UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Southampton Education School

Doctorate in Education

Manifestations of Resilience: An autobiographical analysis of a 'dyslexic'

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an autobiographical study that relates my experiences, particularly my educational experiences, of living with dyslexia with the aim of elucidating its impact on the development of my selfhood. I examine the problems associated with dyslexia and evaluate how my own experiences correlate to, or are disparate from, current knowledge about this specific learning difficulty (SpLD). I explore the notion of *epiphanies* as a way of highlighting the impact of specific occurrences - the battles and the triumphs - within my life that have shaped my outlook and impacted on my self-development. These experiences are analysed through the lens of the theoretical constructs of resilience, stigma, significant others and the Germanic philosophical principle of *Bildung* as a way of understanding the development of my selfhood.

This work makes an original contribution to knowledge as it is the study of the unique experiences of an individual and how dyslexia impacts upon his life. A single case can have considerable general illuminative utility. As such, the thesis is a link with others experiencing dyslexia, and therefore may help to inform them about ways to manage and cope with their SpLD in order to succeed in life. This autobiography may also be useful for those dealing with dyslexic individuals, such as parents and teachers, as they reflect on how they can support those in their care.

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Academic Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

I, JONATHAN PETER BECKETT declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Manifestations of resilience: an autobiographical analysis of a 'dyslexic'.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed: ……….

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Acknowledgments

> **A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.**
>
> **La-tzu, Chinese Philosopher (604–531BC)**

Pursing this research degree has been both challenging and rewarding and I have had to be resilient throughout the process.

I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to Dr Jenny Byrne, who has tirelessly helped me to complete this Doctoral degree. She has been extremely patient and most helpful in her guidance and supervision.

Dr Gill Clark and Michael Erben are also to be thanked for their contribution to beginning this degree: the initial spark that they gave me to pursue it and shaping the nature of the thesis.

To my family, who have supported and encouraged me in continue despite contending with the challenges that dyslexia can bring. For my mother, who has always believed in me and has been accommodating, compassionate and an inspiration.

Finally, for the children who I have taught, particularly those who, like Rachel, struggle with dyslexia. My heart's desire is that from my experiences you will find hope and resilience to continue, and in so doing succeed in whatever you wish to do.

> **For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.**
>
> **Jeremiah 29: 11**

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is an autobiographical study of my educational journey as an individual living with dyslexia. It illuminates how dyslexia impacts upon everyday activities and shapes selfhood, and offers unique insights into my life lived as a 'dyslexic'. The study also contributes to the body of knowledge about dyslexia that may support a range of individuals such as teachers, parents and students to understand better some of the implications of having dyslexia, so that they can use this knowledge to help themselves or others in arranging better provision for 'dyslexic' individuals. A theme that runs through my educational journey is the notion of resilience as I explore the self in different situations and address how circumstances, the role of significant others and stigma have influenced and challenged the beliefs, ideologies and principles I hold. Particular transformational experiences or epiphanies are used to exemplify these moments in my life that have been inspirational and challenging (Denzin, 1989). Further, the Germanic philosophical idea of *Bildung* is employed to reflect upon how events within my life have shaped and educated the nature of my selfhood (Bruford, 2009).

1.1   Aim of the Research

My reasons for undertaking this study are both professional and personal. In a professional capacity, as a primary school teacher, I am acutely aware of the difficulties dyslexia can have on a pupil's cognitive and emotional development. Personally, I have experienced educational disadvantage and the stress this causes as a result of having dyslexia. Therefore, my aims in reflecting on my life are twofold: to help towards a greater understanding of the selfhood and identity of a 'dyslexic' and, as I articulate particular life experiences, I hope others will find resonance with and support those who have dyslexia or deal with 'dyslexic' students.

1.2   Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical constructs of resilience, *Bildung*, epiphanies and the self-concept, including the influences of significant others and stigma on its development. The chapter then reviews the literature highlighting the key features of dyslexia, including the impact it may have on learning. It also explains some of the possible interventions available to help people with dyslexia.

Chapter 3 addresses the nature of biographical research and highlights the impact that the single case study can have upon illuminating the general and generating a 'larger picture' (Kester, 1995). The importance of narrative research is explained and the choice of research methods is justified. Data analysis is discussed, including the use of the schema of Hardwick and Worsley (2011) and how this has been supplemented by considering the wider social, educational and cultural influences upon my life story (Erben, 1998).

Chapters 4 and 5 consist of an analysis and discussion of my autobiography. In Chapter 4 examples from my autobiography are analysed with respect to three categories of selfhood; the personal, the academic and the professional. Chapter 5 offers a discussion and analysis of the three selves with respect to the theoretical constructs of resilience, stigma, significant others, epiphanies and *Bildung* and concludes by reflecting upon my own learning and some recommendations for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of the key theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. The chapter also draws on the relevant literature to review the social, cultural, historical and educational aspects of dyslexia pertinent to this study. Additionally, the chapter reviews the literature about dyslexia, giving examples of biographies by those who have been determined to succeed despite having dyslexia. These individuals have had to demonstrate resilience in order to be successful; resilience is now explored.

2.1   Defining Resilience

'Resilience is understood as having the capability to resist or 'bounce back' following adversity' (Glover, 2009: 5). However, 'bouncing back' appears to be an ambiguous term, as no further exposition is given about how a person may do so and the qualities it may require. Furthermore, this description does not clarify how 'bouncing back' can be measured or the scale on which its level of may be quantified. Fraser (2004) more clearly argues that there are three dimensions to resilience: overcoming problems against the odds, sustaining competence under pressure and recovery from trauma. Within this description resilience is, therefore, implied as managing to succeed in the face of adversity, and being resilient means that an individual will continue to do well, whether socially, academically or physically, despite experiencing difficult or traumatic circumstances. The resilient person demonstrates an ability to overcome specific problems within their life, to recover from these, and to 'move on'. This definition includes, for example, how a person with dyslexia, who encounters problems as a result of having this learning difficulty could benefit from showing resilience. Resilience may be manifested through seeking to recover from situations in which they have 'failed', or not done themselves justice, such as in an academic examination. Ryden (1997) argues that dyslexic individuals experience stress and fatigue in such situations and this can affect the quality of what is written as well as the quantity of what has been produced. Therefore, resilience may be needed to persist as a dyslexic learner may require ten times longer than a non-dyslexic individual to complete a task

(Nicolson and Fawcett, 2010). The toolbox of a learner with dyslexia needs to consist of both compensation strategies and resilience.

Resilience is necessary to transcend adversity, for example traumatic events, such as the death of a close friend or family member. Many of these situations are temporary and being resilient enables an individual to deal with them successfully. However, Luthar (1991) cautions that resilience is complex and a person exhibiting an outward display of resilience may, in fact, be internalising their feelings and this can lead to a long-term inability to cope and depression. More positively, Siebert (2005) argues that resilience provides opportunities for reflection and consideration of how something may look from another perspective, thus enabling a person to learn more about them self. A resilient individual is more likely to develop a positive view of their self and this increases their self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy (Rutter, 1987). The positive sense of self as a result of a resilient attitude enables an individual to accept the occurrence of difficult events, such as those that occur as a result of having dyslexia. Resilience is therefore related to notions of fortitude and endurance, which are manifestations of psychological character building and development.

In summary, resilience may be defined as a psychological response that strengthens, equips and enables a person to overcome complex and difficult situations, permitting them to achieve their goals and ambitions because they have learnt strategies to manage and deal with adversity effectively (Glover, 2009). However, being resilient can be challenging for those with dyslexia as they may face ridicule and opposition on account of their specific learning differences (Glazzard, 2010). Nevertheless, Firth (2010) argues that resilience is a necessary factor in the success of students with dyslexia and can help to strengthen and develop the self. The self and its development are now discussed.

2.2 Development of the Self

The self is:

> a conceptual system made up of one's thoughts and attitudes about
> oneself. It encompasses one's thoughts on their physical being, social

roles and relationships, and spiritual or internal characteristics. (Siegler *et al.*, 2003: 424).

From a symbolic interactionist perspective the study of the self and its development involves looking at a range of factors such as the impact of personal values, the relationship the person has with other people and the broader social picture and includes asking questions about who a person is and their role within society (Hyde, 1954). The development of an individual's self-concept is, therefore, determined by the interactions they have with others in a social environment and their interpretation of these encounters in order to find meaning in their experiences (Blumer *et al.,* 2000). However, the interpretation or 'twist' the person gives to the reaction they receive from others is subjective. Cooley's (1902) 'Looking glass self' indicates that this perception is based upon how the individual perceives they are treated by those within their social circles. These perceptions derive from self-ideas of the imagination of our appearance to another person, especially significant others. As Soler *et al.* (2009: 197) state, 'our self-evaluations are determined by our beliefs about how others see us'. But an individual's perception may not accurately reflect these encounters; as Rose (1981: 7) states, 'perception of things is always accompanied by feelings of value'. Thus these are subjective responses and may not reflect the reality of the situation. If a person feels alienated from some particular aspect of life, for example school, as a result of having dyslexia they may perceive that they are stigmatised by other people. Goffman (1963) discusses how individuals can feel stigmatised by a disability because they perceive that others may look upon them unfavourably. As a result, the person often seeks to hide their disability from other people (Hawley, 2011). Furthermore, the response they perceive they prompt in other people may disadvantage their relationship and lead them to seek friendships with specific individuals or a limited number of people that they feel comfortable with, or even to develop a solitary self. From a positive perspective, Jopling (2000) argues that the 'solitary self' allows opportunities for self-reflection. In private reflection a person can ruminate and consider their specific experiences and, as they seek to attach meaning to them, they are enabled to develop their sense of self.

However, individuals with dyslexia may wish to preserve their sense of self by covering up their problems in order to be regarded as coping with the demands of life. Goffman (1990) considers that individuals present particular aspects of the self in different situations, which he regards as front and back stage presentations that involve a person presenting a different public image to the one they hold internally. Individuals with dyslexia may present a front stage performance of a person who is coping, for example being academically able, whilst concealing or suppressing feelings of insecurity and inability to cope.

The management of feelings to create a publicly acceptable persona is described as 'emotional management' (Hochschild, 1979). Emotional management is the regulation of the emotions through the alteration or modulation of behaviour that an individual undertakes in response to the demands of either public or personal situations in order to maintain a publically acceptable persona. Hochschild (1983) believed that people altered their emotions, body language and verbal cues as a fundamental part of human behaviour when in situations that require conformity to social norms. Hochschild also differentiated between the management of emotions within the public and private spheres of a person's life discussing the former as 'emotional labour' and the latter as 'emotional work'. Emotional work is the regulation of emotional responses the self makes towards situations in their private life. Hochschild (1979:561) writes:

> By "emotion work" I refer to the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. To "work on" an emotion or feeling is, for our purposes, the same as "to manage" an emotion or to do "deep acting." Note that "emotion work" refers to the effort-the act of trying- and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful.

Managing feelings through concealment of actual feelings is a pertinent feature of emotional work and includes acting in a way which may be seen as culturally or stereotypically acceptable. This will cause temporary distress for the individual, for example feeling ashamed at not being happy at a wedding, but if this alteration of external appearance is a constant feature of their life their selfhood will be affected.

Emotional labour refers specifically to the management of emotions of a professional within paid employment, especially in occupations such as, nursing or teaching where there is an expectation of a particular mode of behaviour towards the people they deal with in the course of their daily work. The impression management required to maintain acceptable working relationships is a key feature of emotional labour. In exhibiting a particular outward appearance individuals may hide specific details of their life which do not fit the societal expectation of how they should conduct themselves in their professional role. As a result, the individual puts on an 'act', which is different to how they really feel. As Burns (1992:122) states emotional labour is 'more than simply producing some ideal performance or copying an expert performer', it is the toil of a person within their work who struggles to conceal their identity and / or true feelings behind a false identity. Despite the differences between emotional work and emotional labour both forms of emotional management may create dissonance within an individual's selfhood when the individual aims to normalise their overt responses to a situation, for example when the front stage performance does not correspond to their inner self (Goffman, 1990).

Hochschild (1983) explained how people can act in two ways: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting may include masking upset, disappointment, frustration, annoyance or anger with a superficial happy or excited expression. Surface acting is therefore expressing an emotion without feeling it and this 'faking' can negatively impact of an individual's sense of self. As a result, when a person is involved in 'faking', they begin to feel hypocritical and this causes emotional trauma that can lead to loss of self-esteem (Miller, 2004). Burden's (2005) study found that having dyslexia affected some individuals' ability to cope in situations, and as a result they relied on 'faking' behaviour to portray a competent self, whilst inwardly they felt unable to manage the tasks and experienced attendant feelings of low self-regard. The emotional management that this creates can leave such individuals with a damaged sense of self. As Wall notes:

> We are all aware of the effects our emotions can have on our ability to perform successfully in our everyday lives, from a short-term panic situation to a longer-term emotional difficulty. The effects can be devastating. (Wall, 2004: 142)

On the other hand Hochschild understood deep acting as concealing true emotions as an individual convinces themselves that they truly feel the emotions they are exhibiting and that they attempt to embody the role expected of them. This type of acting has serious consequences for a person's selfhood as it can displace the authentic self and this may lead to emotional trauma such as depression. The psychological impact on a person with dyslexia growing up in a world which is not 'dyslexic' but pretending or convincing themselves they are 'normal', can not only cause loss of self-esteem but may contribute to depressive illnesses (Abela, 2001). The cyclical nature of low self-esteem, depression and internalising problems is identified by Alexander-Passe (2010), who suggests that this is an iterative process in which one exacerbates the other.

In summary, the self can be strengthened or diminished by an individual's perception of the reactions of others. It is how an individual responds to reactions and the challenges thus encountered that determines the development of a resilient individual. Developing resilience also requires opportunities for solitary times when an individual can reflect on their experiences in tranquillity. Reflecting in this manner allows the individual to come to know themselves more profoundly, and as a result their selfhood is transformed enabling the person to flourish (MacIntyre, 2013). This notion of educative self-formation is dealt with in more detail in the discussion of *Bildung* that follows.

2.3 *Bildung*

The term '*Bildung*' is complex and difficult to translate. It expresses a Germanic philosophical principle based upon the development of the self as a result of transformational personal growth. *Bildung* has developed out of Enlightenment philosophies of human experience, and the medieval root stem '*Bild*' refers to 'image' within the context of time. The traditional sense of the root meaning can be associated with some form of spiritual enlightenment, similar to that of an epiphany, in which a person is spiritually awakened in their consciousness and their relationship to God. In the more contemporary sense, *Bildung* is related to the development of the self as a broad educative enterprise in which a person

seeks to attain a moral character through self-reflection and spiritual self-reformation (Dilthey, 1960). *Bildung* therefore incorporates the notion that a person will strive to achieve the highest level of self-development possible, not only for their own gratification but, more altruistically, for the good of the society and culture in which they live (Gadamer *et al.*, 2004). However, morality is a fluid, subjective and ambiguous concept and may be understood as that which adheres to a code of behaviour dictated by society (Carson and Moser, 1997). A less utilitarian or contractual understanding of morality, and one that forms a cornerstone of *Bildung,* is that advocated by Aristotle in terms of being virtuous and seeking to live a 'good' life and as a result flourish. Aristotle noted that an individual was only truly educated when their learning enabled them to understand themselves and their fellow human beings fully, thus leading them to behave in a moral manner (Guthrie and Warren, 2013). This type of educative self-formation, therefore, takes account of the social, cultural and historical contexts of the life of an individual; in the narrative they tell they provide meaning to their life and to an understanding of their selfhood (Erben, 2000). It is through this narration that an individual gains a sense of moral awareness; as MacIntyre (2007: 217, 218) says, a person is 'accountable for the actions and experiences which compose that narratable life'. *Bildung* has the capacity to educate and enlighten and it is through reflective narration, especially at critical moment in one's life, that an individual gains a purchase on self-understanding (Bruner, 1984). The notion of epiphanies that I discuss next is therefore apparent within the concept of *Bildung*.

2.4   Epiphanies

Nicholas (1987) notes that the notion of epiphanies has been used by the Church for many centuries and that it has been brought into the vernacular in recent times by the Irish writer, Joyce (1916). Within the context of this thesis I shall refer to Norman Denzin's use of the concept of epiphanies to describe notable life-changing events. Denzin (1989: 70) explains that 'epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives'. They are unexpected momentary, significant changes in a person's life which have a substantial impact upon them. McDonald (2005: 14) states:

Epiphanies... are sudden and abrupt insights and/or changes in perspective that transform the individual's concept of self and identity, usually because of the creation of new meaning in an individual's life. Epiphanies are momentary experiences of transcendence that are enduring and distinct from other types of developmental change and transformation.

McDonald's definition incorporates the idea of reflection on key events in a life where character may be displayed or developed; as such, epiphanies are crucial components of educative self-formation in the development of *Bildung*. Carson and Casado-Kehoe (2011) note that a person's life may be radically transformed as a result of careful reflection after a particular event and within this process the self may be more clearly understood. In relation to resilience, if the epiphany is experienced as a result of adversity, such as having dyslexia, a person may reflect upon life's priorities and as a result give new meaning to their life and its purpose, causing them to act in new and surprising ways (Feltham and Horton, 2012). Therefore, these specific moments may leave a lasting impression and affect an individual's selfhood.

Denzin (1989: 70) explores four significant forms of epiphanies:

- The major event
- The cumulative or representative event
- The minor epiphany
- The relived event.

The main event in a person's life is the occurrence of an awe-inspiring moment, sufficiently significant to change a person's opinion and alter their life in a particular way. The cumulative event refers to experiences that have been occurring over a long period of time. Third, the minor epiphany is that which causes the person to reflect further upon the previous epiphanies. The fourth is the re-living stage, whereby an individual is given the chance to re-experience the epiphany when a similar situation occurs. Lewis's (2009) research into life histories indicates that when participants shared their experiences they were able to reflect upon these epiphanies and consider how they had reacted in the light of them and as a consequence how their lives had altered. Epiphany moments and the individual's reaction to them are therefore critical in

understanding their experiences such as having dyslexia and, more importantly, in how they have helped to develop their sense of self.

Roberts (2002) suggests that a story can be told using these critical moments, which helps us to understand the situatedness of self educationally, socially, politically and geographically. When a person relates their experiences, involving significant others, such as teachers, and specific locations like a classroom this can shed light upon their past experiences within the education system and their current situation. The social system in which a person lives and their social standing in that society can provide insights about how they view themselves within their social milieu that will add depth to the narrative (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The political situation at the time of writing can also impact upon the story that is told. The political drive for the government in one era may be different from that in another. Additionally, the individual's political persuasion can affect how the story is told. With respect to this study, the knowledge and understanding of dyslexia has evolved over the last thirty years and there have been significant shifts in attitudes. Access to literature, diagnostic assessment and subsequent provision for specific learning difficulties have been enhanced since the 1980s (Copeland, 2002). Finally a person's geographical location impacts upon their biography, both at the time of writing and in the past, as opportunities in one part of the country (or world) may be different from another. For example, access to provision for those with dyslexia may vary from county to county, depending upon the priorities set by the local authority and access to funding (Bauer, 2000).

2.5   Towards a Definition of Dyslexia

The historical background to understanding dyslexia can be traced back to the 1800s. The first educationalist to investigate children's individual academic abilities was Francis Galton in 1869. Prior to this investigative work, children with difficulties in literacy development were deemed to have medical problems, be constitutionally limited or inadequately motivated. In 1878 a German physician, Adolph Kussmaul, described a gentleman he observed who had significant difficulties in learning to read as having 'reading blindness'. Later in

1887 Dr Rudolf Berlin described this type of difficulty as 'dyslexia', derived from the Greek for 'difficulty with words' (Selikowitz, 2012).

Further developments in the history of dyslexia came in 1891 when Dr Dejerne described a patient with head injuries who suffered the loss of the ability to read. Dejerne surmised that the difficulty he observed in the patient learning to read was due to brain injury. As a result, individuals with reading difficulties were seen as having a neurological impairment. This medical model of understanding reading difficulties was to remain into the 1900s.

In 1925 Dr Orton, an American neurologist, introduced the medical term 'strephosymbolia' as a way to delineate 'word blindness' from instances of individuals who reversed letters when reading. He also used the term 'developmental alexia' to describe children who struggled when reading. This led to research and a shift from the medical model to an educational concept. During the mid-twentieth century a greater wealth of educational and psychological research added to the knowledge of how dyslexia could be understood as an educational issue and addressed as such (Lawrence, 2009). The Warnock Report (1978) was an educational milestone for understanding and helping individuals with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This led school medical officers to relinquish their power to use psychological tests to assess intelligence in children seen as having learning difficulties. The report also led to an enhanced understanding of SEN and inclusive practice; prior to the twentieth century, those with learning difficulties were seen by some professionals as unable to be taught (Miles and Miles, 1999).

