessments and assessment of needs before support can be provided, are demonstrably identified and labelled as 'dyslexic' as much through the social interactions with other professionals as they are via the diagnostic reports that act of precursors to support. Coupled with the understanding that professional

qualifications add to the legitimacy of the support dyslexic students receive, and the idea that both staff and students have their own unique identity can be clearly discerned.

The particular ways in which those professionals and practitioners make sense of what they do and why, be they academic researchers, authors or support tutors, is in essence an exercise in understanding dyslexia as a cultural construct. Narrative and language, in this sense, act as facilitators of praxis which are part of a wider cultural series of anthropological traits (Reid-Cunningham, 2009) in which the culture of disability is constituted through the dialogue that exists between professional and client (Gannotti, Handwerker et al, 2001), the possible affinity or indeed solidarity disabled people may feel with each other (Putnam, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2013), and the problematic function of language as both a tool of construction and a site of potential tension (Martin, 2012). Indeed, disability as a textualised construct has not gone unnoticed by those researchers who have focused their examinations on text books and other academic materials (Price, 2006), and concluded that within the books, the conditions themselves, rather than the external environment, figure disproportionately prominently. Similarly, other writers have suggested that, in terms of the semiotics and terminology of disability discourse, the personal experiences of both practitioners and clients are fundamentally driven by variations in understanding key terms or slight shifts in their meanings (Devlieger, 1999). These notions have been revealed within this research. The authors in particular utilise language in such as way that dyslexia becomes a focal point of reference. The titles alone are indicative of how the deficit model and the requirement for the narrative of 'interventions and outcomes' reflects back to the reader the simulacrum of reality assumed to exist.

The research indicates that dyslexia has been institutionally objectified in policy and practice. The objectification of dyslexia has an internal consistency that seemingly articulates its supposedly naturally occurring characteristics. The ideal of dyslexia, therefore, is the interplay between the individuals, their own personal and academic backgrounds and the surrounding agents in the dyslexia field. What dyslexia is not is a mere subject matter to be studied passively; nor is it a large and diffuse assortment of texts. It is an active, ongoing consolidation and distribution of information which is only truly made sense of at the point of contact between dyslexia specialist and student.

The contact between specialist and student has been given added relevance in the past academic year (2016/17) as the official government guidelines related to who may and may not claim to be a dyslexia specialist (and therefore claim DSA as payment for their services) has been revised. Now there is a requirement that dyslexia tutors should possess a specialist qualification but more importantly be a member of a professional body, specifically the BDA, Dyslexia Guild, PATOSS or ADSHE. For my own part this directly relates to my own practice and positionality as any audit of best practice must be assured that the organisation I am employed by must invest in my own professional development, and all learning plans, learning objectives and sessional support files comply with external specifications. This change in policy, therefore, necessarily differentiates the perception of what I do and why from more general study skills tutors. It certainly reinforces the findings of this research in that my own practice is contingent upon social context rather than the quality of the pedagogy, and certainly places my positionality as researcher *and* tutor into a considerably more dyslexia specialist role. Therefore, whether or not I continue to perceive my positionality as primarily an educator or dyslexia specialist will depend on the social and employment

situation I happen to find myself in. One could speculate, for example, that if HEIs who directly employ dyslexia tutors decide to divest themselves of DSA, then that would allow tutors (and myself) to both support students as they (I) thought appropriate, and also it would enable us to position ourselves much more as academic support tutors who happen to advise dyslexic students. In effect what my research and the current policies reveal is that my own professional practice is bound inextricably to external policies that are informed by the same shared assumptions as both the authors and tutors; namely that dyslexia exists as an uncontested reality and only suitably trained specialists should be given the responsibility to intervene. But this position, it must be said, is conditional upon the institution claiming DSA. Arguably, therefore, remove DSA from the equation and the circumstances upon which support takes places fundamentally changes.