In the 1980s dyslexia was seen in a different light, no longer as a deficit (cognitively or neurologically) but rather a learning difference. The work of Howard Gardner was strongly influential in this shift in thinking. Gardner (1983) suggests that individuals had multiple intelligences that could be expressed in different ways. The understanding that those with dyslexia may learn in a different way and have skills that are not necessarily linguistic is supported by Joshi and Leong (1993), who suggest that those with dyslexia can think visually and spatially and can demonstrate creativity. Moreover, Eide and Eide (2011) argue that those that have dyslexia have unique talents. In recent times the

study of dyslexia has been heightened, with new advances in technology such as MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scanning devices that have provided educationalists and psychologists with the tools to understand that the brain is not damaged, as was formally believed, but that a person with dyslexia has different brain patterns activated during learning to those of a non-dyslexic learner (Kraus, 2012).

It is evident that knowledge and understanding of dyslexia have evolved significantly with technological advances, enhanced research, including more specific awareness and appreciation of the condition. This has resulted in changes to legislation (Copeland, 2002). The SEN and Disability Act (Local Government Association, 2001) amended the former 1995 Act, requiring that reasonable adjustments should be made for those who are disabled or have special needs. Later, the Disability Discrimination Act (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005a, 2005b) made the following points:

- schools were to take action to enhance educational benefits and thus outcomes for the disabled
- equality should be promoted and policies to prevent discrimination should be formed
- schools should collect data to identify ways to improve their practice in this area.

The DDA defines a person as disabled or having special needs as:

> A child or young person is disabled if they have a physical (including sensory), intellectual or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005a: 4).

Dyslexia is included in this definition and the Act notes that the condition will have an effect upon a person to the extent that day-to-day functioning is influenced by the severity of the disability. Moreover, the DDA upholds the legal rights of people with dyslexia to expect appropriate provision, adjustments and an understanding of this specific learning difference, making it illegal to discriminate against a person on the grounds of having dyslexia. However, defining dyslexia remains controversial.

2.6   Seeking to Define Dyslexia

Morgan and Klein (2000: 3) state: 'Dyslexia is complex, subtle and eludes easy definition'. The task of seeking to define what is meant by dyslexia is difficult as no single definition of dyslexia is universally accepted, even though it is considered to be the most common type of SpLD. For the purpose of this study I will use the terms SpLD and dyslexia interchangeably. Dyslexia can be defined in many ways, and there have been numerous attempts at defining the condition, and Edwards (1994: 9) comments:

> There has been great controversy over the precise definition of dyslexia, with experts focusing on different aspects of it, or on distinct types of dyslexic. It is important to bear in mind the limitations of fixed stereotypes when dealing with a complex subject where researchers from widely different disciplines are constantly exploring new theories and discovering fresh facts.

The DfES (Dyson, 2001) identifies dyslexia as a: 'Condition that affects the ability to process language'. This infers that dyslexia is something which will have an impact upon literacy development. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA, n.d.: 1) defines dyslexia in this way:

> Dyslexia is a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling and writing. It is a persistent condition. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in areas of speed processing, short term memory, sequencing, spoken language and motor skills.

The BDA states that the condition may also have implications upon the memorisation for materials and cause problems with sequencing. Reid and Green (2007: xi) make the point that defining dyslexia and its key characteristics and making appropriate provision is difficult because it is a somewhat 'confusing condition'. The International Dyslexia Association (2002) and the Rose Review (2009) have both sought to define with more clarity the specific nature of dyslexia.

The International Dyslexia Association (n.d.) describes dyslexia as a neurobiological, specific learning disability which can be identified by difficulties in accurate and fluent word recognition. It can also be perceived in poor spelling and decoding abilities. This explanation suggests that the difficulties

experienced by a person with dyslexia are typically as a result of a deficit in the phonological component of language. The International Dyslexia Association advocates that those with dyslexia learn in a different way to those who do not have dyslexia, in the way in which they store and process information within the brain. Furthermore, this definition suggests that dyslexia can occur irrespective of intellect or ability and that those who have dyslexia are often of average or above average intelligence.

The Rose Review (2009) defines dyslexia against a deficit model, suggesting that the condition had the characteristic features associated with difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing skills. According to the Rose Review, dyslexia can affect the skills involved in correct and confident word reading and spelling. The Review states that these difficulties can in part be identified in pre-school aged children. Signs of dyslexia include delays or problems with the spoken word or expressive language, little interest in words or letters and underdeveloped rhyming skills. They go on to state that dyslexia can occur across a range of intellectual abilities but is considered as a condition which is hereditary. Therefore, a child who has a parent or parents with dyslexia has a heightened probability of being a child with dyslexia. Dyslexia is also thought of as part of a continuum, rather than a categorical feature, with no specific cut-off points (Rose, 2009).

Dyslexia is a complex learning difficulty and a simple definition such as 'having difficulty with written words, including spelling, reading and writing' may appear facile. However, these are some of the common difficulties associated with dyslexia and, as Crisfield and Smythe (1993: 8) suggest, the definition of dyslexia is interwoven into some of the things in which a person with this SpLD may find difficult:

> Dyslexia can be defined as a specific difficulty in learning, constitutional in origin, in one or more areas of reading, spelling and written language, which may be accompanied by difficulty in number work. It is particularly related to mastering and using written language (alphabetical, numerical and musical notation) although often affecting oral language to some degree.

2.7 The Features of Dyslexia

In this section the key aspects associated with dyslexia are discussed. However, there are variations to the actual nature of this SpLD. Masland (1989: 5) argues: 'differences appear to relate to the location and extent of the primary neurological dysfunction at the root of dyslexia'. Furthermore, each of these features may affect individual children differently. Reid (2011: 16) notes:

> Dyslexia is individual. This means that children with dyslexia may have slightly different characteristics from each other. These characteristics can have a varying impact on the child.

It is also significant that some theorists disagree in relation to the specific difficulties for those with dyslexia. For the purpose of this thesis I will discuss the common features of dyslexia and in taking this more holistic stance consideration of the general difficulties a person may have will be illuminated, although I will highlight some differences where necessary.

2.7.1 Lack of co-ordination

Davies (2008: 15) explains: 'Orientation means knowing where you are in relation to your environment'. Spatial awareness is not impaired for all people with dyslexia but many not only lack co-ordination but they also may find that they have problems in understanding the relationship between themselves and other people or objects. Bartlett *et al.* (2010) explains that dyslexic pupils can often stub their toes unintentionally, as they misjudge the desks around them, and as an adult they may find it hard to manoeuvre a car.

Physical education is an area of the curriculum where the difficulties using gross motor skills are evident:

- PE and sports involving balls, apparatus. Throwing, catching and kicking balls will prove problematic. The student may 'misjudge' where he is when using apparatus
- Bumping into people and objects. (Massey, 2008: 44)

Schmitt (1994) relates in his biography how sport caused him stress and unhappiness as he felt uncoordinated and unable to participate effectively with others. However, not all biographical accounts identify sport as an area which is problematic for a person with dyslexia. Innes (1990) states that his mother felt

that he was good at PE but that he dismissed this as immaterial and, furthermore, suggested that literacy and numeracy were more important. Innes (1990: 1) notes:

> When I was twelve I used to cry in my bed at night and tell my Mum that I wished I was normal. My Mum said that I was good at sport and had lots of things going for me. I told her I wished I wasn't good at any of those things, I just wanted to be able to read and write properly.

2.7.2 Difficulties with handwriting, writing and spelling

A related problem to gross motor co-ordination is the difficulty with fine motor skills. A child with dyslexia may have problems in trying to produce neat handwriting due to their difficulties, such as in holding a pen or pencil (Hall, 2009). A recurrent theme in biographical accounts is that people with dyslexia find writing challenging (Pollak, 2005). Schmitt (1994) reflects upon his childhood experiences of having dyslexia and identifies specific difficulties he had in writing. Schmitt notes that he was continually told to erase his work and many of his pages were filled with rubber marks as the teacher indicated that his handwriting was not neat enough and not written on the line. Schmitt (1994: 15) states:

> The teacher kept a constant eye on me, often reminding me to write more legibly and keep my words horizontal, a task that was extremely difficult for me to do. Any word that was not up to his standard of legibility he ordered erased and rewritten.

Disorientation may also affect the quality of writing as the words a child with dyslexia writes may jump up and down, resulting in a series of words or lines all over the page rather than in neat lines (Davies, 2008). On the other hand, Richards (1985) notes that individuals with dyslexia may have neat handwriting but struggle with sentence formation.

For many children with dyslexia, writing clear, structured sentences can be a difficult task. Massey (2008: 42) argues a typical difficulty for those with dyslexia is 'organising ideas on paper'. Backhouse and Morris (2010) show that those with this specific learning difficulty will inevitably find, as with reading, that the development of writing is difficult due to the issues they have in understanding the formation of words and sentences. Although some people with dyslexia are

able to form logical and well phrased sentences, they may find that punctuation is rather complex and find it difficult to know where to demark a text with the correct form of punctuation. Purnell (2006) in his autobiography notes that when he was learning to write he would put the full stops and commas where he felt they should go. However, he was never fully sure that his guesswork was correct. He also had to sit near the teacher when completing work, as a way of monitoring him to ensure he was 'on task' and this subsequently became a cause of anxiety for him. Pollock *et al.* (2004) argue that sometimes children with dyslexia can be seen as lazy if they appear competent orally yet lack the ability to record their ideas in a written way.

Spelling can also be a concern for some children with dyslexia. Children who have specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) learn spellings in a different way and often at a slower pace than those without dyslexia. When learning to read, write and particularly spell correctly, a person has to be able to recognise the sound of each symbol, link the sounds of the differing symbols together and remember what these words and symbols look like (Taylor, 2008). Taylor argues that this is a complex task and one that people whose brain operates in a slightly different manner, such as a dyslexic individual, will find difficult to fulfil. This is further hindered, as Ellis (1994) notes, because the English language has many irregular spellings, difficult for a dyslexic person to grasp. Moreover, Pollock *et al.* (2004: 67) state: 'A teacher will be alerted to a dyslexic child's spelling problem by spelling that is either bizarre or purely phonetic...'. Therefore, a child with dyslexia may experience difficulty in deciding which letters make up the spelling of a word as well as deciphering the order in which they are formed. As Goulandris and Snowling (2003: 161) postulate:

> In the light of the research on normal spelling skill acquisition and on the reading skills of dyslexics, it is reasonable to hypothesise that phonological processing difficulties of dyslexics prevent them from acquiring the accurate and automatic phoneme-grapheme associations that form the basis of skilled spelling in normally developing children.

For those with dyslexia, difficulties with handwriting skills, writing logically and spelling words correctly can cause a degree of stress (Miles, 2004). Torrance (2004) writes in his autobiography that spelling and associated subjects, including reading, were a particular difficulty for him. Torrance notes that he

found completing examinations difficult and comparisons were made between his work and that of other members of the class. He writes about the pressure this caused and the need he felt for developing strategies to cope, a form of 'emotional management', (Hochschild, 1979). Torrance explains how he regulated his feelings when in examinations, as a way of conforming to the need to put on an external front that he was as competent as his peers at answering questions under timed conditions.

2.7.3 Reading difficulties

A pertinent issue associated with dyslexia is the struggle people with dyslexia have in learning to read. Broomfield and Combley (2009: 11) note that: 'The dyslexic learner's most observable difficulty is in learning to read'. Davies (2008: 11) explains that language is made up of symbols. Learning to read includes understanding:

- What the symbol sounds like
- What the symbol means
- What the symbol looks like.

For a person with dyslexia making sense of the symbols may be difficult as they may find it problematic to recognise words and phrases. Ott (1997: 53) describes those with such difficulties are people who are 'word blind'. This is due to the difficulties they have in understanding phonetics and deciphering the meaning of the words as they decode the text. Phonemes are units of sound within a spoken word and it may be hard for an individual with dyslexia to sound out a phoneme as their brain operates to break apart words in different places compared to that of a non-dyslexic reader. This, in turn, makes correctly identifying the unit of sound a difficult task for those with dyslexia; it can lead to incorrect identification of the written word when transferred to the spoken word. Cooke (2002: 20) argues: 'Research studies and clinical observation provide a good deal of evidence that children with dyslexia have difficulties with phonology'. This relates to understanding the sounds indicated by a word or letter and the segmentation of words, which is an underlying principle of teaching young children to read and spell. Pavey (2006: 18) states: 'The building of phonological skills plays an important part in current approaches to

literacy...'. If this is not understood, this can lead to poor reading ability caused by confusion over the meaning of different words (Broomfield and Combley, 2009). Eide and Eide (2011) cite Kristen and Christopher as examples of children whose life narrative reflects difficulties in reading, such as phonetic decoding and making frequent word substitutions for unknown words—for example, 'peaches' in place of 'pears'. They note that the specific difficulties experienced in learning to read by those with dyslexia include understanding orthography (spelling patterns), syntax (patterns of word formation) and morphology (word formation).

As a result of the difficulty experienced in decoding a text, it is inevitable that a person with dyslexia may find it impossible to read a book at speed, as they are likely to spend a significant time working out what each word says as well as its meaning. Bruininks and Bruininks (2010: 173) found that: 'Dyslexic children read more slowly than chronological-age-matched controls...'. As a by-product of spending additional time reading a text, a dyslexic reader may find they struggle with tiredness and lack significant concentration over a sustained period of time.

A final point in this section is the visual stress that reading can cause an individual with dyslexia. Meares-Irlen Syndrome, Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome or Visual Stress are terms to describe some of the symptoms associated with dyslexia. According to Russell and Cohn (2012), these symptoms can include:

- The blurring of print and vibration of letters
- The letters or words, or both, moving, including going off the page, changing position or appearance and creating patterns
- The perceived fading or increased brightness of the black print
- Illusions of colour; splodges of colour moving on the page
- Rivers of light or water snaking through the text
- Nausea, discomfort or even pain caused by glare from the page, causing headaches, tired or sore eyes.

As a result of Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS), an individual with dyslexia may find it difficult to read due to the problems indicated above. Moreover, there is a correlation between visual stress and poor cognition when compared to those without Meares-Irlen Syndrome (Irlen, 1991). Robinson *et al.* (2000) also

highlight the symptoms and, the effects of SSS; they cause an individual difficulty in concentrating and, as a prolonged condition, represent a potential cause of stress.

2.7.4 Problems with concentration

Those with dyslexia find listening and concentrating problematic (Cooke, 2002). Taylor (2008: 39) argues that the key difficulties associated with dyslexia are:

- Visual processing problems
- Auditory processing problems
- Motor processing problems.

Janover (2004) notes that Josh could not remember instructions, lost his place when seeking to concentrate and muddled up letters. These problems have been associated with short-term working memory and may result in a pupil being thought of as lazy or 'off task' (Riddick, 2010). Within Pavey's (2006) account of living with dyslexia he states that he would almost 'go off into his own world' and be alienated from what was being said in class, due to the lack of understanding he had of the words that were used as well as the inability he had to concentrate. Hornsby (1996: 40) reinforces these points: 'The child who does not appear to pay attention to what is going on in class or listen to what his parents are saying may not be doing so from choice'. Teachers may then take action to monitor the pupil more closely; Chilcoate (2006) remembers his experience of being asked to sit near the teacher's desk in order to be more focused upon reading, writing and spelling tasks. He highlights how this humiliated him and made him feel that he was not as intelligent as the other children, and identifies problems with memory as a factor in not being able to complete the task since he forgot or misunderstood instructions. This lack of concentration resulted in having to re-sit the year as he had not made satisfactory progress. This meant leaving his peer group for children he did not know very well, meaning he felt socially disadvantaged. In his epilogue he advocates that schools should treat children with dyslexia better than he was treated and seek to implement appropriate provision.

For a person with dyslexia, listening and assimilating information is an area they find hard (Cooke, 2002). Reid (2011: 15) states: 'Dyslexia is a difference in how

some children process information'. Doyle (1996) argues that when those with dyslexia attempt to listen, signals within the brain are transmitted in a different way to those in a person without dyslexia; this has been associated with short-term memory problems. Thus, when a person with specific learning difficulties is given a task, they may have difficulty in remembering copious quantities of information, lists or sets of instructions or sets of numbers, and have problems in recalling what was asked of them or the order in which the activities are to be undertaken.

Grant (2010) highlights that a person with dyslexia may have difficulty in sleeping because their mind is active at night, thinking and preparing for the next day as well as reflecting upon the events of the previous day. Thus, they may spend time arranging and sequencing the events that have occurred as well as those still to take place. In my own experience of working with individuals with dyslexia, some state that they ruminate on and view things introspectively when reflecting upon how a day has gone in terms of what was said and what events occurred. Additionally, some claim to plan and sequence things within their mind in preparation for the next day. Grant (2010) suggests that 60 to 65 per cent of university students with dyslexia reportedly suffer with insomnia and some of his participants kept a note pad by their bed to record their ideas, giving some further evidence that sleeplessness is prevalent amongst those with dyslexia.

2.7.5   Sequencing problems

An indication of dyslexia which can be identified from pre-school age is that pupils may find auditory and visual information difficult to remember, as well as recording and acting upon instructions (Savill and Thierry, 2012). Sequencing in action songs, such as Mosley and Sonnet's (2007) 'Whole brain work outs,' may be found to be problematic. Early speech is affected by dyslexia, in which a child may not remember how to say a particular word or phrase when a picture of that object / item is shown to them (Savill and Thierry, 2012). Speech and the written word are interlinked; therefore, people with dyslexia may struggle to associate written words or symbols and their order, such as the place in which a letter comes in relation to the other letters in a word or the alphabet, with the

spoken word (Stainthorp and Hughes, 1999). Watson (1997: 8) suggests that people with dyslexia have specific difficulties in relation to ordering and sequencing of different concepts such as:

- Time sequences
- Number sequences
- Gross or fine motor sequences (co-ordination)
- Alphabet (letter order).

Subsequently, at later stages of the primary curriculum, access to dictionary skills can be hampered by having this specific learning difficulty. Reid (2011) is of the view that not only young children but anyone with dyslexia often find sequencing and learning rhymes hard due to losing track of where they are in a rhyme or confusing the sequence of the song, or any sequence including ordering a set of digits.

2.7.6 *Difficulties with maths*

Not all learners with dyslexia have problems in mathematics (Rifkin, 2009). However, as Reid (1996: 256) notes: 'specific difficulties do manifest themselves in Mathematics, for a range of reasons and in a range of ways'. For example, a child with dyslexia may find place value difficult as setting their work out in the correct columns can be confusing. They may also find interpreting the question and developing strategies to address the question difficult. Furthermore, the language of mathematics can prove difficult to interpret for someone who has problems in reading, thus not understanding the question and not answering it correctly are inextricably linked. A child with this dyslexia might also find measuring, recording and the appropriate use of mathematical tools a complex task. Pollock *et al.* (2004: 145) suggest: 'Exercises in symmetry and correct use of protractors and measurement of angles are particularly hard for a child with special needs and a lack of directional awareness'.
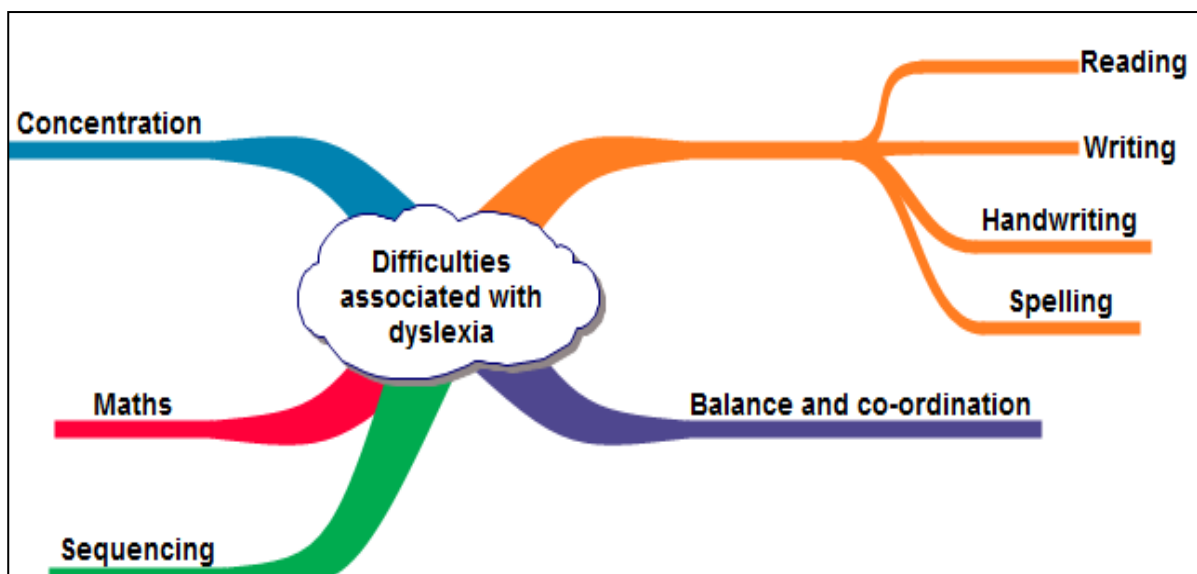
Another issue for dyslexic learners is an inability to learn their times tables. This will inevitably have ramifications upon the extent to which they can access parts of the maths curriculum. For example, when using the grid method for multiplication (a systematic way of partitioning and multiplying the digits through

staged procedures), times tables are required. Times tables are a fundamental principle also for division, in working out how many of each number go into the target amount. Chevin (2009) is of the opinion that those with dyslexia have to work much harder than those without this SpLD, due to the fact that they are all the time having to do calculations without the basic principles of knowledge as an undergirding support. Haigh (2008) argues that the inability to learn and teach whilst having dyslexia makes you feel fraudulent (see Section 4.2.3).

Reid (2011) suggests the key areas in which someone with dyslexia may struggle, in terms of mathematics, are the inability to estimate effectively, significant weaknesses in mental arithmetic and with forgetting of the question asked in mental maths. Moreover, a person with dyslexia may find recognising patterns or making generalisations difficult and subsequently be impulsive when doing maths, rather than adopting an analytical approach. Additionally, their work may be poorly organised, for example columns of numbers not lined up correctly. This means that they may also find it difficult to set work out in their exercise books as the teacher requires. For example, if the numbers in a column are not accurately aligned, it is unlikely the person will correctly solve the question, resulting in them getting an incorrect answer. Vittles (2009) writes about her particular problem with number work. She was unable to visualise what numbers meant and was unable to grasp mathematical concepts. She further recalls that it did occur to her that other children might see numbers differently. However, these points were illuminated when assessments occurred and other pupils performed much better than she did.

To summarise, dyslexia involves a range of difficulties for a learner (see Figure 2.1), although not everyone may have all of the problems noted above or to the same severity. There are positive aspects to the condition, such as the opportunity to develop resilience and as a result gain increased self-awareness. Additionally, the qualities of dyslexia mean that an individual may have different types of intelligence and skills, such as the ability to be creative or to see things from a different perspective. The difficulties discussed within this chapter relate to those of having dyslexia. While the co-occurrence of dyslexia and other conditions is a pertinent issue, a full discussion of the comorbidity of dyslexia and other conditions is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Figure 2.1 Difficulties that dyslexia can cause

2.8   A Shift in Paradigm—from a deficit model to a profile of strengths

I shall now address how having dyslexia can enable an individual to have particular strengths that other people may not. There is a paucity of discussion of the positive aspects and beneficial implications of having dyslexia in the literature. Eide and Eide (2011) suggest that when considering people with dyslexia, it is possible to look at the struggles they face (such as difficulties in reading, language, learning tasks and so forth) and view them negatively. However, looking at their abilities from a different perspective, they can be seen as talented individuals, skilled within a particular area. They write: 'From this new perspective they not only cease to look disabled but often appear remarkably skilled or even specially advantaged' (Eide and Eide, 2011: 4). Moreover, Crowe (2008: 4) writes about being diagnosed with dyslexia later in life, stating that she had 'exceptional strengths'. This matter is not therefore purely about adjusting perception but identifying the advantages that having dyslexia can bring, as Eide and Eide have argued (Eide and Eide, 2011).

Dyslexia should not simply be associated with an accumulation of deficits but seen as having a different perspective on learning with potential for creativity (Kiziewicz and Biggs, 2007). For example people with dyslexia can be

especially good at pattern matching, looking at the larger picture, visualising things and spatial reasoning. Individuals with dyslexia are likely to be hard working, as they have always had to be in order to compete with their friends. They may also be creative, make original connections, be able to solve problems and be innovative in their thinking. Betteridge (2011) suggests that the dyslexic brain will assimilate and process things in a different way to that of another individual. This can be seen as a positive aspect of dyslexia as it allows for variation in perception and different viewpoints. The two halves of the brain are associated with different functions (Hugdahl and Westerhausen, 2010). Individuals who have dyslexia primarily use the right hemisphere, the creative part of their brain, meaning that they are often gifted, creative in their thinking, and often practically able.

Having dyslexia can make individuals manifest resilience as they face difficulties in conforming to the benchmarks of the things society decrees as important, such as achieving particular levels in reading and writing. Cosgrove and Garvey (2008: 23) write 'those with dyslexia are susceptible to emotional vulnerability on account of not achieving the academic successes their peers do'. A way of responding to possible academic failure and managing the emotions that this may bring is the exhibition of resilience. Therefore, according to Griffiths (2003), a positive aspect of dyslexia is the hard work and determination to succeed that people with dyslexia are likely to demonstrate.

Despite the current discrepancy in literature between the positive and negative aspects of dyslexia, dyslexia should not primarily be seen as a negative deficit. A different view to the prevailing literature could be that dyslexia is seen as a 'gift' (Davis and Braun, 2010). Craig and Smith (2004) appear to take a balanced view in their book, *Conquer Dyslexia without Losing the Gift*, noting the difficulties associated with dyslexia but identifying the positive. However, managing these difficulties does require specific intervention strategies.

2.8.1 Intervention

Cummings and Brown-Chidsey (2008) understand intervention as a way to 'problem solve'. To contextualise this, intervention and provision are based upon seeing dyslexia as a potential barrier to learning and seeking to apply

strategies that can help the individual manage and overcome these difficulties. Backhouse and Morris (2010) suggest that there are 'common themes' associated with having dyslexia. As a cautionary preface I would note that the suggestions mentioned are not 'one size fits all', as each individual with dyslexia has specific needs and may be different from another.

2.8.2 Possible intervention strategies to help those with dyslexia

The most prevalent ways in which dyslexia can be managed come under two headings: educational and medical. Educational provision refers to what may occur in an educational institution to help a person with dyslexia, whereas medical interventions refer to treatments and provision such as increasing the intake of Vitamins A and B to help concentration (Selikowitz, 2012). Ott (1997) postulates: 'There is still debate over whether dyslexia should be considered a medical or educational concern'. Dyslexia is understood scientifically and the diagnosis is of clinical origin, but its treatment is educationally based. For the purpose of the literature review and autobiography I shall focus upon educational provision as this specifically relates to my experience.

The teacher has a significant influence upon how a child may improve their literacy and language work in providing for a dyslexic pupil (Ott, 1997). The National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 1999: 33, emphasis added) states:

> A minority of pupils will have particular learning and assessment requirements which go beyond the provisions described in sections A and B [*setting suitable learning challenges. Responding to pupils' diverse learning needs*] and, if not addressed, could create barriers to learning. These requirements are likely to arise as a consequence of a pupil having a special educational need or disability or may be linked to a pupil's progress in learning English as an additional language.

Within this description, the National Curriculum stipulates that a teacher should take the necessary steps to help the child with a specific need to be able to access the curriculum, going beyond setting different tasks and responding to a diversity of needs. Hales (1994: 137) argues: 'The idea that dyslexic children require just 'more of the same' has been a very common description in children receiving inappropriate help'. The Code of Practice (2000) gives schools the authority to determine how best to meet the needs of individuals, as well as the

power to decide the most appropriate type of provision to meet the individual's needs. One example of this provision is an Individual Education Plan (IEP) used to outline targets for the pupil, containing clear success criteria. This could help locate the areas in which a child with dyslexia needs specific help as, according to Bousted (2010: 6), 'children with specific learning difficulties may exhibit an uneven pattern of strengths and weaknesses'.

For practitioners, possible provision for assisting individuals with poor working memory may be achieved through breaking down the tasks in the classroom, simplifying instructions and re-presenting information (Holmes, 2012). Gathercole and Alloway (2008) argue that dyslexic children find that their working memory is often unable to cope with the demands placed upon it in a typical classroom situation, resulting in lost learning opportunities and slower educational progression. Therefore, if teachers are aware of the potential for a child with dyslexia to forget what they have been asked to do or not to understand what is required, they may choose to adapt their approach to cater more effectively for the needs of those with SpLDs.

In order to help a child succeed in Maths, authors Davis and Braun (2007: 45, 46) believe that an individual needs to learn a sense of the following:

- Time: the measurement of change
- Sequence: the way things follow each other in amount, size, time or significance (importance)
- Order: things in their proper places, positions or conditions.

A way in which those with dyslexia may be supported in reading and writing is that individuals are exposed to multisensory teaching to inspire them to write about the given theme and to read and investigate further. In 2011 a pupil I was teaching was a child had signs of dyslexia and did not enjoy reading or writing, but became fascinated by my lessons of teaching poetry, looking at humorous texts such as *The Dragon Who Ate Our School* by the poet Nick Toczek. As a result, he was able to analyse the text for rhyming couplets, synthesise its content and look for figurative language usage. He also purchased the book of his own accord and had a keen desire to write his own poems and to perform them. Kempe (2013) advocates the use of drama as a kinaesthetic teaching tool

to engage students who might be reluctant or unable to achieve in other curriculum areas. I would endorse Kempe's view as my pupil enjoyed this type of lesson and was inspired to explore further. Hulme (1981) conducted a number of controlled experiments into the impact of multisensory teaching and concluded that the storage and integration of information was enhanced by multisensory experiences. Krupska and Klein (1995) believe that if a dyslexic student can store and process information then they will be more interested and engaged in the tasks, which perhaps was the case for the child I cited above. There is some limited evidence that multisensory teaching creates mind and body connections (neural pathways), which help especially in reading and can promote cross-modal processing, which helps the learner to form letters and to write more effectively (Walker, 1996). A common sense approach should prevail, in which a practitioner works on exploring a child's strongest sense to help them to engage with what is being taught. If therefore a child appears to succeed in using their stronger senses to learn more effectively, this method should be adopted and, if this is not suitable, alternative strategies should be sought.

Such an alternative might be the use of coloured filters that may be used to help a child who has difficulty in reading, as Chivers (2006: 65) suggests:

> Some people say that when they use coloured plastic sheets over their work they are able to read more easily. These plastic sheets may help people with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties…. They work by reducing the perceptual distortions of text (some students say the words go fuzzy or jump about).

The rationale of using coloured sheets or wearing coloured glasses is to prevent the words appearing to move across the page, enhancing the reader's ability to effectively engage with the text. Additionally, the use of these overlays is to reduce the symptoms that may occur when a person with dyslexia is reading. These include eye strain and headache. Wilkins (2003: 38) states:

> It is now known that coloured overlays can reduce the symptoms of visual stress, including headaches from reading, and they can improve reading speed.

Furthermore the 'correct' overlay can have an immediate positive impact, illustrated in this excerpt:

When Sonia placed the coloured overlay that was the right colour for her over the page of text she immediately noticed that she could see the individual words much more clearly. Without the overlay the words looked as if they were clumped together, and she had to tease out each word from around it when reading. Consequently she read aloud in a hesitant manner. However, as soon as she placed the overlay that best suited her over the text, the words appeared to be separate from each other: 'The words look like words'. Her reading speed improved and she felt more relaxed and confident (Grant, 2010: 99).

Chivers (2006) also underlines the benefits of the use of coloured lenses in helping those with dyslexia. The coloured lenses are thought to improve the amount of time a person can sustain reading as a result of the enhancement of visual perception. Their research also highlights that coloured lenses can decrease symptoms such as eye strain, light sensitivity, headaches, blurring of the text, loss of place and watering eyes. Thus, the use of coloured lenses is beneficial in terms of a reading aid for a person with dyslexia, but are not to be seen as a cure or even a universal solution to reading difficulties. According to Whitely and Smith (2002) there is little empirical evidence to support the use of coloured filters and they question whether anecdotal accounts of alleged successes when using coloured overlays or tinted glasses, or both, are an accurate reflection of scientific study. It may be pertinent to question the grounds on which claims were made and the accuracy of the perceptions of participants in different studies. In summary, as with multisensory teaching, each dyslexic learner is unique and each strategy mentioned in this chapter needs to be assessed against the individual's needs and specifically evaluated against their learning styles and personal needs.

2.9   Summary

This chapter has given a theoretical backdrop to understanding how resilience, and the effect of significant others and stigma and epiphanies, can promote the development of selfhood and encourage *Bildung* in those living with dyslexia. This chapter has also reviewed the literature in relation to dyslexia. The case has been made for the complexity of defining the condition and how it is associated with difficulties in reading, writing, mathematics, concentration, sequencing and co-ordination. These difficulties can cause stress and anxiety for the individual and cause them to question their selfhood.

However, there are positive aspects to having dyslexia, such as the way in which the brain operates to allow for creativity and skills compared to non-dyslexics that can encourage the development of a resilient individual who has improved self-awareness. Finally, intervention can be understood as medically and educationally oriented. From an educational perspective alternative teaching methods, consolidation, IEPS, coloured overlays and so forth are possibilities of potential benefit when helping individuals with dyslexia.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This is a qualitative, interpretative study employing a biographical approach to explore and interpret a single life. The methodology and methods adopted involve decisions about the most appropriate ways to gather and analyse the data. First I will discuss biography as a tool for narrative inquiry. A biographical approach was employed because it has the ability to study the self and how the self is constructed from the life experiences over time of the individual. Moreover, I have chosen to use this approach as it helps to capture the rich nature of human experience within the context of historical, socio-economic, political, societal frameworks and temporal conditions. The chapter then addresses ethical issues which emerge from this type of study, such as the veracity of what an individual may be prepared to share in their biography and how this influences the data obtained. This specifically refers to the truthfulness of what is said and how honest an interpretative approach can be when addressing subjective ideas. As Balnaves and Caputi (2001: 87) note: 'A 'method' is not a neutral framework—it embodies the procedures you use to collect and analyse evidence'. Finally, I shall examine the process of analysis, involving imagination, using the analytical schemas of Hardwick and Worsley (2011) and Erben (1998) that I have employed for handling, assembling and presenting my data.

3.1   Biography as a Research Tool

Biography is an interpretative method involving collecting a person's narrative and sometimes personal documents (Denzin, 1989). This type of research includes studying accounts of people's lives with a view to seeing how, for example, childhood and other experiences have shaped the person they have become and the person they seek to be (Greig *et al.,* 2007). Biography is becoming more used, recognised and acknowledged within educational research (Kridel, 1998). The evolution of this approach has rapidly progressed due to the inspiration that reading about other people's lives can bring. The research method employed in this study is an autobiographical narrative and

this type of research is, by virtue of its nature, small-scale, local and in-depth. This approach therefore produces substantive, thick description about a person's life. Lieblich *et al.* (1998: 9) state: 'The use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires or observations'. More specific to my research, Macdonald (2009) suggests that the biographies of those with dyslexia can be a rich source of data about their life, and their specific difficulties and successes that also illuminate issues that are of general interest. Within my biography I address how having dyslexia has caused me specific problems, such as difficulties at school with written work and accessing the curriculum fully, and how this has led me to manifest resilience when I have found work difficult. My autobiography analyses how dyslexia has impacted upon my professional life. Moreover, Chamberlayne *et al.* (2000) take the view that when conducting biographical research a person's professional and personal networks, life decisions, goals, ambitions and feelings are made overt. Likewise, Graham (1984: 119) writes:

> Stories... provide a vehicle through which individuals can build up and communicate the complexity of their lives. Stories can be used to illuminate the uncertain, dynamic quality of experience, being themselves part of the process by which individuals make sense of past events and present circumstances... stories are pre-eminently ways of relating individuals and events to social fabric.

Furthermore, Cohen *et al.* (2011) state that storytelling within educational research is often a neglected area. They argue that it could be employed to a greater extent as it can focus upon exploring the meanings of lives, within their cultural settings and traditions, and point to valuable new insights that can be obtained in discovering how people make sense of their educational experiences. This is what I have sought to achieve.

3.2   The Value of Narrative in the Biographical Enterprise

Narrative is a defining aspect of biographical research in order to make meaning of lives (Erben, 1998). As Smith and Sparkes (2008: 18) write: 'We organise our experiences into narratives and assign meaning to them through story telling'. In my autobiography I have recounted stories of pertinent events as a person living with dyslexia, with a particular emphasis on my educational

experiences, in an attempt to understand how my identity and the formation of my selfhood have been affected as a result of manifesting resilience.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 19) argue: 'we are… not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also life as it is experienced on a continuum...'. For Ricoeur (1991), narration and time are interlinked; humans understand time in terms of narrative. Narrative, therefore, allows that life lived in time to be interpreted and understood (Ricoeur, 1991; Erben, 1998). The narrative account presented in this thesis has enabled me to reflect upon my life lived over time as I have sought to make sense of the events that have challenged my selfhood and this is discussed in relation to the three selves in Chapter 4. Thus time is the underpinning referent that has enabled my endeavours to make meaning of my life to be understood through narrative (Erben, 1998).

Therefore, narratives can be understood as stories that frequently include a chronological ordering of events with a view to making meaning out of those events and experiences. According to Sarbin (1986: 3), this storytelling consists of a 'symbolised account' of human actions with a temporal dimension. Within the process of narration I have been able to reflect upon my life in a sequential approach to understanding my life narrative. Lived lives, on the other hand, are often unpredictable and at times chaotic. This can mean that certain parts of a life story are given precedence over others at different times, or events are retold in a different order. Ricoeur (1991) underlines that narrative does not determine identity; rather, it mediates the generative constitution and reconfiguration of identity. It is a structure that allows individuals to organise a coherent story and seek to assign meaning to their experiences, even those experiences that appeared to be chaotic at the time, so that their identity is developed. In other words, individuals create a plot to give their narrative a logical purpose and it is this structure that allows individuals to organise a coherent story and make sense of their experiences so that their identity is developed (Erben, 1998).

Furthermore, narratives not only link the individual to their past, present and future but to social, cultural and historical settings and therefore enable them to

be understood within these contexts. MacIntyre (2007) argues that each person has a significant number of stories on which they draw in managing and adapting to everyday events and social interactions, including the influence of significant others, in an attempt to understand themselves and society and through this process identity is acquired. In narrating my story, I have been able to select different events and specific instances, or epiphanies, to illustrate the social, cultural, and historical contexts of my life. These have helped to provide cohesion and structure that have, in turn, given meaning to my life and facilitated the development of my selfhood.

In this thesis I am both the researcher and the researched and this requires high levels of reflection and reflexivity in order to provide a coherent, and at the same time a truthful and honest, account of my life. Brown (1998) argues that human beings are cognate and reflexive beings, that they have the ability to think for themselves and the capacity for self-referent thought. Through the narrative I have recounted and as a result of reflexive thinking as I have reflected on, and analysed, events in my life, I have gained a better sense of my selfhood and heightened self-awareness that has added to the development of *Bildung.*

3.3   Justification for the Single Case

A case study, according to Yin (2009: 18), is: 'An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (a 'case') set within its real-world context...'. Case studies are both descriptive and detailed, with a narrow focus (Dyer, 1995). A case study can provide a unique example of 'real' people within everyday situations. An autobiography is by its nature a single case. It is a qualitative approach that tells a life story, or an aspect of a life story- in this case living with dyslexia- and offers a detailed and in-depth understanding about the person, their life and self-hood. The scale and scope of the research in this thesis is determined by the decision to study a single life.

Rather than providing a generalised view of living with dyslexia, the biographical method employed here seeks to reflect on, and interpret, the events in a particular life in order to gain a better understanding of the life lived. However, an important element of social science is a methodology in which it is possible

for specific sectors of society to be studied in detail as an illumination of the general. As Frankenberg (1963: xi) notes: 'It is my firm view that only the particularistic can illuminate the universalistic'. McNulty (2003) concurs with Frankenberg's point by suggesting that data gathered through life story narratives can be used to compare with experiences of other people who have had similar life experiences. Thus insights into the specifics of living with dyslexia that emerge from my narrative may help to illuminate more generally the issues of others with dyslexia.