Should the UK higher education sector take the decision to re-orient its approach to dyslexia support as a broader issue of accessibility and inclusivity then the experiences of support tutors and students, as well the actual pedagogy of support, will be altered in quite striking ways. For example, my research has indicated that in terms of pedagogic interventions, there is very little if anything to justify the word 'specialist' being used for what dyslexia tutors do. A case can be put forward that dyslexic students should not be marginalised as they presently are in terms of the support they receive, but should instead be able to access academic study skills advice that is available for all students. This, ideally, should be provided by a dedicated in-house study support department which offers a combination of one-to-one support, as well as opportunities for students to attend academic workshops in areas such as academic writing, exam strategies, research methods etc. This would then re-frame dyslexia away from its current iteration as a cognitive learning disability, towards addressing it as an educational issue rather

than as an inherently disabling condition. All students in this case would then be able to access the same advice service in a way that is equitable for all, and it avoids compelling staff and students to identify themselves as distinct and different.

While providing a bolt-on approach to study skills will contribute to a more inclusive learning environment, so will a purposeful strategy of inclusive teaching and assessment. Study skills support should ideally only ever compliment the teaching of academic staff within their respective disciplines. To that end, embedding practical academic skills development into course modules, combined with a greater emphasis on classroom management training for all teaching staff, will help encourage a learning environment in which academic tutors are aware of the necessity of responding to cohorts comprised of students with different learning styles who will require a range of teaching and learning experiences. Indeed, for broader inclusivity to exist within a university students should be given the opportunity to experience a range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies that both challenge and stimulate all students fairly. Thus, if students with dyslexia are accommodated for their learning profile, then much greater diversity in course content delivery and flexibility in assessment will go some considerable way in mitigating against many of the assumed difficulties they will face while enrolled within higher education. Moreover, this approach will also diminish to the point of irrelevance the role of the educational psychologist, as well as the requirement for students to be subjected to a battery of diagnostic tests, needs assessments and screenings. In short, adopting a fully inclusive learning environment that accommodates all students will significantly impact on the way in which various dyslexia stakeholders have commoditised dyslexia in a way that for university students is wholly unnecessary!

What the research has revealed, however, is that although in general there is widespread agreement about its deficit nature and pathological origin, individual institutions are markedly very different. How the DSA modifications may change the nature of how I support students will invariably depend on what sort of support is being offered by each university. The problems that may occur within those institutions is that those tutors employed directly and whose positions are not funded through DSA, may feel the necessity of consolidating their role within the institution and orienting their practice even more towards the deficit model of dyslexia. However, other universities may adopt a policy of inclusivity for all students in terms of flexible curricula and availability of support services, that mitigate against the manifestation of the worst effects of dyslexia. The research has revealed that much may depend on whether certain universities 'treat' dyslexia as either an educational issue or something more disability related. It would appear, therefore, that for my own part, I must perceive myself as a specialist who intercedes for disabled students until such times as I either gain employment as an academic skills tutor, or work for an organisation that refrains from claiming DSA. Indeed, these changes in institutional policy could very well be prompted because of the current practices of the tutors within those universities; there is the very real possibility that some tutors may feel that, with the proposed cuts to DSA, their profession is threatened. Where support, professional development and future recruitment could be directly affected, is in those instances when professional self-interest is conflated with the belief that students best interests will be put at risk.

Being as they are products of a certain cultural disposition, those professionals inside that culture may unwittingly take on board the broad spectrum of traits presented as

typical of dyslexia while rejecting the notion that much of what is being suggested in this regard can equally be applied to many non-dyslexic people. It is in this manner that the support practice acquire a transfigurative quality; dyslexia becomes a way of thinking based upon the epistemological and ontological distinction between dyslexia and 'normality'. It is through this prism of thought that may give licence to the dyslexia tutors to influence how dyslexic students perceive themselves, their personal experiences and even the manner in which they think through metacognitive exercises. Yet, even though self-reflection is a strategy that exists prominently in other areas of education and support, within an enclosed, self-referential system of dyslexia support these techniques can be said to serve two purposes; on the one hand they legitimize the specialist nature of dyslexia support as the metacognitive interventions have their foundations in psychology and can be said to be pertinent to students' neurological learning styles. On the other hand, by guiding students to reflect upon their own self-perception and experiences, they reinforce the identity that is bestowed upon students through the formal act of diagnosis. One experiences emotion as a very personal thing, therefore, to experience negative emotions as a consequence of one's academic underachievement is to experience a very real symptom of the pathological condition of dyslexia. Outside the dyslexia community it would not be such a stretch to discern the correlation between underachievement and unhappiness as very much within the educational arena. Poor academic performance may be attributable to poor teaching or a mismatched learning style to the teaching methods, but regardless of which, one would assume any negativity would dissipate once educational progression was back on track. Not so with dyslexia. It would be interesting, therefore, to follow up these findings by researching the perspective of dyslexic students in relation to their own self-identity, particularly in the context of receiving DSA funded specialist support.