Therefore my autobiography has the potential to inform others about the difficulties and successes of having dyslexia, and thus may have generalisability beyond the single case (Murray Thomas, 1998; Yin, 2012). The single life narrative can inform readers about other people's experiences, which in turn can be used to generalise from. Moreover, Cox (2001) makes the pertinent point that only those who have dyslexia or are close to an individual with this SpLD will know and appreciate the difficulties that someone with dyslexia may have and the frustrations they feel. Therefore, they are in a position to relate their narrative so that others more removed from the reality of living with dyslexia may be able to appreciate more clearly what it is like to have dyslexia. As Lawthom *et al.* (2006: 183,184) note in their biography of Frank:

> What are these stories for? What are they designed to do? In the case of Frank each reader is a unique 'audience'—who takes his/her own lessons from the story. Frank is a story for any reader who chooses to seek to learn lessons. It is a story designed to provoke something of the self in the reader.

It may be argued that, 'the researcher will struggle to 'get inside' the lived experience of those being researched' (Hardwick and Worsley, 2011: 107). However, the strength of my research is that I am not trying to 'get inside' somebody else's experiences. I am the subject and researcher making this single case study a direct account of my first-hand experiences, unfiltered (by others).

Consequently, decisions about what to include or exclude are entirely subjective and the boundaries that this creates within the rich picture of the case study are reflected in some of the ethical implications of the research (Thomas, 2011).

3.4   Ethical Issues

When someone writes their life history they are making conscious decisions about what to include and what to omit (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010). I made decisions about what I would write about and how I would represent myself within my autobiography and how I would portray the significant others in my life. The way in which I approached this work, by exploring the manifestation of resilience in relation to the issues of living with dyslexia, meant that as I positioned myself at the centre of the research I had to make decisions upon what was to be included within my biography and what would not be mentioned. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000: 150) state: 'Qualitative methods emphasise judgement'. Within these decisions I had a moral obligation to act ethically and with integrity. According to Bathmaker and Harnett (2010: 19), ethical work involves acknowledging the position of the researcher in relation to their research:

> It seems to me that ethical practice demands that a researcher / writer states where they are positioned with regard to their work. Thus they should explain why they are interested in a particular topic, how it relates to them and their experiences, why they are choosing to use particular methodologies and methods, and what theoretical perspectives they are bringing to bear on the analysis.

On a pragmatic and functional level I gained ethical clearance and consent to complete this research by the University Ethics Committee, see Appendix 1. However, this type of research requires a more thoughtful approach to the inherent ethical implications. No research can be detached from personal values or biases, but this is a particularly pertinent aspect of autobiographical research. Sapsford and Jupp (2008: 91) state the need for 'awareness that the researcher's own preconceptions and latent interests may shape the conclusions drawn from the data'. I needed to be constantly alert to recounting with honesty and integrity my experiences and have endeavoured to be true to the aims of the research.

Therefore, this account of living with dyslexia involved a reflexive analysis of my experiences and developing sense of self (Mauthner *et al.* 2008) in which I have endeavoured to be truthful and honest. The veracity of this account is therefore

a crucial aspect of the ethical dimensions of autobiographical research; this and other ethical issues are considered below.

The credibility of biographical work is a pertinent issue in educational research; it is based upon assessing the dependability of the responses given (Roberts, 2002). Narrators can make mistakes by exaggerating, ascribing intentions to specific actions or committing falsehoods. It has been my intention to ensure, as far as is humanly possible, that I was truthful in my recollections. Biographical research is based upon participants using their memory to reflect upon past experiences. This has potential pitfalls as a person's memory can be insufficient; they may forget crucial events or may distort the truth. Reason and Rowan (1990) suggest that some checks can be made on oral sentiments with historical documents, which may ratify or challenge the response given by a person. In my research it was possible to refer to school reports and commendations and awards and so forth for the narrative I have provided. They were used as a way of cross-checking what I had said.

As my topic cannot be separated from me, self-interest is potentially another type of bias. Therefore it was important that I sought to reflect on my experiences honestly without seeking to 'promote my own agenda' in the account I have given. Zinn (2004) highlights how past experiences affect the story told. In my autobiography it was important to exercise reflexivity and not to focus on a set of stories with an overly emotional perspective that would distort the truth about my lived experiences. Reflexivity can be described as self-conscious, self-evaluating analysis, capturing the more subjective dimensions of the research, which places the researcher as a key component in constructing knowledge based upon systematic, thorough analysis (Finlay and Gough, 2003). This involves thinking critically, honestly and openly throughout the research process and meant that I sought to highlight events as they actually occurred in my life, incorporating the key principle of integrity in how I have reflected, analysed and eventually written about my life. However, this approach does not exclude emotional reactions to events. Zinn (2004) argues that when a person recounts life experiences, even unsubstantiated sentiments that may be seen as 'false' or 'incorrect' can be accurate in the way in which this event impacted upon their psyche. Within my biography there are moments that

created memories of feeling inadequate when compared to my peers. Thus, the verisimilitude of the experience was accurate as far as I was concerned. Even though this may have been my emotional interpretation of what occurred, this would not necessarily be how the teachers would portray what they intended or wanted me to feel. That said, this work is an autobiographical account of living with dyslexia and therefore the subjective experience of the author, rather than the narratives of others, is its main purpose.

Biographies are unlikely to be objective or detached. This criticism can also be levelled against biographical research, and may be seen as an accurate assessment of this type of research (Osborne, 2004). However, this is a strength of autobiographical writing as I have been able to draw upon my own life experiences and theorise them. Erben (1998) argues that interpretation of biographical data involves inductive logical theorisation. This involves postulating and generating inferences upon tentative grounds which are suitably cautious and not making leaps beyond the data. Prior to this the data requires analysis.

3.5   Analysis of my Autobiography

Analysis is a process of generating, developing, and verifying concepts- a process that builds over time and with the acquisition of data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Analysis involves the emergence of themes, such as problems with learning, and coping with adversity including depression. These themes are used to discuss my autobiography which I present as three distinct but overlapping selves- the personal, academic and professional selves contained in Chapter 4. A meta-analysis of my autobiography is presented in Chapter 5, that incorporates and employs the theoretical constructs of resilience, significant others, epiphanies and *Bildung*.

Within the analysis I seek to reflect upon the data, adopting a critical approach to assess the themes that emerge from the narrative so that the key features, richness and complexity of my life may be more clearly understood. This required careful reflection and imagination, as Hume (1978: 92) states:

> Reason can never show us the connection between one object and another.... When the mind, therefore, passes from one idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determined by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination.

Erben (1998: 9) suggests that when seeking to analyse qualitative data the researcher should employ imagination:

> The majority of time spent in presenting qualitative research is not used in replicating data but in interpretation. To perform this interpretation the researcher is required to employ imagination by which we mean the ability of mind to speculate upon and to link and assemble ideas related to the research text.

Hardwick and Worsley (2011: 127) argue that interpretative analysis of qualitative data has five pertinent stages, of which I considered:

- Knowing
- Theming
- Selecting
- Committing.

I have adapted this framework in the analysis of my autobiographical data. This included writing my biography, reading and subsequently re-reading the complete text, and considering the particular events, the significant individuals involved as well as notable features of this biography such as determination, resilience, success, teaching prowess and the importance of personal faith in Christ. This process helped in organising the themes of my research and also allowed other aspects of the biography to emerge, such as how I felt at specific moments when at school, that may have been missed ('knowing' the data).

The themes that emerged were used in formulating the structure of my autobiography. Within my research I sought to sequence key events chronologically within my life, analysing epiphany moments and the occurrence of self-educative events. Within this process I was able to reflect, for example, that the times when I felt unsuccessful were often the points in my life when I manifested the most resilience.

It was also important to be truthful and accurate in the identification of the most pertinent points arising from the data analysis. This honesty is a key component

of ethical practice, adding to the credibility of the final thesis. The material so obtained provided me with the confidence to select examples during the penultimate stage of analysis to illustrate particular themes that would provide an accurate and authentic account of my life presented in Chapter 4.

Mason (2009: 183) argues: 'It is important to focus your mind on whether a slice or segment of data is actually integral to, or constitutive of, your argument, or whether it merely provides an illustration of it'. Finally, I committed to the prominent themes and notions in the account of my life, interpreting and reflecting upon what the data was expressing. These last two stages were similar to Erben's notion of rehearsals (1998). Having followed most of Hardwick and Worsley's stages of analysis, I overlaid Erben's (1998) schema (Table 3.1), which added further rigour in analysing the data by providing contextual detail that enhanced the narrative through the use of 'thick description' (Geertz,1975: 10).

Erben (1998) suggests that there are distinctive stages in autobiographical research and analysis and that they are influenced by factors that permeate the lives of individuals and therefore shape their narrative accounts. I explore these factors in Table 3.1.

Stages used in examining my biography	Influences on my biography
• *Specific events: e.g. which provided the initial incentive for the research aims*	Cultural systems: attitudes and values towards dyslexia that have shaped my personal value-sets and steered the direction of research
• *Local context of specific events: significant others e.g. teachers and parents, educational experiences and employment*	
• *Societal context: educational systems, SENDA (Local Government Association, 2001) and DDA (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005a), recognition of dyslexia as a special educational need*	Chronology: the dates and times of important and public events that have shaped my biography
• *Documentary sources: personal and public accounts e.g. school reports*	Rehearsals: the process of reconsidering and refining all the data within my biography

Table 3.1: Methodological and analytical approach adopted in this study (adapted from Erben, 1998)

3.6   Summary

This chapter has addressed the methods and methodologies employed in this autobiographical research project. This includes describing biography as a way of investigating a life lived in time (Erben, 1998). My autobiography, by the nature of its focus, is a single case study that may be seen as 'an in-depth analysis of a single entity' (Murray Thomas, 1998: 81). When recalling life experiences, issues surrounding ethics are prominent themes: 'Ethics concerns the morality of human conduct' (Mauthner *et al.* 2008: 14). As part of this I sought to act with integrity and fidelity in interpreting my biography, being mindful of the reader when locating myself within the research. The truthfulness and trustworthiness of the sentiments offered are pertinent to considering the credibility of biographical work.

Coles and McGrath (2010: 72) note: 'Bias is always present because people are involved in research'. By assessing claims against other sources, such as cross-checking data with documentation (reports and accounts) or ratifying this with other people, the truthfulness of what has been claimed can be more clearly assessed. Additionally, imagination is a principle required when analysing research data. This allowed me to extrapolate key points and prominent themes from my autobiography. This was an iterative process, whereby themes continued to emerge from the data, as I read and re-read my narrative and it required interpretation. Finally, I have discussed the use of Hardwick and Worsley's (2011) and Erben's (1998) schemas as ways of analysing the data through a multi-layered approach, being aware of the data through knowing, theming, selecting and committing, whilst considering the impact of a range of factors such as the local and national understanding of dyslexia within a societal context and the role of significant others in shaping my autobiography.

Chapter 4: An Autobiography

This chapter is an autobiographical reflection of some of my key experiences of having dyslexia. It will emphasise the development of selfhood through the identification of examples which illuminate different aspects of the enhancement or depletion of the self within differing contexts. In so doing I intend to use Denzin's notion of epiphanies and the German concept of *Bildung* as defined in chapter two to theorise significant moments within my autobiography. Additionally the structure and analysis of my biography will take into account its chronology, and the social, historical and cultural context of my educational journey. Erben (1998: 8) states: 'Biographical investigation must involve the continual examination of the interplay of family, primary group, community and socio-economic forces'. This chapter will focus on my biography within these contexts by examining my personal, academic and professional selves in the overlapping spheres of my selfhood. Particular theoretical constructs are pertinent to my self-development and these are discussed. Resilience is a characteristic that I will explore and I shall focus on how I have demonstrated it in different situations in my life, including the examination of some of the setbacks experienced and affordances offered as they relate to dyslexia. I will also consider the effect, both positive and negative, of significant others in the development of my selfhood. My personal faith in God is a particular key influence on the formation of my selfhood because it originated out of emotional adversity and helped me through some of the setbacks that I experienced. This notion of spirituality was pertinent to me during specific periods of depression and anxiety, as it provided refuge and helped to make sense of having dyslexia. Finally, this chapter will conclude by summarising how a number of interlinked factors have contributed to shaping my character and developing my sense of self. However, I shall begin by briefly offering an overview of my life, as this will contextualise the analysis and discussion in Part 2 of this chapter.

4.1 Part 1, Vignette of my Autobiography

I was born on 8th August 1984 at two minutes to midnight at Chichester Hospital (West Sussex). As a young child I did not learn to crawl. I also had a speech impediment. During 1987 and 1988, when I went to playgroup and nursery, my parents inform me that I appeared to be academically 'less able' than those of the same age. At nursery I had to have someone to hold my hand as I drew a circle and started to write, as I was unable to do either of these things without support. In September 1989 I began my formal education at a small village infant school. My mother said that at the start of school, some of my peers could write their name and were articulate, whereas I could not write at all and still had 'immature' speech.

The educational and political background to my childhood was shaped by the reforms in education, such as The Education Reform Act (1988) that introduced the National Curriculum, formal tests and expectations of pupils at different levels. Mine was the first year-group to experience these tests and consequently the teachers were administering them for the first time. The education culture of the time was still predominantly influenced by the notion of child-initiated learning, advocated by the Plowden Report (1967). This approach, in hindsight, was unhelpful to my learning style as I needed more direct teaching and support to help me overcome some of the difficulties I was facing. After leaving infant school, I went to the junior school in the same village where I lived and had attended infant school. During my time at junior school my difficulties were highlighted and became more apparent than previously. I was positioned at a table for those with SEN and was often withdrawn from the classroom for specialist intervention, making me feel as though I was a 'special case'. One specific difficulty I had was with reading and focusing upon text. This led my parents to take me to a specialist optometrist where I was given a black patch on one eye of the glasses and a normal prescription in the other. This was to adjust the strength in both eye muscles to an appropriate level, whereby they would act at a similar strength.

In September 1995 I commenced secondary education. My difficulties in reading and writing continued and my parents took me to an out-of-county

specialist who had the innovative idea of trying coloured overlays to assist with reading a text. Although I was not diagnosed with Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS), referred to in Chapter 2, Section 2.7.3, I was given this 'new' treatment programme. The colour which was most effective for me was green, and it helped prevent the problems I had experienced when trying to read such as words that appeared to jump up and down and go off the page, and therefore helped to reduce visual stress. Within a single academic year of starting using the overlays and having them made into green prescription glasses, my reading age had increased by two years. This was a significant epiphany.

In 2000 my grandfather died and with his death I lost a close relationship that I had enjoyed from my earliest memories. This left an emotional mark upon me and led me to seek more closely and examine the claims of Christianity. As a result, I was converted and brought to see my need of forgiveness and a relationship with the Saviour. I also ended compulsory education in 2000, doing reasonably well with my GCSEs. This enabled me to begin sixth form and involved staying on at my secondary school. My studies were focused around vocational skills in order to avoid examinations, as I often did not do well in these. My choice of subjects included Health and Social Care, Religious Studies and History, most of which had a significant element of coursework attached and fewer exams than traditional 'A' levels. During my studies, in 2001, my grandmother died of lung cancer, which brought into sharp relief the significant loss I had faced when losing my grandfather only the year before. After leaving sixth form in 2002 with good grades I decided to do a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education. During this time I found significant difficulties in writing assignments at undergraduate level and only just achieved a pass standard in some of my written work. At the end of 2005, after being awarded my degree with Qualified Teacher Status, I was appointed as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) in an extremely challenging school where I worked for two years. During this time I received unhelpful feedback from school leaders despite working in challenging conditions. My first teaching post ended in redundancy in summer of 2007 as a result of the amalgamation of two schools and the requirement for the Local Education Authority (LEA) to save money.

The change of situation led me to pursue further study and I commenced a course at Reading University in Inclusive Education. During this time my former

difficulties in organising, structuring and managing assignments, particularly at higher education level, became a pressing issue. This led me to book a session with the dyslexia assessor. I was found to have dyslexia and mild dyspraxia, which had been affecting me for 23 years. This diagnosis was affirmation that some of the difficulties I had encountered were not because I was silly or a fool, feelings I had had prior to my diagnosis, but because I had dyslexia. This was another epiphany. With the help of my tutors and assistive technology I was able to achieve my Master's degree, a significant achievement at the time.

In September 2008 I began work at a rural school in Hampshire. I had a deep-seated desire to do well as a teacher, and reflecting on inspirational practitioners from my past meant that I worked long hours and spent a considerable amount of my leisure time preparing lessons and doing administrative tasks. During the autumn of 2009 I began my Doctoral degree at the University of Southampton. Combining both study and work was challenging but not impossible and something I felt I was able to do. In March of 2010 Ofsted visited the school and I was graded as an 'outstanding' teacher. The confirmation that my efforts had been recognised and the accolade of achieving Grade 1 lessons was helpful in enhancing my self-esteem. However, during the year I became tired as I was devoting a large proportion of my time to teaching and studying, leaving little time for recreation or cultivation of my personal self.

During the summer term of 2011 I became seriously ill and suffered a mental breakdown due to excessive stress and an unhealthy work–life balance. As a result I did not go to work for six months and stayed with my parents because I was unable to function 'normally' and cope with everyday activities. After making a partial recovery I went back to work on a reduced timetable after Christmas 2011. My return to work was difficult and I struggled with teaching full-time. At the end of the academic year many of my symptoms returned, indicating that a relapse was possible, so I resigned from my post and focused on writing my EdD thesis. I am no longer trying to manage the complexities of teaching and Doctoral writing but am working solely towards the completion of this thesis. Table 4.1 provides a summarised version of the key aspects of my biography using my methodological and analytical approach (Table 3.1.).

Stages used in examining my biography	Influences on my biography
Specific events*: for example which provided the initial incentive for the research aims.* A desire to write an original, insightful piece of research based upon personal experiences, offering a powerful account of living with dyslexia but also that can illuminate general issues for others, ***Local context of specific events****: significant others e.g. teachers and parents, educational experiences and employment.* The influence of teachers who tried to help me throughout my educative journey and how this affected my self-esteem positively, making me feel that I was able to successfully complete my work. Parental support is a prominent factor in my self-development; my mother was particularly caring and knew that I was, throughout my school years, behind age-related expectations. Difficulties emerged at university and in employment—managing to cope with having to learn in a different way to others.	Cultural systems: attitudes and values towards dyslexia that have shaped my personal value-sets and steered the direction of research. Change in attitudes towards inclusion. A shift in paradigm occurred within society towards inclusion and special educational needs that led to an enhanced understanding of the nature of dyslexia and the types of provision required to help these learners.
Societal context*: educational systems, SENDA (Local Government Association, 2001) and DDA (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005a, b), recognition of dyslexia as a special educational need.* The Education Reform Act 1988 made substantial changes to the education system with the introduction of a National Curriculum, standardising what was to be taught in state schools. This led to the introduction of national testing through Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) as a way of assessing what children had learned. SATS tests were introduced in 1991 for Key Stage 1, Year 2 (ages 7 and 8), and in 1995 for Key Stage 2, Year 6 (ages 10 and 11). Further changes to the curriculum occurred while I attended Secondary school with the introduction of Curriculum 2000; a reform was implemented in 2001 to replace the traditional 'A' level system (typically studied between the ages of 16 and 18 years). In 2001, when in Sixth Form College our year group was the first to sit the new Advanced Subsidiary (AS Level) qualification, which was deemed to be a stand-alone assessed examination at the end of the first year that subject to a successful outcome could become an 'A' level (A2) if studied next year.	Chronology: the dates and times of important and public events that have shaped my biography. 1989–1995 Began primary school; used a black patch for eye correction. 1995–2000 Commenced secondary school; given green corrective lenses. 2000–2002 Studied at college; introduction of the AS/ A2 qualification. 2002–2005 Studied for BA at university. 2005–2007 Began my teaching career. 2007 Made redundant and started postgraduate study. 2008 Diagnosed with dyslexia. 2008–2012 Worked as teacher in a rural school. 2011 Developed depression and was unable, for a period of time, to work. Summer 2012 Resigned due to ill health and a desire to complete my EdD.
Documentary sources*: personal and public accounts e.g. school reports.* Documentary sources were also important as I was able to analyse my school reports and my exercise books, looking for early signs of dyslexia and seeing the quality and quantity of my work at different periods within my life. School reports highlighted and concurred with my memory of different events, they could also be used to ratify certain experiences I had. The reports and the marking of work and exercise books demonstrated the understanding I had of the work set but also the teacher's lack of understanding of my needs, particularly the comments they employed in relation to what they perceived as incorrect or superficial work.	Rehearsals: the process of reconsidering and refining all the data within my biography. The context or milieu also refers to the environment that surrounds the story and the audience, associated with or involved in the biography. For this autobiography the analysis of data included looking at the evidence that existed within the environment in which I was situated. This included thinking about the impact that attending a medium sized school in rural Sussex had upon my holistic development, including my emotional development. Within this analysis it was important to consider how the ideas and philosophies that were pertinent in the management of the school affected the provision I received as child with un-diagnosed dyslexia. For example, the infant school believed that dyslexia could not be diagnosed or specifically recognised until junior education. This meant that I would not have been tested for dyslexia, even had provision been available then.

Table 4.1 Overview of my biography (adapted from Erben, 1998)

I shall now discuss and analyse in more detail key points from my educative journey and the development of my selfhood from personal, academic and professional perspectives.

4.2   Part 2, Analysis and Discussion of my Autobiography

In this section of the chapter I look at the self from three perspectives; the personal, academic and professional self. In so doing this work will take particular themes that illustrate these dimensions of my selfhood as a person living with dyslexia. Therefore, I shall select events which illuminate the nature of my self-development at different moments and in different contexts of my life. The rationale for selecting the three selves is that each demonstrates an aspect of part of my life affected by experiences in specific situations and contexts and interactions with others. Within this analysis I reflect how self-identity has been formed and developed through circumstances and interactions with significant others.

4.2.1 Personal self

In October 2007, encouraged by family members, I embarked upon the Master of Arts (MA) in Education at the University of Reading,. The influence of significant others' approbation, especially those closely related to me, was crucial in my decision to fulfil my desire for postgraduate study. Gabb (2010) suggests that there is a strong desire for individuals to seek parental approval for the decisions they make. On the one hand I wanted the autonomy to decide to extend my professional development by undertaking further academic study, whilst on the other I sought parental support for my actions. My selfhood was shaped by its interactions and dealings with other people, especially significant others. These interactions with my family were certainly important in persuading me to decide to return to university, because I wanted to maintain the *status quo* by retaining cordial relations with them.

After finding some difficulty in writing my assignments I reluctantly decided, with parental support and persuasion, that I should take a dyslexia assessment. This decision was based upon interactional and practical decision making: interactional because I sought to make the decision based upon deliberation

with my family, seeking their approval; and practical in the sense of agreeing with the family and therefore arranging the appointment and participating. After two months of anxiously waiting, the appointment came through to see the dyslexia assessor. This would become an epiphany moment that trumped other experiences and, as Denzin (1989: 47) describes, it was the 'main event'. This event would alter my sense of self as I realised over time the impact of the outcome of the assessment. At the time of my appointment my emotions were mixed. I wanted to be formally assessed but I felt that a positive diagnosis might impact negatively on my selfhood. I felt that if I was found to have dyslexia, it might leave me vulnerable to people's unguarded comments and I would be stigmatised as an individual with dyslexia (Goffman, 1963; Hawley, 2011). My mind went back to the 'residues of emotional experiences of childhood' (Thomas, 1996: 360), for example being laughed at by my peers for the difficulties I had when reading a text aloud or trying to produce a piece of writing at the standard for age-appropriate expectations. During my school years I had been seen as incapable of achieving and was made to feel unsuccessful (see the 'academic self' below).

During the three-hour dyslexia assessment I completed many psychometric tests, a process I found to be stressful and intrusive. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state that stress coupled with anxiety can be associated with the assessment process. This is my experience; the tests were difficult for me to complete and I became more and more anxious and nervous as I was incrementally challenged to complete one test after another. After the appointment I had to wait for several weeks to receive the results of the tests. This period was one of extreme anxiety for me. Eventually I was asked to see the assessor to discuss the outcomes of the psychometric tests. I remember making the journey to Reading; it seemed to be interminably long that day, probably because of my nervous state, wondering what the day would bring and thinking what the results of the tests might indicate. There was a considerable part of me thinking that if I had dyslexia it might explain some of the issues I had. But another part of me did not want the label of 'dyslexic,' a term used, on occasion, in derisory fashion in my wider family. Chilcoate (2006) suggests that labelling can be detrimental to a person's sense of selfhood, arguing that if a

person is labelled then they become the condition rather than living with it; in other words 'being a dyslexic' rather than 'having dyslexia'. I was also concerned that having dyslexia could mean that I would be stigmatised and subject to ridicule and thus alienated from other people. Ridicule and unwarranted criticism can have an adverse impact on selfhood. Pollak (2005) argues that within education, significant others, such as teachers can have a negative effect on those with a SpLD. He discusses Kelly, who felt that some teachers were dismissive of her dyslexia and that this was detrimental to her self-esteem. A major concern I had would be the torment, similar to that described above, I might receive for having dyslexia and in its wake the probability of significant anguish with a resultant loss of self-esteem that would diminish my personal self.

I felt uneasy and a seeping of self-confidence, as Dr Edwards went through my scores and the centiles to which they had been converted. I was overwhelmed that some of the scores were much lower than I would have predicted and I felt distressed and uncomfortable. The dyslexia assessment was both a disappointment and at the same time, a relief. At first it was a disappointment as I felt bad about the scores I had obtained, feeling as if I were a failure, yet at the same time I felt a sense of relief that I had been formally diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD). Krupska and Klein (1995: 28) cite an individual's experience, which I relate to and empathise with:

> Positive diagnosis is a shock, asking around it seems to affect fellow dyslexics in a personal and profound way. For myself I remember a tremendous tidal wave of relief- overwhelming, drowning relief. I was not stupid, dumb, slow, lazy, hopeless, backward. I was dyslexic and I could do something about it, the question was what? The effect of being diagnosed, coupled with deeply held emotions, came the dubious prospect of shedding tears in public; in short, I felt like crying.

These mixed emotions stayed with me for many days and I reflected upon them often, seeking to evaluate whether knowing I had dyslexia was a positive or negative thing. Despite being diagnosed with dyslexia I was keen to succeed and sought to develop compensatory strategies, such as investigating how people with dyslexia can learn most effectively. I wanted to portray myself as a person who was able to be successful, whilst at the same time managing my

dyslexia and keeping it hidden from others. Eide and Eide (2011) note that some individuals seek to conceal their dyslexia and present themselves without a problem. This type of concealment was a form of front stage performance, which was my initial reaction to not wanting others to see me as different. I felt, and still do to a certain extent, that I have to place a mask on at times, to hide the shame of the actual face of dyslexia. However, at other times I remove the mask and let my dyslexic identity be known.

In hindsight I have concluded that my personal self was developed by being diagnosed with a SpLD. As a result I had to understand what it meant to be dyslexic and how I could access further help; being told you have dyslexia is not a sign of weakness. Goodwin and Thomson (2012) argue that being diagnosed with dyslexia often confirms that which was suspected prior to the diagnosis. This was the case for me and in so doing I felt that a burden had been lifted, yet was also aware that the diagnosis may have a different burden that I had not previously carried. Purnell (2006) writes that his diagnosis was a release of emotional and psychological pressure; this succinctly describes my reaction to my own diagnosis. This has enabled me to understand much about my struggles in education and my reactions towards them including my persistence and determination to succeed even in the face of adversity. The diagnosis helped to make sense of some of the difficulties I had experienced, whilst at the same time it enabled me to look to the future with some assurance. Knowing that I had dyslexia was a pivotal moment in my personal development because it meant that I could use this knowledge to meet any future challenges with greater equanimity than hitherto and therefore manage them more successfully.

However, this positive stance is not always easy to maintain in the face of the many difficulties associated with academic study. Hargreaves (2007: 4) discusses a case study of a student who found that she was dyslexic after completing an access course and writes about the emotional and psychological impact this had upon the person:

> Having stumbled my way through a foundation / access course I was first
> diagnosed with dyslexia in 2003 just before being accepted into a BSc
> (Hons) programme for Human Nutrition and Dietetics. After several

consultations with a dyslexia tutor, I began to understand just how dyslexia was affecting me psychologically as well as affecting my work.

This is similar to my experiences; having found my BA in Primary Education challenging as an individual with undiagnosed dyslexia, I felt as though others on my course were doing well when I was not. It was not until I was partially through an MA that I was diagnosed with dyslexia.

For me having dyslexia whilst trying to complete a Master's degree meant that a significant amount of additional time and dedication was needed to complete the assignments. I compared myself to other group members who thrived at their work and obtained positive feedback, whereas I often struggled to structure the papers, organise my thoughts and write coherently. This meant that I would become emotionally frustrated at having dyslexia and sometimes feel downcast and a failure. This illustrates several issues: first, peer comparison; second, the additional effort I needed to take to complete tasks as a result of having dyslexia; and, third, the 'emotional work' (Hochschild,1983) associated with managing the previous two. Peer comparison, which I also discuss in the 'academic self' below, meant that when others wrote papers quickly, some boasting of the ease and speed with which they had completed the task and the high marks they received, I thought about the significant amount of time I took to produce an assignment that frequently resulted in a low grade. When marks were returned, other students used to ask one another what grade they had obtained. I never divulged my grades and after a while I was not asked any more.

The negative impact of my perceptions of significant others' evaluations of me is relevant to the development of my personal self. Although my peers were not being malicious, they made me feel inadequate when openly discussing how well they had done and with so little effort. This made me feel disappointed and unhappy with myself and the mark I had obtained, especially when I considered the amount of time it had taken me to complete the work. Cumpsten (2009) writes about the anguish caused by peer comparisons, which resonates within the development of my emotional self, and thus the personal self. Finally, as a consequence of my negative feelings, when I compared myself to my peers and of working to excess with little reward I began to feel the impact of the emotional

labour of trying to maintain a confident public persona. I felt it was necessary to act as if I was unconcerned that I had merely obtained a pass grade again, when others had a merit or distinction. In so doing I was performing a role, a staged performance that I did not believe in. Consequently, this had a negative impact on the development of my personal self.

I had experienced a personal setback when completing my GCSE and AS exams represented by the death of my grandfather and grandmother in a short space of time. This negatively affected my emotional health. These deaths resulted in fortifying my personal self by allowing me to be resolute in managing my emotions during this adverse period in my life and ultimately led to a positive and transformative experience, going from the 'slough of despond' to seeking a relationship with God (Bunyan and Sharrock, 1965). In Biblical literature, Micah 7: 8 says: 'When I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me'. At times I felt as though darkness enveloped me. However, at these times the light of God-given faith shone brightly. My faith has subsequently helped me to make sense of the diagnosis of dyslexia and helped me to cope with the effect of having this condition. It has also allowed me to face the reality of, and come to terms with, the deaths of close family members.

At the age of 15 I learnt that my grandfather had chest pains and had struggled to be his active normal self on holiday. On his return he went to the doctor, who immediately admitted him to hospital for further examination. I remember being extremely worried as I dearly loved my grandfather and shared many fond memories of him, such as being taken to the London museums, playing games with him in the garden and just being in his company. As I reflected upon his illness I knew that the doctor would have not admitted him to hospital without good reason and, selfishly perhaps, I wanted him to be better so we could do all those enjoyable things again. When visiting my grandfather at the hospital, the sight of the oxygen cylinders and the other hospital equipment wrenched at my emotions; I hated to see my grandfather, who was once so full of life and energetic, wearing an oxygen mask, struggling to breathe and with sores on his hands and arms where the needles to supply him with pain relieving drugs had been inserted. I began to dislike greatly the hospital that was caring for my grandfather as I began to associate it with a place of pain and death. Every time

I visited my grandfather I felt nauseous and I could not wait to leave and return home. I struggled to hold back the tears at the sight of my grandfather. I was brought up believing that men should not cry, a fact I often felt was unfair as I thought women and men should be allowed to weep if they chose to. However, public displays of emotion were, in my family, thought to be a sign of weakness and I did not challenge this attitude at the time. Meares and Freeston (2008) make the point that individuals can act a part by suppression of feelings, which appear to temporarily displace that feeling but this ultimately creates anxiety. Holding back my emotions provided me the opportunity to pretend I was strong and able to cope whilst inwardly my emotions were fraught at the sight of my grandfather dying. With the illness of my grandfather I felt as though I was living a lie, putting on a brave face when really I wanted to cry uncontrollably for the imminent and eventual loss of a significant person in my life. My personal self therefore had to manage feelings of grief that this severe illness and subsequent death had brought, and at the same time present outwardly as if I was coping with the experience I was going through and that this was not an unusual set of circumstances.This was exhausting and caused a great deal of emotional work. When my grandfather died I was deeply affected but I maintained an outward appearance of fortitude and refrained from crying as this was regarded as 'unacceptable' behaviour in my family. This level of emotional work could be regarded as surface acting. However, struggling to come to terms with the death of a loved one and the pain of not feeling as though I was able openly grieve but that I had to pretend everything was normal meant I was also deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). This combination of surface and deep acting was detrimental to the fulfilment of my emotional needs and negatively affected the development of the personal self. My grandfather died in July 2000. As he had been in considerable pain, my emotions about his death were mixed. Badham and Ballard (1996) note that death of loved ones can create different emotions, one being you are glad to see them out of pain, which is something I took comfort in. I remember getting the telephone call from my grandmother stating that she thought my grandfather would die imminently. We hurried out of the house. However, just before arriving, he had died. I recall looking at his body, still warm, watching and feeling the colour and warmth depart from it; it was the first time I had experienced a death. I felt absolutely powerless and

helpless, unsure what to do or say. In my distress I stood with the other family members by his bed and cried. One of the worst moments was the police arriving and explaining that my grandfather's body had to be examined, as he had died under circumstances that required investigation (of mesothelioma). I felt that we had been robbed of our opportunity to say goodbye to him as a family. My father visited the hospital alone to see my grandfather after the autopsy. Many years later I learnt that this had been a traumatic experience for my father and that he had shielded me from it.

My grandfather had stayed positive throughout his illness, although he was evidently suffering both physically and emotionally. This was hard for me as I knew he was suffering but he did not want to show it; this almost made things worse, as I wanted to support him but I felt powerless to help or to discuss how he was feeling. Straker (2013) writes about the lack of empowerment and the emotional pain felt by relatives and friends when someone close to them is dying. My feelings resonate with Straker's sentiments. These were traumatic moments in my life and they affected how I thought and felt for many years afterwards. As a result of my grandfather's death, and only a year later the death of my grandmother meant that my emotions were negatively affected. I recall many times crying about my loss and the enormous vacuum that their deaths had made in my life. The experience of a second death within a short space of time meant that the negative feelings from my grandfather's death were again in the forefront of my mind and the sorrow of the previous year was revisited. However, my family has strong social bonds and we sought to support one another by bearing each other's emotional burdens. Hasson and Hadfield (2009: 150) state: 'Time together gives the family an identity and a sense of unity'. As a family we were able to spend time talking about the deaths and trying to 'move on'. This helped with the grieving process and we were able to continue life as normally as possible. The impact of the death of close family members educated me morally about what I saw as my duty in the grieving process and the support I needed to offer to other family members. Riches and Dawson (2000) see emotional support as a fundamental tool for helping bereaved individuals. The notion of allowing circumstances to educate me is described by Kester (1995) in terms of self-reflexive development. Within this I

sought to convey empathy to the partner of the one who had died and demonstrate love and concern. This educated me psychologically as it prepared me for the difficulties that life can bring. Finally the loss of both grandparents educated me to have more compassion for others who have experienced the loss of one close to them. I have recently been able to support those who have had similar experiences and I have sought to be empathetic, and bring solace to them.

The death of my grandfather, in particular, was an epiphany moment, a sudden negative change in circumstance that ultimately transformed my life, inextricably linked to the love that I had for my grandparents. At 17 years old, one year after the death of my grandfather, I experienced what some might term 'religious conversion'. I prefer the phrase, 'relationship with God'. The Bible describes this experience as the 'new birth' or 'being born again' (Holy Bible, John 3: 3).

My faith helped me to depend upon God when I was struggling as a learner with dyslexia. Instead of using a self-destructive, negative coping mechanism, built upon blaming God, seeing Him as the source of personal distress, I learnt to look to Him for help with the occurrences of death I had to deal with and for help in managing being dyslexic (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). I did not wish to be the victim but the victor. Likewise, I take His life and teachings seriously, knowing that despite difficult situations He lived and taught resilience. Clarke and Nicholson (2010) argue that choosing to view situations as part of the victim paradigm means that a person's ability to be resilient is sapped. In contrast my attitude underpinned by my faith meant that I sought to possess fortitude in managing the complexities and difficulties of my life.

I have therefore been able to develop a personal and spiritual dimension to myself, something which I had never considered important before. This was a turning point in my life and it helped me to re-assess what I considered was important in life and to evaluate my priorities. Becoming a Christian and making sense of having dyslexia can be seen as emancipation. The Northwestern University's Foley Centre for the Study of Lives (2009: 1) writes: 'People often use redemption or contamination imagery to depict significant life transitions or turning-point scenes in their life stories'. Although my conversion to Christ was

many years ago, the impact of this experience affects what I do today and it orchestrates the spiritual and moral decisions that affect me personally. It also gives me the ability to face personal, professional and academic challenges with a greater degree of resilience.

4.2.2 Academic self

This section synthesises my formal academic and scholarly achievements, and the challenges I faced within the academic self. The development of greater self-awareness with regard to these challenges has enabled me to reflect on the associated issues when dealing with others in similar circumstances to me. Much of this is linked to the development of the personal self outlined above. A specific, underlying difficulty I had, from my earliest childhood memories, was the inability to read effectively. However, even after learning to read, as I went through different stages of my educational career I faced the challenges of not understanding what I had read and not remembering it. This was, and at times still is, particularly stressful and tiring. I will now address these challenges as they affected my selfhood throughout my education and, as might be expected, they are inextricably linked to the development of my personal and professional self.

Near the end of my junior school education my parents decided to have my eyes tested. I had explained to them about the difficulties I had in concentrating when reading and tracking the words; when focusing upon a text I would use my finger in a vain attempt to focus on each word on the page and to follow the text as closely as I could. This was a problem that I experienced every time I attempted to read a book. My visit to the opticians led to me being diagnosed with a 'lazy eye' (amblyopia), in which the vision in one eye is underdeveloped and requires more extensive use of the eye that is more developed. As a result of this diagnosis, I was required to wear a black patch on one eye and a prescription lens on the other eye, with a view to strengthening the weaker eye. I disliked the term 'lazy' as it was not something I felt applied to me. On the contrary, despite monumental efforts on my part I was still facing difficulties in learning to read. During this time I was found to have visual tracking difficulties in which my eyes would not work together to converge equally to focus on the

words and letters of each line. My eyes would not track across a page from left to right without missing words and lines (Irlen, 2010). As a result I was instructed by the optician to complete a number of eye exercises, which involved looking down a set of coloured beads on a string and seeking to focus my eyes upon each bead. This was to help the focus of the pupil and to strengthen the muscles in my eyes, with a view to helping me to track and focus upon words.

Having to stare at a set of beads was something I could do in the privacy of my own room, but having to wear a black patch to manage muscle strength within my eye was something altogether more public and caused mixed but very overt reactions from my classmates. To my peers I appeared as Captain Hook and I can recall the many remarks about being a pirate on a voyage. For some children, this provided an opportunity to taunt, ridicule and scoff at the patch on my eye. This made me feel both foolish and vulnerable. However, for others in the class the image of Hook created almost a celebrity status for me. These reactions had a positive impact on my sense of self because I was able to bathe in the reflected glory of the image of Captain Hook as a famous pirate that I held in my mind. At that age I thought Hook was a champion, a mighty conqueror, like other fictional characters such as Long John Silver who was feared by others and therefore not the subject of ridicule. This meant that I was able to wear the glasses with a sense of pride and this made it possible for me to continue to use them. The adoption of this outlook helped me to be more optimistic and increased my resilience to overcome the taunts and jibes of some of the others. Reivich and Shatté (2003: 40: 41) argue:

> Resilient people are optimistic. They believe that things can change for the better. They have hope for the future and believe that they control the direction of their lives.... Optimism, of course implies that we believe we have the ability to handle the adversities that will inevitably arise in the future. And, of course, this reflects our sense of self-efficacy, our faith in our ability to solve our own problems and master our world, which is another important ability in resilience.

Being resilient meant that I thought of the eye patch as something positive: I imagined that I was really a pirate and my peers ought not to mess with me or they might face the order to 'walk the plank'. As a result what might have been

used as something detrimental to my self-esteem became something positive to enhance it and thus my self-confidence grew. As a result I continued to wear the glasses and this helped in my endeavours to improve my reading which, in turn, improved my sense of my academic self.