Moreover, as well as the student voice being noticeably absent from this research, so are the voices of academics and more general study skills tutors.

The research has revealed one predominant consistency; personal experience, and the insights that drive subsequent professional practice, play an enormous role in the sort of advice students are given by the tutors who have learned their stock-in-trade on the job. There is an ambiguous relationship between insights gained through professional practice, the very notion of professionalism itself, and how what we think we should know about dyslexia plays a part in how we think we ought to support people who have dyslexia.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Sheffield Hallam University

SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

28/08/2012

Dear

I am currently enrolled on Sheffield Hallam University's Doctorate of Education programme. As part of my studies I am presently preparing to undertake a research study on dyslexia support in higher education, focusing specifically on support tutors. I am interested in researching dyslexia support in higher education, particularly what strategies support tutors use in their practice and why they use them The title for the main study is 'Deconstructing the Pedagogies of Dyslexia Support in Higher Education'.

Because you are a professional in this area of higher education I would like to invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview, lasting approximately an hour at a mutually convenient time and location. The interview will deal with your personal experiences supporting students in higher education, particularly focussing on your own working practices, your previous employment experiences in education/education support and your views on training courses for specialists and resources for practitioners in this field of higher education. The overall purpose of the research is to examine the different working practices of support tutors, and assess whether there is an agreed understanding of what dyslexia is and how to support students. As well as semi-structured interviews the other research methods will include textual analyses of key support literature used by support tutors and the curricula or higher level courses designed for dyslexia specialists in higher education.

The interview and its contents shall be entirely confidential and your anonymity will be guaranteed. You are perfectly entitled to withdraw at any time if you feel uncomfortable or unsure of the procedure. Furthermore, should you not wish to answer questions for any reason, you are under no obligation to do so and may decline at any point to continue either in whole or in part of the research process. I would also like to include you in the transcription process (undertaken by myself) to avoid any misunderstandings or misinterpretations that may occur. Furthermore, I shall consult you and all other participants throughout the transcription, analysis and submission stages. The research findings will not contain information that has the potential to identify you or your institution, and you will be given every opportunity to clarify or redact anything you wish not to be included.   If you wish to discuss any aspect of the research at an

institutional level you are very welcome to contact my course supervisor and/or head of programme:

Head of Programme: Dr Paul Garland p.garland@shu.ac.uk

Programme leader for Research Degrees in Education

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0114 225 4669

The interview will be confidential, one-to-one and will last approximately forty minutes to an hour. It will be semi-structured and subjects under discussion will be dyslexia in higher education and your experiences supporting students. You may withdraw at any time during the interview or decline to answer questions.

Yours Sincerely

Stephen C. Campbell

I can confirm that I understand the nature of the interview.

Signed: Participant

…………………………………………………………………………..

Signed: Researcher

…………………………………………………………………………..

Appendix 2

Ed.D Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Topic	Content
1. Concepts of Dyslexia	1. What is dyslexia 2. Is there a universal profile for dyslexia 3. To what extent, do you think, does a person's environment contribute to their dyslexia related characteristics? 4. How much does a professional educator need to understand dyslexia to support or teach students with dyslexia?
2. Background and Experience	1. How long have you worked as a dyslexia support tutor? 2. What were your previous experiences? 3. Can you tell me what your current academic qualifications are? 4. Do dyslexia support tutors need specialist qualifications? 5. Has your previous professional experiences informed your professional practice?
3. Professional Practice	1. What resources do you draw upon in your 1:1 support sessions? 2. How important is Disabled Students Allowance to supporting students? 3. What is the difference between dyslexia support and study skills support? 4. Could you work as a study skills tutor? 5. Do you need a students' educational psychological assessment? 6. To what extent do you support students pastorally? 7. How do you incorporate metacognitive practices into your sessions? 8. Can you tell me about the strategies you use to support students' reading and writing skills?