As well as learned optimism, I recognise that it is possible to feel ridiculed for being an individual with special needs. This experience has enabled me to be more mindful of how I perceive and react to others with all kinds of differing needs and has given me an enhanced sense of empathy towards those with special needs in my teaching role. During my work as a teacher in 2011, whilst sitting in the staffroom I felt uncomfortable as members of teaching and support staff criticised a child for his lack of aptitude towards a task, suggesting he was 'slow' and incapable of doing anything he was asked. This made me feel uneasy as I listened, as it made me think about how some staff still view those with a SpLD as 'thick'. This superficiality of knowledge of SEN concerned me, because judgements were being formed due to lack of understanding. Sagmiller (1995) writes that people's lack of awareness can mean that they can misjudge you for being dyslexic and treat you in a way which is detrimental to self-esteem. Throughout my time as a student and a teacher with dyslexia, I have found that some teachers and lecturers can be intolerant of individuals who are different. Unguarded and sometimes unsolicited conversations about pupils or other staff in their absence makes me feel uncomfortable and, I believe, highlights the misunderstanding of dyslexia and SEN that some practitioners still have (Rose, 2009). It also makes me reflect back upon Mr Giddens, my English teacher, who was so understanding and helpful and sought to do his best for me despite my difficulties. Equally, it reminded me of teachers such as Mrs Gettings, who lacked the empathy Mr Giddens clearly manifested and seemed to have a lack of regard for my emotional and psychological well-being. On one occasion I was directly compared to another child and told I was not very able. This made me feel humiliated and it diminished my selfhood by making me think I was less of a person than my peers and that I was not, and never would be, like the child I was being compared with. As an adult and a teacher, my being aware of the needs of those with dyslexia places me in a stronger position to understand and help a child with SEN.

My own experience of managing dyslexia can be seen as an 'insider's' knowledge, which I seek to use to the advantage of the children whom I teach. The experiences I went through have helped shape how I feel about having something in my life which makes me different from others. Having dyslexia seems to mark one out as different and yet it has contributed to my development of a more rounded, moral conscience and character; someone who is accepting of special needs, particularly dyslexia. As this discussion has illustrated, the experiences in my academic life have had a powerful effect upon my professional practice as a teacher. Personal growth and the maturation of self-awareness are evidenced and have added to my self - development and *Bildung*. When a child in my class came in wearing pink prescription glasses, this immediately triggered memories of my childhood experience. I reflected back to how the words appeared to move around on the page and the fatigue I faced when trying to read a text for a sustained period of time (both features of SSS, mentioned by Russell and Cohn, 2012, in Section 2.7.3). I also remembered the feelings I had when everyone else appeared to be a confident reader and I was still struggling with the basics. This led me to consider some of the difficulties this child may have been facing in her reading and helped me to be firstly empathetic to her needs, and secondly practical in asking her about provision she would find beneficial and then seeking, as far as possible, to implement that.

When I was in the last year of junior school, I visited the specialist opticians with a view to correcting what was, at the time, unknown to me, SSS (see Section 2.7.3). This had been partially corrected through the eye patch but had not rectified the issues of eye strain and the apparent movement of words on the page. A strategy the optometrist tried was an innovative experiment with overlays, coloured Perspex sheets to be laid over a book or piece of writing in order to facilitate reading for the user. Reid (2011: 105) suggests: 'There is evidence that different colours for background and font can enhance some children's reading and attention'. Initially I approached the use of the overlays with a degree of cynicism, reflecting upon the times when I had to stare at a set of wooden beads, which had not seemed to offer much of a solution. However, lured by the promise of a meal in a Pizza Hut in Brighton afterwards, I complied

and went along. The specialist optician tried a range of colours: red, purple, yellow, green, blue and so forth. Irlen (2010) suggests that finding the most appropriate colour for the dyslexic learner can improve print quality and stability and enhance tracking of the text, whilst maintaining the place on the page. Irlen argues that coloured overlays can reduce eye strain as well as headaches and decrease the fatigue recurrently associated with this.

There was no guarantee that an overlay would help but it was felt that I should try different colours. I found that the use of the green overlay when trying to read a text improved my reading experience and it was agreed that I would use it for one month. I then returned to the optician with a view to considering a more permanent solution. After several consultations it was proposed that I have the green overlay made into glasses, involving placing green prescription lenses into glasses frames. The whole experience over several months of consulting the optometrist took perseverance on my part, trying different overlays and glasses, feeling self-conscious about their use in front of peers, whilst also being worried that I was so far behind in my academic work. The stress of feeling academically weaker than your peers is emphasised by Brown (2012), who suggests that peer comparison can deflate pupil's self-beliefs (see the 'personal self' above). Although I felt that I was constantly compared to other class members by my teachers, I still maintained some self-belief in my ability to learn and I wore the glasses both for reading and distance work such as seeing the board.

This was an epiphany moment that transformed my life; a little like gaining full sight again after being unable to see properly (Denzin, 1989). Crowe (2008: 4) describes a similar experience: 'The relief was overwhelming. I felt as though I had had a cataract operation on my brain—suddenly light and colour flooded in, transforming everything'. Although I was not physically blind, I felt as though I had been liberated from the longstanding problems with my eyes. I found myself able to read for sustained periods of time and able to concentrate much more easily than I had ever done before. The use of the green lenses was a significant provision that helped reduce the stress of reading and assisted me in increasing my fluency and speed. I therefore learnt on a personal level that, with determination and the appropriate provision—in my case the glasses—and help

from significant others, such as parental support, academic successes can be achieved.

At the end of junior school I had a reading age of 9 years old, but within a year of wearing the glasses I had made an increase of two reading years. This experience of academic success was a boost to my self-esteem that allowed me to face many of the challenges of secondary education. In secondary school I had to cope with more complex texts and without the ability to read at this level I would have found learning difficult. I continued to wear the green glasses into secondary school, which became more difficult as the safety-net of primary school, with staff vigilant to detect possible instances of bullying, had been removed. My experience suggests that for some children transition from primary to secondary school can be difficult. Staff at the secondary school seemed less supportive of me wearing these glasses and peer pressure was a prominent factor in not wanting to wear them because it made me stand out from the other children. I recall during a history lesson in Year 7, shortly after getting my glasses out of their case, that the teacher had forgotten that I wore them and loudly asked me, in front of all the class, to take the glasses off, assuming they were for pleasure or a joke. He then quickly corrected himself, apologising for what he had said and sought to move on in the lesson. However, the damage was done and my self-esteem had taken a blow. All the class was now looking at me and, as a shy person by nature, I did not welcome this type of attention or comparison between myself and my peers. Ashton (2008) suggests that listening to children about how they feel on transfer to secondary school provides a powerful tool for effective school transition. If my voice had been heard, especially with regard to wearing the green glasses, then perhaps this episode would not have occurred and I would not have been subjected to the humiliation I felt.

The social identity of a person is shaped by these comparisons made by others in the same social network (Hayes, 2008). For me, the comparisons were between myself, wearing unusual spectacles and struggling with reading and subsequent learning, and those not wearing tinted glasses and doing well. Eysenck and Keane (2005: 151) argue: 'The views of their peers can have a strong effect on children's behaviour'. Despite the strong desire for me to

abstain from wearing the glasses, I assessed the laughter of my peers against the potential good the green tinted lenses seemed to do, and I was determined to persevere as I wanted the lenses to work in helping me to 'catch up' with the rest of the class members, who appeared leaps and bounds ahead of me. I overcame the laughter of some of my peers and accepted that the green glasses were for my benefit, and I was prepared to absorb any derogatory or snide comments. Remembering my earlier experiences in primary school of pretending to be a pirate helped me to gain the self-confidence to continue to wear the green glasses.

To date I still find reading a challenging task which, as Irlen (1991) notes, is a lifelong problem associated with having dyslexia (see Section 2.7.3). I do at times struggle with the decoding of a text, a prominent problem within dyslexia, (Savill and Thierry, 2012), due to phonological integration difficulties (Russell, 1982). As a result I avoid public reading and keep my private reading to small but regular amounts. Churchward (2012: 1) states:

> Reading out loud in class was what Sue Kerrigan dreaded the most. She knew she would get something wrong and be corrected in front of everyone. 'I felt stupid a lot of the time', she says. Then there were the physical effects, she adds, 'Reading made me feel sick and giddy.'

My experience of reading and being asked to do so publicly concurs with those described by Churchward. I hated reading at school and was corrected when I got something wrong. These feeling have remained and, as a teacher, I now reasoned that if I read aloud I would end up getting corrected or sniggered at by the children. I was supposed to be the teacher and the children's derision would be injurious to the development of healthy self-esteem and negatively impact on my belief that I was an able reader.

However, as a primary teacher, reading to the class is difficult to avoid. Having to read aloud a complex text with lengthy words and extended paragraphs filled me with dread. Each afternoon at story time I would struggle to read, stumbling through the passages in the text, feeling as though I was idiotic and absolutely incapable. After several weeks of this humiliating experience I selected three competent readers from the class and asked them to read a section each. Meanwhile, I listened and observed the rest of the class. I used this strategy as

a pretence that I wanted to watch the children and see who was listening. This relieved the stress of having to read aloud and provided me with some respite, whilst at the same time I was able to maintain some level of self-esteem and professionalism.

I would dearly love to read story books to the children I teach without the fear that I will misread parts of the text or mispronounce words but, as illustrated above, I have adopted strategies based upon coping techniques to avoid this ordeal. Reasons for this reluctance are twofold. Firstly, my self-image as a dedicated teacher means that my poor reading ability causes me concern that it will be detrimental to my pupils' learning; and, secondly, I know my selfhood is vulnerable to any ridicule that may occur as a result of the mistakes I may make and therefore they may negatively affect my sense of my academic self. Dyslexia makes reading a slow task and often hard work, taking away the potential for pleasure from this pursuit. This, as Ott (1997) argues is due to 'word blindness' (see Section 2.7.3). It also means that ascertaining the meaning of an article or book can take me significantly longer than others. I read only a few pages at a time, pausing and thinking about what the text has said, rather than rushing through substantial amounts of a book or article. I have learnt to use a highlighter pen to highlight key points in an academic text and, even though SSS does not affect me to the extent it once did, I still find apparatus or my finger helpful in avoiding repeating words and lines or confusing where I am on the page. This difficulty in reading frustrates my academic self because I would like to read correctly and for sustained amounts of time without becoming weary. Despite this I have been academically successful as a result of my determination coupled with the compensation strategies described above.

The overlapping of the professional self and academic self are evident when I was required to present an academic paper at a school governors' meeting. I was asked to explain some of the things I had learnt from the taught element of the EdD course and to outline some of my ideas for the research that were relevant to the school. I was nervous about writing and presenting theoretical ideas and the usefulness of classroom-based research to enhance practice. I felt afraid that my dyslexia would hamper my ability to convey my ideas and

when organising my thoughts I was aware that I did not wish to write awkwardly worded sentences that might appear 'clumsy' and expose my dyslexia. Preparing the paper took a considerable amount of time, even beyond my initial expectations. However, after many revisions I felt as though I might just manage to present the paper. During the presentation I was conscious that, although I had learnt to be articulate, people might judge me for the 'dyslexia' that may seep through my presentation. Additionally, after the presentation I was concerned that talking with the governors and staff my interactions would reveal how 'dyslexic' I was and diminish my academic self.

4.2.3 Professional self

This part of the chapter addresses my selfhood as a teacher, the profession I decided to embark on after leaving school. This is significant to the whole self as its development and my identity are inseparable from the career I chose to pursue. Hasson and Hadfield (2009: 129) write: 'Our sense of identity is bound up with our work'. I will now discuss how my professional self has been shaped by the experiences of teaching.

During my school years I had my mind set on one of two options for higher education, to train to be a nurse or a teacher. Knight (2003) describes these types of careers as caring professions and suggests that people choose these jobs to make a difference to others. I desired to help others and enter a profession which supported people, either seeking to make them well or to educate them. Inherent within a caring profession are emotional challenges that can affect the self. Henderson (2001) explains that the emotional labour attached to nursing is significant. Similarly, Hargreaves (2007) has noted that teaching is an emotional practice and that 'emotional hazards' are an inevitable part of the profession. Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) argue that teaching can be emotionally draining and the investment required in sustaining good student–teacher relationships can create significant levels of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983). This was an aspect of my chosen profession that I was aware of and I felt I would be able to manage. The decision to train as a teacher was based upon my enjoyable experiences of working as a volunteer with the children at the local primary school I had attended, and I considered that the

Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) would be my most suitable training route.

After three years of teacher training, in September 2005 I entered the classroom as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). My first job as the person with sole responsibility for teaching a class of children was a significant transition from being a student teacher, where responsibility lay with the qualified teacher, and I felt my lack of experience keenly. Pollard (2006) describes the difficult transition the inexperienced practitioner has to make in adjusting from trainee mode to being fully in charge as a class teacher. Pollard (2006: 254) writes:

> Another set of management skills which we have identified is related to self-presentation, for how to 'present' oneself to children is also a matter for skill and judgement. Teachers who are able to project themselves so that children expect them to be 'in charge' have a valuable ability. There is a very large element of self-confidence in this and student teachers, in particular, may sometimes find it difficult to enact the change from student role to teacher role. Perhaps this is not surprising for a huge change in rights and responsibilities is involved. The first essential, then, is to believe in oneself as a teacher.

During the first year as a newly qualified teacher I was extremely nervous and although considered a professional, I felt like an amateur. Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2010: 52) take the view that: 'Lack of professional experience makes everything more difficult. Inexperience creates a whole host of problems...'. Some of these difficulties included having to put on an act that I was a competent practitioner when actually I was a new graduate. I also had to face the difficulties of managing a challenging class and teaching content that I had difficulty in understanding myself. As well as being newly qualified and therefore without substantial experience of being in charge of a class, I did not realise that I had dyslexia. I was facing some of the challenges many probationary teachers face with the additional problem of having a SpLD. Some of the generic challenges of being newly qualified are learning to fit into a school environment as a professional, rather than a student, and learning the rules and routines and conveying competence in meeting the professional standards. However, unknown to me, my dyslexia was making it more difficult to become a competent practitioner. I will now discuss some of these points as they have shaped my professional self and my teacher identity.

On the first day of teaching I met my new class as they arrived, settled down, found their seats and had their eyes fixed upon me. My body began to shake nervously and my hand was trembling so much that it was almost impossible to draw the lines on the register. I distinctly remember one girl sniggering as she noticed my hand was shaking as I struggled to compose myself, trying to look in control to give the impression I knew what I was doing. I was performing a front stage act, but backstage I was cowering. The front stage performance, as illustrated above, was not very convincing and this increased the emotional labour I was experiencing. I was trying, albeit, unsuccessfully, to adopt and manifest an identity as a teacher, which I inwardly felt I had not demonstrated wholly successfully. Danielewicz (2001: 9) argues: 'Here is my claim: becoming a teacher means that an individual must adopt an identity as such'. When I returned home, after this front stage performance, I felt that I had spent the day acting, trying to be someone I was not and in so doing had not actually done a good job or been myself with the children. I concluded that I had performed poorly as an actor, which affected the development of my professional self, making me feel a deep failure.

To compound the precarious sense of my professional self, my class had already been identified, unbeknown to me, as notoriously badly behaved. The previous year they had been taught by 17 different teachers, none of whom had wanted to stay. When I asked a member of staff what the class had been like and what I could expect, she said: 'It's best not to say'. Being inexperienced I did not probe further but, had I done so, perhaps I might have been forearmed for, despite trying all the behaviour management strategies I had learned about while training, each day seemed like a battle. My experiences resonate with Crossley-Holland (2009) who writes about her struggles as a young teacher in London. She notes that she would explain her class rules to the students, only to have many of them broken. She also had to move students into isolation, re-arranging the furniture many times, to keep students back after class, deal with the children answering her back and so forth. These were all features of my experience with my class and sapped my self-belief as a teacher. My prior confidence that I would be able to manage the emotional aspects of teaching was seriously undermined, especially during the first term, and high levels of

emotional labour were expended in coming to school each day and putting on an act. These experiences made me question my professional self and the development of my teacher identity. On reflection lessons which went badly, such as children behaving inappropriately or demonstrating signs of boredom, educated me about why they might have been unsuccessful. They caused me to reflect upon issues such as superficial planning, lack of zealous delivery or a superficial amount of praise or rewards being given.

Another way I learnt about my professional self was experiencing problems in understanding some of the materials I was required to teach. This was exacerbated by the difficulty I had in spelling, handwriting, mathematics and organisation in relation to planning, preparation and assessment (PPA). At this point in my educative journey I still did not know that I had dyslexia, which meant that I struggled through these difficulties without understanding why I was facing them or why they were so problematic. I will now illustrate some of these difficulties as they affected me within the scope of the development of my professional self.

During my first year of teaching I became acutely aware that I had problems with spelling and handwriting. Singleton (2009) argues that spelling is often the most complex literacy skill for those with dyslexia to master. This meant that writing on the board in front of the class or marking exercise books was an added complication in my professional development. The children, their parents, and the teachers who came to observe me were all potential sources of criticism if I misspelt a word or worded a sentence awkwardly. Being exposed in this way was a constant worry and I feared that signs of my (as yet undiagnosed) dyslexia would be manifest not only in class but in the quality of my marking of the children's work. Russell and Cohn (2012) note that underlying difficulties for those with dyslexia can include incorrect spelling, writing words backwards, writing in an inconsistent size and having to take a significant amount of time to plan or write a sentence. These were all challenges I faced and had to deal with.

An additional stress was caused by having to act spontaneously when I had to write on the board with a class of children looking at what I was writing. This

created pressure and anxiety to get it right, especially when being observed by senior management. This meant I was always on my guard about how to spell particular words and structure my sentences, especially in literacy lessons. To avoid potential embarrassment I referred to a dictionary that I kept beneath my desk, to check a spelling, in case, like Ellis (1994) (see Section 2.7.2), I spelt something irregularly. However, this was not always practical as the head teacher often showed parents around, teaching assistants walked in and out and sometimes other staff came in to my room. Additionally, in the normal flow of a lesson there was rarely time to check whether I had spelt something correctly. Often I would have to go with my initial thoughts, which at times could be wrong. I also felt there was a stigma attached to having to look up spellings. However, when time allowed I would check a spelling surreptitiously, feeling guilty like a thief in case I was caught out. Consequently, I was tense and this meant that I was continuously listening for the door to creak open and for someone to come into the classroom. I was hyper-vigilant, wondering what they wanted and what they were looking for. This continual nervousness meant that I felt uneasy and anxious about what someone might discover and make me feel I was some type of liability or fraud. Bradshaw (2005) suggests that feelings of shame can be a pertinent response to the feeling of being out of one's depth in a situation.

My teaching career as an undiagnosed dyslexic began in this way; I felt shame at my perception of being a fraudulent teacher, unable to spell, read, write, plan or teach effectively. I felt as though I was living on borrowed time, surmising that soon the classroom door would swing open and I would be found out to be the charlatan I actually felt I was. My feelings are succinctly summarised by Haigh (2008: 1) as he writes: 'All in all, it is exhausting, depressing and makes me feel like a giant fraud' (see Section 2.7.6).

As well as feeling like a criminal, committing daily acts of fraud, I had now recognised that I had to spend a considerable additional amount of time planning and structuring my lessons. This added significantly to my workload but I found this to be necessary in order for lessons to run smoothly—because of the organisational problems many dyslexic individuals have. Moody (2009: 25) notes that having dyslexia can also impact upon productivity at work:

'Dyslexia affects efficiency in many workplace tasks'. I learnt that if I did not spend time planning meticulously, the lesson would not go well. And these more unsuccessful lessons always seemed to be the ones that would attract the attention of the head teacher as he undertook a 'walk through' of the school. The additional time I needed to spend on scrupulously planning lessons meant that I may have been less effective in developing myself professionally, as I had little time to reflect on my lessons in order to improve my teaching. The repercussions of this were that I did not have much leisure time and was continually exhausted from overworking, meaning that I went home early and avoided socialising. Sometimes my colleagues would ask me to join them for a drink or to go out for a meal at the end of the day. I would often decline due to being over-tired and also afraid that they might ask me educational, pedagogical or praxis-based questions that would highlight my academic and professional shortcomings. Drew and Heritage (1992) argue that organised social settings shape self-construction through institutionalised conversations. The potential of having to deliberate on professional matters made me fearful and I therefore sought to avoid these informal gatherings, consequently limiting my professional development.