Appendix 3 – Research Participants' Background and Experiences

Participant	Background and Experience
Gwen	Qualifications: Diploma in Education Post-Graduate Diploma in Education Background: Teacher of basic literacy/GCSE Needs Assessor Dyslexia Support Tutor
Anne	Qualifications: BA Library & Information Management PGCE Supporting the Adult Dyslexic Learner in HE/FE Background: Library Assistant (HE) Dyslexia Support Tutor
Denise	Qualifications: MA Education Background: Further Education Tutor Higher Education Lecturer Dyslexia Support Tutor
Sally	Qualifications: BA English Literature and Education (failed) BSc Psychology

	PGCE (science) 7-12 Background: Research Psychologist School teacher SEN teacher Dyslexia Support Tutor
Robin	Qualifications: BA Communication Studies PGCFE in Further Education MA Education PGDip in Dyslexia and Literacy Background: SEN teacher FE Lecturer – sociology Learning Support Tutor (FE) Key Skills Tutor (FE) Dyslexia Support Tutor, HE (various institutions)
Christie	Qualifications: BA English Language and Literature PGCE (English) secondary education MA, English Language and Literature MA, Applied Linguistics and TESOL Diploma FE/HE Dyslexia Support Background: FE Lecturer VSO (Sri Lanka)

	Teacher ESL FE Lecturer – ESOL Dyslexia Support Tutor
May	Qualifications: BSc Psychology Postgraduate Diploma Dyslexia and Literacy Background: Supply teacher Clear-Links Dyslexia Support Tutor Dyslexia Support Tutor
Kelly	Qualifications: BA Politics, Economics and Social History MA, Inclusive Education MA, Applied Linguistics Postgraduate Certificate in Dyspraxia

Appendix 4 Textual Analyses: Criteria and Strategy

Criteria

- Detailed definitions and descriptions of dyslexia
- Focus of text is specifically on dyslexia
- Sections and chapters must contain detailed suggestions for pedagogic interventions
- Authors must incorporate scientific research on dyslexia

Strategy template for textual analysis

Title	
Author (s)	
Key Descriptors/Language of Dyslexia	
Use of Evidence	
Strategies for Support	

Appendix 5: Recommendations for Universities

1. For those universities who directly employ dyslexia support tutors: redeploy those staff either to an already established study skills service, or set one up. Either way, their skills and experiences will be highly valued and of benefit to more students than those who have been diagnosed with dyslexia.

2. Inform UK assessment centres that students will be able to access one-to-one study skills advice from a dedicated skills team. There should be sufficient information on the university website to inform both students and needs assessors how the support sessions are delivered and what is covered in the sessions. This will be particularly relevant for those students who have applied for Disabled Students Allowance, as needs assessors will be disinclined to recommend funding dyslexia support from an external company.

3. Universities should invest in the latest assistive technology packages, particularly screen reader software, mindmapping programmes and lecture capture technology. These packages should then be made available for all students and accessible on the university server.

4. Academic staff should be given the opportunity to receive Continuous Professional Development in teaching, learning, classroom management and assessment.

5. Curriculum design and course content should include a variety of teaching and learning techniques, as well as some flexibility in assessment (e.g. students be given a choice of coursework, exams or presentations for some modules).

6. Academic skills development should be embedded in the main curriculum, either as a stand-alone module, or as an integral component of a module. This should ideally be in year one for undergraduates.

7. Study skills teams and academic tutors should collaborate on the design of learning resources, e.g. booklets on essay writing, report writing, literature reviews, referencing etc. This will enable students to receive consistent advice from study skills tutors that is relevant to students' courses.