A further difficulty I faced was planning lessons in line with the requirements of the school. This involved submitting lengthy explanations of what I intended to teach and what I expected the pupils to learn; furthermore, all lessons had to be self-evaluated. These were then regularly checked by my line manager and often external persons, as the school was undergoing intense LEA intervention, following several unsuccessful inspections. I was concerned that my lesson plans and evaluations would not be adequate and that my poor spelling might be observed and 'found out' and I would be called to give an account of my credentials for teaching when dyslexic. These fears were very real to me and I frequently felt that I would fail classroom inspections and end up being dismissed because of my ineptitude. Leary (1996) suggests that individuals can act a part in order to avoid detection of professional ineptness. These sentiments are pertinent to my experience of self-presentation and the formulation of an external image of professional success.

After only a short time Mr Brown, the head teacher, asked me to see him. He indicated that he knew that I was having difficulty in coping with the workload and managing a problematic class, inferring that the class would be more effectively managed by a more senior teacher. He also highlighted that this challenging class should not have been given to an NQT. Alsup (2006) writes about teacher identity discourses, in which Lois was an example of a successful teacher who used her experience to engage disaffected students, motivating and inspiring them. However, as an NQT I was neither experienced nor had the teaching skills to meet the needs of such a challenging class. Mr Brown also said 'off the record' that if I wanted to resign he would accept my resignation, suggesting that this would be the best solution for all concerned. I felt as though my professional relationship with the head teacher had completely broken down. As a result of being under surveillance, interpersonal relationships became difficult. The notion of Hochschild's (1983) 'emotional management' can be seen in this situation. I sought to manifest an appearance that I was feeling fine about what Mt Brown had said and I would either leave or rapidly enhance my practice. This was a 'deep act' as I was also convincing myself that I could do this. I was also unwavering in faking my emotions at this point, keeping a positive face. Mann (1999) writes about how individuals fake their emotions at work in order to cope, face criticisms and remain in employment. I postulate that Mr Brown was trying to provoke me to react emotionally and resign in haste. However, I sought to remain objective and professional as I was determined to succeed and, instead of making me downcast, this meeting had the opposite effect, causing me to manifest even more resilience than ever before. I had a strong determination to prove to Mr Brown, but more importantly to myself, that I was an able and competent teacher. Pretending to myself that I was competent was a form of deep acting, Hochschild (1983) and required sustained resilience. The emotional labour that this situation created was subsequently detrimental in causing professional burnout later in my career (see below). However, at this point in my career, it proved to be a turning point for the development of my professional self; a minor epiphany. I stopped seeing myself as a fraud and was resolute to succeed in my career. It was a pivotal moment in which character was manifest and identity created (Denzin, 1989). There is a paradox here; the very event that could have broken, crushed and

destroyed my confidence as a teacher aided me to be more determined and try even harder, despite having undiagnosed dyslexia. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009: 177) note that teacher identity can be formed in a range of ways:

> A teacher's identity shifts over time and under the influence of a range of factors both internal to the individual such as emotion and external to the individual such as job and life experiences in particular contexts.

My experience of criticism shaped my identity as a teacher in helping me to produce more resilience in order to counteract criticism that could so easily have been detrimental to my professional development. McGuinness (2012) argues that rejection and criticism can lead an individual to emotional desolation or, conversely, to exercise practical and psychological resilience, which was arguably my response to Mr Brown's evaluation of me as a teacher.

In reacting to this episode I rapidly developed a range of strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour, which was a significant problem not only with my class but throughout the school and as the academic year continued I became more confident in my ability to teach. I also learnt about 'inner' and 'outer' faces, a concept similar to Goffman's (1990) front and back stage presentations that Markham (1995) uses to describe how a person presents themselves in different situations. For example, I had to assume a 'professional' role even though my inner self felt 'out of my depth' in dealing with challenging behaviour and teaching in a clear and confident manner. My worst fears were not realised and I completed the year with some measure of success and a sense that my professional self had developed, but this was to some extent negated when I was made redundant from this post. After my redundancy in 2007, I decided to return to academic study and during this time I was diagnosed with dyslexia (see Section 4.2.2).

The next school I worked in, commencing in 2008, was a pleasant rural school in Hampshire significantly different from my previous school in terms of location, catchment, standards and behaviour. There I would achieve a number of successes and develop my practice further, thus helping to cement my professional self. My Year 4 class was well behaved, attentive and a pleasure to teach, and they appeared to enjoy learning, this was diametrically opposed to my first experience of teaching. However, the challenges to my professional self

were no less daunting. I now knew I had dyslexia and the problem was managing my dyslexia whilst motivating children who were academically very able and required extension tasks, which sometimes challenged me beyond my capabilities, especially in relation to mental mathematics. Although the children that I taught were 8 and 9 years old, some of them were working considerably above age expectations and were able to answer mental arithmetic questions quickly. A consequence of having dyslexia is that rapid thinking, involving mental calculations is problematic, similar to the struggles experienced by Vittles (2009) (see Section 2.7.6). This was what posed an issue for me in class. In order to maintain a swift pace to the lesson I would have to plan out carefully the mental maths questions I would ask and not deviate from the prepared sequence of questions and classroom interactions. However, this presented problems, as learning is not linear and teachers need to take into account progression and consolidation. Consequently, I had to invent questions that after asking required more thinking than I had time to solve.

During one lesson observation by the head teacher and deputy head teacher I could see that the children were excelling during the mental maths part of the lesson, so I sought to maintain the pace of the lesson by asking some quick-fire questions, which were not scripted within my planning or preparation. This led to complications for me. When I asked unscripted or unrehearsed questions I could not work out rapidly enough whether the children had answered correctly or not. Like many other dyslexic individuals, I had difficulty in learning times tables, number sequences and patterns, as well as rapid computation, and this was noted during the observation. When the head teacher was giving me her feedback after the lesson she stated that when I had asked one child a question I said that they had answered correctly when they had not. With this type of feedback it was important that I tried to be composed and to appear shocked that I might have made a mistake, maintaining that it was a slip of the tongue rather than a calculation issue. She graciously stated that it was probably me trying to maintain a rapid pace to the lesson or I had misheard the child. I remember nodding and agreeing with her outlook, thinking that I had narrowly escaped being found out again.

I was putting on a performance giving the appearance of stability and confidence (Goffman, 1963). In this act, I was building a substantive barrier between the backstage emotions and vulnerability and what I was seeking to portray in the foreground of the front stage act. This was because the fear of being found out to be 'dyslexic' or a 'fraud', as I saw it, continued to linger over me. Coping involves the alteration of cognition and behaviour to manage an internal or external demand that appears specifically challenging (Snyder and Ford, 1987). This instance of coping allowed me to look as though I was shocked by the remark that I may have got an answer wrong, which was in reality a concern for me from my earliest memories of teaching. Coping therefore meant that I had to deal with the internal feeling of being demoralised, whilst pretending to be a competent practitioner. As a consequence of this experience I employed a coping strategy to mask my dyslexia by selecting lessons for performance management review observations that did not require me to make mental calculations.

When trying to deal with professional challenges I learnt to employ compensation strategies and coping techniques; for example, by using similar word and number problems and changing the numbers slightly in order to reduce the mental calculation load required. In my planning and preparation I also wrote out extension questions for most lessons, with the answers, to avoid being 'caught out'. In addition I selected a child who I knew would often get the answer right to come up to the board and explain what they had done to solve the problem, thus hopefully giving the correct answer and allowing me time to think through the problem myself without losing face. However, there was no guarantee that the child could answer the problem correctly and I was highly conscious of not giving everyone in the class an opportunity to display their mathematical ability. These were issues I had to contend with whilst teaching and were problematic for the professional I wanted to be.

From an optimistic perspective, having to work hard at planning and thinking through every permutation, I was able to empathise with learners who need additional time to think and solve mathematical problems. Burns and Bell (2010) argue that teachers with dyslexia are in a stronger position than those without dyslexia to educate other professionals in the manifestation of empathy towards

their pupils, helping them to become more aware of dyslexic pupils' needs, thus expanding the capacity for inclusion and social equality in educational institutions. As a result, aspects of my professional self such as an appreciation of the difficulties some children have in learning, have made me more empathetic as a teacher. Having dyslexia makes me more aware of some children's needs but does not make up for a lack of subject knowledge or rapid recall of times tables or the ability to perform calculations quickly.

Nicolson and Fawcett (2010) in Section 2.1 describe how it can take ten times as long for the dyslexic brain to process something, which would not be conducive to a fast-paced lesson. I was in a position of responsibility, possessing a dyslexic teacher identity and yet finding subjects such as maths time consuming and stressful. My limited subject knowledge of particular areas in mathematics became personally apparent. Fan *et al.* (2013) argue from an international perspective that teachers' subject knowledge is crucial in pupils' acquisition of mathematical proficiency. Moreover, successful teaching of students is strongly influenced by a desire for education, which is aligned within a structured curriculum and precise lesson delivery. My awareness of the weakness of my mathematical subject knowledge and at times the delivery of different concepts was a concern to me and militated against my sense of being a proficient, experienced practitioner. However, I was persistent and always ensured I knew how to work out a question before teaching it. This did, however, make planning and teaching a more complicated and challenging task and increased my workload and the determination to develop my professional self came at a personal cost to my emotional selfhood (see the 'personal self' above). Nevertheless I have been successful in my teaching career, achieving extremely positive outcomes for lesson observations both by senior management, the LEA and Ofsted, even when faced with the difficulties that dyslexia can bring.

However, the strain of additional workload, the cumulative effect of 'surface' and 'deep acting' in an attempt to conceal my dyslexia, and pretend to myself that I was capable and competent eventually caused a sense of failure, fear and depression. Moody (2009: 167) writes: 'It will come as no surprise that all the emotional difficulties, communication problems, and conflicts that accompany

dyslexia may sometimes cause a person to become depressed'. In the summer of 2011 after working especially hard in preparation for the summer term I became very unwell and I was diagnosed with severe depression.

I felt that there was a sense of stigma attached to the condition and likened it to how I was made to feel at school when directly and indirectly compared to my peers (see above). Endler (1990: 117) argues:

> Throughout history the mentally ill have been tortured, pitied, scorned, feared, laughed at, and denigrated but not always cured. There has been and still is, a stigma attached to psychological problems.

There still appears to be some confusion and potential misunderstanding about the nature of depression and I remember reflecting upon what the office staff and teaching staff would say about my condition being a mental illness. In addition I reflected upon what the parents of the children I had been teaching might think if they knew that I was absent from work due to depression; I considered the potential responses that might be prompted at the school gates. At times like this I felt worse as I thought about the potential stigma associated with depression.

In reality the stigma came from some members of staff and not the parents at all. I was made to feel I had placed an overwhelming burden on the school financially and practically by my absence due to being ill. It was also implied that I had been 'skiving' and had not considered the significant detriment my absence would cause. I find a similarity in Hepburn (2012), as he cites an example of a teacher whose mental health was questioned as to its validity and veracity; the teacher was told to just get on with the job despite a severe anxiety attack. On my return to work after Christmas the stigmatisation continued, making me feel alienated towards the school and an imposter who was not welcome anymore. The head teacher was critical and hostile towards me in her approach and attitude and I felt completely isolated and downtrodden as she appeared to incrementally grind me down. As a result of her continual criticisms and misunderstanding about depression I felt compelled to resign, and on May 31 2012 I handed her my notice.

This was an epiphany moment; at the same time I had a sense of relief and release from the head's stranglehold. I have been educated by having depression; realising it is not possible to dust your own self off and pick yourself up or suddenly snap out of some low mood, but that it is a serious condition which requires time off, life-style changes and medical help. I have learned from this episode and, if I return to the classroom, I will not exhibit the extreme levels of resilience which became a destructive driving force, but use it as a positive force to overcome some of the difficulties that having dyslexia can bring. Since resigning I have focused on completing my Doctoral thesis.

4.3   Summary

This chapter has provided a synopsis of my autobiography and summarised the development of selfhood through the personal, academic and professional selves. In Chapter 5 I discuss these selves with reference to the specific events, or epiphanies, discussed in this chapter in order further to analyse the three selves with respect to the theoretical constructs of resilience, stigma, significant others, stigma and the development of self-awareness through *Bildung*.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

This chapter is an analysis of the narrative accounts discussed in Chapter 4 that focussed on the development of my selfhood with particular emphases on my personal, professional and academic selves. This chapter draws upon specific theoretical concepts to facilitate thematic analysis of my lived experiences and how these have contributed to my growing sense of self-awareness and moral development. Within this chapter I refer to Denzin's (1989) types and forms of epiphanies as a structural guide that provides the architecture to the analysis. This is because the specific events I have described in Chapter 4 are critical moments that have been catalysts for many of the changes in my life. These have taken me in new directions and have resulted in the development of my selfhood and are therefore pertinent to reflections on my educative journey. Furthermore, these events ground my life story in specific social, cultural and historical contexts that enable my narrative to be interpreted in terms of the particularities of my life whilst also offering more broadly those features of my experiences that are pertinent to others (Erben, 1998).

I ascribe Denzin's different levels of the epiphanies within my life to the following events that are discussed further and analysed within this chapter:

- The major events: diagnosis of dyslexia, grandparents' deaths, conversion to Christianity;
- The cumulative events: problems with reading and mathematics, having problems with academic assignments and exams;
- The minor events: wearing glasses and being the hero and also the villain, reactions of parents and teachers, becoming depressed;
- The relived events: recalling grandparents' deaths, issues when teaching.

I will use these different types of epiphany in order to focus upon specific themes illustrated in the discussion and analysis of the three selves in the previous chapter. These are: 1) the development of resilience, 2) the issues associated with stigma and 3) the effect of significant others. My narrative is interpreted in this chapter through the lens of these theoretical themes and they

are employed to illustrate how each has shaped and determined the evolution of my selfhood and identity as I have pursued my educative journey and the development of *Bildung*.

5.1   Resilience

According to Zolli and Healy (2012) applied patterns of resilience can cause the self to flourish and prevail. In this section I reflect on how I have been resilient and suggest how this has contributed to the development of my selfhood. In the account of my personal self I explain how I discovered that I was dyslexic as a postgraduate student at the age of 23; this was a significant moment in my life– a major epiphany that fundamentally affected how I regarded myself. The diagnosis initially made me feel weak, vulnerable and fragile; this was due to feeling as though I had been branded with a label that might be a cause of stigmatisation. However, I had learnt through the previous experiences of my life to face difficult situations with equanimity and emerge triumphant, even though at times these seemed like enormous setbacks. Cyrulnik and Macey (2009) propose that the inner strength mustered by resilience can set a person free from past failings. As I reflect upon my life I can more readily acknowledge past difficulties and can trace signs of resilience that have kept me buoyant even through the toughest moments.

This is evident in my academic life, for example when I was at junior school, learning to read and write despite having significant difficulties doing so (see 'the academic self'). Furthermore, because I have been resilient and determined to overcome the adversities I recounted in the previous chapter in relation to varying aspects of my life I have not experienced any long-term detriment to my selfhood. In fact these setbacks and being able to triumph over them have enhanced my selfhood in various ways and I believe have added to the development of my character. I now discuss some of the key moments in my life that have a) illustrated my resilience and b) enhanced my capacity to be resilient.

In 2008 when studying for a Master's degree at Reading University I was diagnosed with dyslexia for the first time. This was a main epiphany event for me (Denzin, 1989). Despite not feeling comfortable doing so I demonstrated

resilience in taking the initiative, after initial reluctance and much prevarication, to go to the dyslexia assessment centre. The educational and social context relating to dyslexia had shifted in the years leading up to my diagnosis. There was a greater acceptance of SpLDs, rather than seeing individuals as 'backward' (Copeland, 2002). However, the negative experiences of infant and junior school days were a contributory factor in my reluctance to go ahead with the test.

I felt a deep sense of nervousness when faced with having to complete sets of psychometric tests that could potentially 'prove' I was dyslexic. As I completed them I sat at a small desk next to the assessor and concur with Chilcoate (2006), who felt uneasy having to sit in close proximity to the teacher (see Section 2.7.4). However, at this stage in my life I was psychologically mature enough to be able to recognise that being assessed for dyslexia might be beneficial rather than detrimental to my studies: it was especially significant as I knew that I had some sort of learning difficulty but initially I did not want to be assessed for fear of the outcome. However, my desire to know why I was having so many difficulties academically overcame the reactions I perceived I might get if I was categorised as a 'fool'. It is evident that within my internal mental struggles I sought to undergo an evaluative assessment of the benefits and limitations or disadvantages of being assessed for dyslexia. Ultimately, I realised that the benefits of being assessed outweighed the drawbacks and I demonstrated resilience in attending the assessment and dealing with Dr Edward's diagnosis. I wanted access to provision, such as additional help by tutors who understood my condition, who I hoped would help me without judgement or threat of feeling intimidated or of being teased, as was the case in my earlier life (see Section 4.2.1) for having dyslexia.

After the assessment results confirmed that I had a SpLD, I had to exercise resilience to accept the diagnosis and develop compensatory strategies to manage the condition. At first I did not want to accept or acknowledge the diagnosis and therefore had to overcome my pride. This required me to reflect upon the reasons why I decided to be assessed and the potentially positive outcomes that learning about my condition could offer. For example, being able to understand why I had particular difficulties and how I could achieve, despite

not finding academic work easy. Coming to terms with a dyslexic identity meant that I would have to be resilient in coping with a 'label'. This meant not allowing it to affect me negatively but employing strategies to cope with the difficulties a SpLD can create. In so doing I learnt how to revise in a kinaesthetic way and to work hard, so that as far as possible my dyslexia did not reveal itself. Martin and Marsh (2005: 55) argue that 'academic buoyancy' is the ability to successfully deal with coursework requirements, assignment pressures and coping with examinations. The cumulative events of having to work particularly hard on academic papers required significant resilience in order to be successful academically and achieve in the same way as others.

Within the professional arena of my life I also struggled when working out mathematics problems, especially when under time pressure. My determination to succeed as a teacher meant that I had to adopt strategies to recompense my inability to work through mental maths problems quickly and I had to allow additional planning and preparation time to ensure I knew exactly what I would say or write on the board during the lesson. Reid (2011: 278) writes:

> People with dyslexia, whether students or in the workplace, usually find their own way of coping with situations that can put demands on them. Many of these coping strategies are individual for that person, but it is often informative to learn from the experiences of others in similar situations.

Many of these coping techniques I adopted were a way of getting through the day successfully and completing my teaching satisfactorily. In so doing I had to be resilient to manage the extra workload and pressure of time to plan in detail. In addition they masked a larger personal concern; the prospect of my dyslexia becoming common knowledge and being stigmatised as a result (see below). In addition, with respect to these relived events I have had to apply significant resilience when teaching in a mainstream school, especially when managing children who have many learning differences including dyslexia. The paradox of this situation, when the aspirations of the professional and personal self collided, meant that sometimes I had to be cautious to ensure that I was not being 'unprofessional'; thus I had to have a measured response to those with a SpLD. As a professional I was required to act with integrity and wisdom whilst demonstrating a sympathetic approach to those with SEN. Disclosing that I had

a SpLD and thereby giving an empathetic response was a frequent temptation but one that I considered would be unprofessional. This was a difficult, and at times a challenging, experience that required me to be resilient and maintain a professional attitude. As a relived event, I could reflect on these experiences and contextualise them historically and educationally, by noting how I was not treated with respect during my school years as a child with learning difficulties (see Section 4.2.1).

In my professional life I have therefore had to be resilient as I relived events that had been cumulative experiences during my school days and as a student in higher education. However, my reactions to these later events were informed as a result of the major event, that of being diagnosed with dyslexia. This was helpful, in that I knew why I was having difficulties, but it also caused additional stress in not wanting to be recognised as having a SpLD by my colleagues or the children I taught.

Eventually the pressure of the amount of work and the emotional labour involved in managing a 'non-dyslexic' identity at school became unsustainable (see Section 4.2.3). The high levels of resilience I had previously shown were self-defeating and became a negative rather than positive personal attribute; as a result I became ill. However, on reflection my illness became a further lesson in my educative development and I consider it has facilitated the development of my selfhood.

The death of my grandfather was a major turning point in my life and the death of my grandmother, just a year later, created a relived event. My grandmother's death brought remembrance of the feelings that the major epiphany had created; and I re-experienced thoughts of great sadness and emotional grief, sorrow and pain. The significance of my grandfather's death was pertinent in 2000 to my development of selfhood, particularly my personal self. I had always held my grandfather in high esteem and sought to please him by aiming to do my best in whatever task was set. However, after his death I came to realise that what I did was not primarily to please another person but was for my own self-development. Consequently, I learnt that after grieving I would have to live my life without his company and approbation and learn to depend upon my

inner resources of resilience. Recalling my grandparents' deaths and the issues I had with dyslexia when teaching (professional self) are the relived events within Denzin's schema, which required substantial fortitude to manage. Being reminded of lost loved ones through various circumstances of life required me to become 'hardy' to these experiences. However, this was not always easy. For example, when I saw someone who looked similar to my grandfather this triggered memories of what he was like. In addition certain clothes, places or smells brought back memories of him, renewing the feeling of loss that had, until that moment, been submerged.

These major and relived events required strength of character to recognise and accept what had happened whilst having the resilience to grieve appropriately. Without forgetting the memories and fondness for lost loved ones, the bonds I had when my grandparents were alive could not be maintained and I was able to resolve my grief and successfully continue with my life (Bonanno *et al.*, 2002). One particular way I was able to do this was through another major event; my conversion to Biblical Christianity. This allowed me strength to cope with the death of my grandparents and provided the determination to succeed and overcome the problems associated with my dyslexia. Becoming a Christian did not prevent the trials of life but it gave me inner strength and grace to overcome the tribulations that dyslexia can sometimes create. Newell (2010: 1) forges the link between faith and resilience, suggesting that, for Christians, resilience is the by-product of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ His Son:

> Resilience provides an inoculation against the effects of personal and social trauma. What is resilience? In our tradition of faith, God-given resilience is just another name for the gift of faith. Faith in the One, mighty in word and deed, who comes to us—not as a triumphant figure of power, but as a servant of the loving God. This is a homily about resilience... Holy resilience. A synonym for resilience is buoyancy. Holy buoyancy is the gift of God in Jesus Christ.

Personal faith meant that I exhibited a robust attitude, especially when faced with adverse conditions. I would differ with some of Newell's testimonial, as resilience based in God has not immunised me against suffering although it does supply an inner resource to draw upon. Scalise and Scheer (2011: 1)

argue that resilient faith is an eminence of faith that helps an individual through trouble, temptation and trials and as a result to become stronger in their faith and character. Holy resilience, for me, helped me to make sense of the different occurrences of life even when adverse situations arose. However, I have illustrated that even prior to my conversion I exhibited a resilient attitude in the face of adversity, which is apparent in all the spheres of my life, and became more clearly manifested after I became a Christian.

5.2   Stigma

Stigmatisation can be historically associated with the branding of the skin by burning or marking the flesh as a matter of judgement against the accused (Harper, 2012). Whilst physical pain and marking is thankfully not part of stigmatisation within current educational contexts, value judgements and the use of pejorative terms made towards an individual who is regarded as differing from the norm can nevertheless cause high levels of emotional distress and discomfort, which result in that individual feeling psychologically damaged (Goffman, 1963). For example, this may transpire through overt disdain and unfavourable treatment, verbally or non-verbally, of a person with a SpLD. For the scope of this thesis, stigmatisation refers specifically to the prejudiced attitudes and actions shown towards people with dyslexia.

As I reflect upon significant moments in my life and review my educative journey, I recall a number of occasions when I have felt stigmatised. Being diagnosed with dyslexia was a major turning point for me, but this event in itself did not cause me to feel stigmatised, although I was afraid that it could do so- as witnessed by my excessive self-imposed workload whilst teaching. Rather, the cumulative and minor epiphanies that occurred as a result of having dyslexia are those that have left me with feelings of being stigmatised. These moments encapsulate other people's reactions to my dyslexia, such as difficulties with mathematics and reading as well as having problems with other academic tasks (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

One area of stigmatisation that I will analyse as a minor epiphany was having to wear glasses with a black patch and later specialised corrective lenses. The reactions of some my peers, discussed in the section on academic self, set me

apart from everyone else and created a form of stigmatisation that could be regarded both positively and negatively. For some children I was given the status of a hero, whereas for others I was perceived as a fool. These events marked me out as different from the others and provided opportunities for others to either shame me or give me celebrity status. However, I sought to use the experiences as an opportunity to take a positive stance to negate the stigmatisation I received, thus exhibiting resilience in the face of adversity, in deciding to adopt the role of a pirate (black patch) or a sunglass wearer (green lenses).

My peers were not alone in making me feel stigmatised. Whilst at school, I perceived I was unnecessarily compared to my more able classmates by my teachers. In Dickens's novel *Hard Times*, Sissy Jupe cannot define a horse as expected but Bitzer is able to perform the required task perfectly and as a result she is left feeling inadequate and stupid (Dickens, 2012/1854). I recognise these feelings as my efforts were negatively contrasted to other children's superior work. On one occasion I was asked to recount the key points of our class story. I could not do this and remember writing little. Consequently, some pupils sniggered as the teacher reprimanded me for the quality and quantity of my work; others looked at me with pained expressions. The negative impact of stigmatisation often appeared to occur because the teacher assumed that all pupils had the ability to complete a task, regardless of individual needs. At the time (1980s and 1990s) the knowledge of dyslexia and the provision for it were in their infancy and teachers were being asked to consider the different talents and ways of learning that the dyslexic child might have, rather than seeing dyslexia as a difference in cognitive functioning or brain activity (see Section 2.5). Additionally, the umbrella term of 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN), under which SpLDs may be included, has developed over recent decades, including the introduction of government legislation to promote inclusive education. However, as Snowling noted in 2000 (p. 216), the practical nature of effective intervention is still embryonic:

> while it is now clear that dyslexic children need more than the usual diet of classroom support if they are to overcome their difficulties, we are a long way from catering for their needs.

Ofsted's report to the Audit Commission (2004) included the recommendation of statementing children with SEN, highlighting that many children with SEN were still inadequately catered for in mainstream schools (Warnock and Norwich, 2010).

One teacher's reaction in front of the rest of the class indicated that she was unaware that I was unable to process the story and then recall what I was supposed to have heard (see Section 2.7.4). However, even if she was unaware of my needs her behaviour was not acceptable as it made me feel humiliated and indicated a lack of inclusive practice. I would echo the remarks Beech uses: 'when I look back I can't help but feel that the education system failed me in a number of ways at this time' (Beech and Gilbert, 2013: 31). At the time it appears that my educational needs were not understood, diagnosed, assessed or taken specific account of. In addition, the retorts of some children indicated that they did not understand the difficulties I faced as a young person with undiagnosed dyslexia and sought to judge my performance against their own. However, even as an adult I am still conscious that people can make negative judgements about people with dyslexia and, although they may not ridicule me, I still face people's lack of awareness and question whether to openly disclose my dyslexia (Bartlett *et al.*, 2010).

Stigmatisation also occurred within my professional life. As a primary school teacher I was responsible for planning, delivering, marking and assessing the work of a class of pupils. This type of responsibility placed significant pressure upon me to be organised and to arrange and implement the necessary provisions in order to fulfil my duties as a class teacher. Having dyslexia made completing paperwork difficult, as well as making practical organisational issues more stressful than for those who did not have dyslexia. In addition to the increased workload and pressure of completing the tasks described, I battled regularly with trying to disguise the fact that I had dyslexia. In so doing I would plan excessively and work hard to do my best with a view to impressing senior management so that they, or anyone else, did not suspect that I had dyslexia. The rationale for this was to avoid stigmatisation. Being a teacher with dyslexia appeared as something which was not acceptable (Moody, 2009).

In initial teacher training (ITT) I had learnt the theory of managing SEN and SpLDs but it was never mentioned or implied that someone training to teach might have dyslexia and, in a professional capacity, might have to apply what was taught as good practice to their own life. As a result it was my assumption that teachers would not have any form of additional need and having a SpLD was not 'acceptable', and if this was the case it was wise not to disclose the fact. Bartlett and Moody (2010) write about the unsympathetic nature of some line managers compared to the more sympathetic college or university tutor with a knowledge and understanding of SpLDs. Although these remarks are generalisations, the potential for superficial levels of understanding in the workplace compared to those of an educational institution are important factors in recognising why significant others may stigmatise you for having dyslexia. If a line manager does not understand what dyslexia is and how it affects you, as I assumed after my diagnosis, it is necessary to disguise the difficulties caused by the condition in order to avoid stigmatisation.

The stress of actual and potential stigmatisation, 'covering my tracks' to avoid being caught as a 'dyslexic' and having to work harder than others to achieve the same things, resulted in professional burnout. The negative impact of being overly resilient and allowing myself to feel as though I was being stigmatised contributed to the development of severe depression. I postulate that, because I learnt compensatory strategies to manage each day, I applied resilience to such a degree that in the summer of 2011, after periods of significant workload and the stress of 'masking' my dyslexia, I collapsed both physically and mentally and was no longer able to continue with a 'normal' working day. The state of my mental health, losing sleep and developing a sense of mania, were all portrayed in my reactions and behaviours at this time.

I ascribe my experience of depression as a minor event within the notion of epiphanies, as it appeared to be a temporary, phasic, bodily and psychological reaction to the major event of being dyslexic. Although I have classified my depressive episode as a minor event, this should not detract from its powerful effect in debilitating me for a significant period of time (around six months of severe illness, in which I was unable to function normally or rationally). Stigmatisation with depression is common (Atkinson, 2005). While all this was

occurring I was conscious that I was potentially liable to stigma by people who felt that I was not as mentally unwell as I was claiming, who would suggest that 'it's all in your head' and that I ought to 'pull myself together' and sort my life out.

In summary, stigmatisation occurred within my life across the three selves discussed in Chapter 4. From my infant and junior education I felt as though I was different from other children. I was also compared to my peers, which gave me a sense of inadequacy when I was seen as someone who was less able than other children. Within the professional self I have been conscious that I should not let my dyslexia manifest itself overly, in order to avoid stigma. As a result I had to display significant amounts of resilience and work particularly hard to prevent my dyslexia being obvious. These high levels of resilience meant that within my personal self I eventually burnt out and developed depression.

5.3   Significant Others

This section synthesises the effect of significant others on my selfhood. In the personal self and overlapping nature of selfhood, my grandfather is a significant other whose life, and death in 2000, had a profound effect upon me (see Section 4.2.1). I was close to my grandfather and enjoyed his company, playing games with him and making him proud of my achievements. His death meant that I grieved for the loss of his life but afterwards was able to manifest degrees of resilience appropriately to continue with life despite feelings of loss and the difficulties having dyslexia generated (see Section 5.4).

The significant other in another major event that of my initial diagnosis with a SpLD was Dr Edwards (see Section 4.2.1). In the cumulative event, it was my mother who asked me to do additional pieces of work as a way of catching up with my peers. In the minor epiphany, the significant others were my friends and peers, to whom I was compared. Finally, in the relived event, it was the scores I achieved as a result of Dr Edwards' conducting the dyslexia assessment test, a pertinent reminder of what I had experienced at school when being graded as one of the lowest in the class.

I was formally diagnosed with dyslexia in 2008. Dr Edwards exemplifies a significant other who created a mixed response in me. Initially, she made me feel as though I was behind the national population, as my centile scores were low, reminding me of the times at school when I was unfairly and unnecessarily compared to my peers. However, at the same time she enhanced my self-awareness so that for the first time I was able to put a name to the difficulties I had had as a child and young adult. This empowered me and made me realise that I was not unintelligent, as I had sometimes felt, but that I was struggling in trying to manage a SpLD. These sentiments concur with Massey (2008), who argues that dyslexia is not an issue of IQ but of organisation, especially when writing (see Section 2.7.2). Some of my biggest hurdles, from infant school to university, had been organising my thoughts in written tasks and assignments. As a result of my diagnosis by Dr Edwards I was able to understand with more clarity what was 'wrong' with me and begin to consider strategies to overcome having dyslexia. This was a significant turning point in my life and had a positive effect on my sense of self.

Both of my parents were supportive of my education and desired me to do my best. From my earliest memories (at infant school) my mother was particularly concerned about how far my attainment deviated from others in the class. As a result, between the ages of 7 and 11 she worked with me at home, showing me flash cards and videos, playing word games, and using number quizzes and other educational materials in an attempt to help me make academic progress. As a young boy I greatly disliked having to do additional work as well as my set homework. I used to question why I had to do this extra work when I was sure that other children were not doing it. Despite not enjoying what I was asked to do, as I reflect back upon these experiences I can see that my mother had a positive influence on my sense of self. I can see how she demonstrated her love, care and concern for me by placing my educational needs as a central part of her life, even though I was unable to appreciate her efforts at the time. She positively affected my sense of self and I am humbled that she spent so much time with me. This has shaped my sense of selfhood, when I realise how selfless she was and how in the future, if I have children, I can learn from her example of kindness.

5.4   Development of Self-awareness and *Bildung*

I will now discuss the development of my selfhood and moral character in relation to the notion of *Bildung*. This section draws together the analysis of my experiences discussed in the previous sections of the chapter and illustrates how they have contributed to my self-development and moral character. Self-awareness emerges as part of a developmental process. Consequently, as self-awareness is achieved, perceptions of personality, strengths and weaknesses, thoughts, motivations and beliefs can be more clearly understood by an individual. As a result, attitudes, emotions, responses, interpretations can be altered as you gain a better understanding of yourself and how you relate to other people.

The major epiphany of finding out that I had dyslexia meant that I understood for the first time some of the reasons why I had had so many difficulties during my education. Goodwin and Thomson (2012: 44) suggest that sometimes identifying dyslexia in adults can be challenging as individuals find ways of compensating for difficulties; 'compensated dyslexics'. Until the assessment I had unconsciously concealed the fact that I had a SpLD and later this became a conscious decision that I rationalised as a fear of being stigmatised (Kosmos and Kidd, 1991; Goffman, 1963).

Although the initial diagnosis from Dr Edwards was unwelcome, I came to accept that an understanding of the condition was paramount to my success as a learner battling through the daily difficulties which a SpLD can create. Researching the condition to gain a better understanding of dyslexia does not prevent its effects, but by enhancing my knowledge I was not only better able to cope with adversities but I knew where to find the most effective provision and support for my needs. Knowing that I had dyslexia and subsequently researching the condition has made me more able to reflect on my own life through a different lens and this has provided me with an alternative and more balanced perception of my selfhood. Furthermore, of equal importance and, perhaps, more importantly for my professional self, it is this self-awareness that has enabled me to have a better understanding of others who have a SpLD. Being 'different' can cause you to become the butt of jokes and victimised as

the odd one out (Schmitt, 1994). However, I have been able to use these experiences to my advantage and consider carefully how a child with a SpLD is to be treated and have their needs met. As a result I seek to ensure that children I teach are not ridiculed because they have different needs. I often use 'circle time' (an interactive discussion in which topical matters are shared, addressing personal, social and emotional issues) as a way of discussing with the class how we can accept and value our differences and accept diversity. I believe that 'circle time' and other inclusive strategies that I have implemented ensure that children in my class do not feel stigmatised, as I did. My self-knowledge as a person with dyslexia and knowledge of the condition have therefore enhanced my empathy with those with a SpLD and made me more reflective and sensitive to their needs. I postulate that my understanding of the possible damaging effects on the development of selfhood of having a SpLD and the stigma it can cause has heightened my self-awareness; this has positively affected my moral character.

The second major event was the death of my grandfather followed soon after by my grandmother's death (see Section 4.2.1). Although both deaths were significant and the relived events of remembering both of them were painful, the death of my grandfather affected me profoundly and is a prominent feature of my educative journey. Brown and Winn (2009: 10) write: 'Pain can feel so excruciating that it seizes your attention...'. At the time, the pain of death was, as Brown and Winn describe, an all-consuming raw pain; the emotional trauma of losing a loved one took me a long time to overcome but, as discussed earlier, I was resilient and determined to continue with my life. My grandfather's death and the relived event when my grandmother died made me question the purpose of life. Even though thoughts and memories of them brought both pleasure and anguish I resolved to honour them by continuing to aspire to be successful in my life in the way that I had been encouraged to do, especially by my grandfather. This approach has helped me not only to find a 'conclusion' to their lives but it has increased my fortitude and the development of my character.

The third major epiphany was my conversion to Christianity. This was when I saw for the first time how I was in need of a relationship with God, something

which had never crossed my mind before. It may be described as a form of enlightenment by the Holy Spirit in my heart, soul and mind. Keller (2003: 1) writes:

> First, we are not capable of finding God unless we experience spiritual conversion initiated by God. Second, Christian conversion is not a call to morality and religion; it is a challenge to morality and religion. Third, conversion happens by the transformation of the Holy Spirit.

I fundamentally attribute my conversion to Christianity to the work of God, which was assisted by the arrangement of circumstances which occurred in my life. Through the supernatural work of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, I was convinced that I had to respond to the gospel ('good news' of how to become a Christian—repenting of your sins, asking God to forgive you and asking Christ to dwell within your life), a message I had heard before but had seen in it no real specific relevance to my own life. However, by supernatural origin I was able to see for the first time this message was for me, rather like a personal invitation to come and be saved. During 2001, I felt drawn for the first time to God, seeing that Christianity was both unique and sacred, and subsequently became a Christian.

This experience facilitated resilience and the development of selfhood in that I no longer solely depended upon my own strength to contend with the difficulties dyslexia brought but I was able to rely upon divine help. In Biblical literature Jesus, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane shortly before His death, received God the Father's help through the ministering angel, to strengthen Him for the task ahead (Holy Bible, Matthew 26: 36–56; Mark 14: 32–42; Luke 22: 39–46). Although I do not suggest I had such a task as the incarnate Lord, I did find that God helped me through difficult times, strengthening me as I have developed my dyslexic identity, even in the most problematic situations. Dunn (1994) argues that God ministers to individual believers through the challenges of life. I would argue that through the circumstances of my life and the difficulties I had contending with dyslexia meant I leant, by faith, upon God for solace and help.

The cumulative events and continuing difficulties as a result of having dyslexia are things which I still have to live with on a daily basis (see Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). I still battle with the issues I had as a child: reading, writing, spelling and

so forth. However, I have not allowed them to gain mastery over me; rather, I have sought to gain mastery over them. In my professional life, I continue to face difficulties associated with having dyslexia, that are outlined in Chapters 2 and 4, but I have sought to work hard so that they cease to be such an issue. In so doing I have developed my professional self by finding ways around the problems. I have also sought to change my outlook in relation to how I view the nature of dyslexia, noting that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Some of my academic limitations are associated with having dyslexia but I also have many strengths, including those which I can use effectively for the benefit of others. For example, one of my references from a previous head teacher stated that: 'Jonathan is a gifted and talented teacher'. These sentiments highlight that I was, despite the difficulties dyslexia posed, an able and effective practitioner, who should not be stigmatised for being dyslexic.

The educative insights that came from having depression, which I regard as a minor epiphany, have become a vehicle to drive changes in my personal, academic and professional life. Almedom (2005) suggests that recovery from depression and mental health problems can allow a person the opportunity to develop resilience and achieve post-traumatic growth. Joseph (2013: 1) states:

> Post-traumatic growth refers to how adversity can often be a springboard to a new and more meaningful life in which people re-evaluate their priorities, deepen their relationships, and find new understandings of who they are. Post-traumatic growth is not simply about coping; it refers to changes that cut to the very core of our way of being in the world.... Post-traumatic growth does not necessarily mean that the person will be entirely free of the memories of what has happened to them, the grief they experience or other forms of distress but that they live their lives more meaningfully in the light of what happened.

After being very unwell I have developed post-traumatic growth, subsequently using negative life experiences such as bereavement, the complexities of having dyslexia and so forth as ways to successfully 'move on' and cope with the challenges of life.

I have also developed practical strategies and altered my attitude to work. On reflection, professional 'burn out' taught me to manage my workload carefully and, even though I seek to do my best for the children I teach and be in a state of preparedness, I am now conscious that there is a 'cut off' point at which I will

stop working, even if this means leaving tasks undone. Before my illness this was something which I would have never considered. I believe that having depression was a positive experience because I have developed personal mental resources and can now recognise some of the positive aspects that have come out of the situation. I have also been able to use my experience of depression to help other people who have undergone a similar experience, by listening to them and, where appropriate, offering them advice. As a result, the development of my character that has ensued has been twofold: I am better able to understand myself and I have become more attuned to the moral identity of others. I have become a member of a local society campaigning to develop awareness of dyslexia and of depression. Furthermore, I am also a member of a local Evangelical Reformed Church. MacIntyre (2013: 256) writes: 'Notice also that... the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities...'. The experiences I have written about in Chapter 4 of having dyslexia and depression have led me to seek membership in society, developing, as Macintyre, would argue, 'moral identity'.

Finally, relived events after the main epiphany of my grandparents' deaths can cause me to desire that they were still alive, especially when their memories are brought into sharp focus by such things as the anniversaries of their deaths. However, I continue to remember them with great fondness and alongside this I am able to reflect upon the importance of my self-development and desire to progress without being continuously sad. The individual development that has come from having to manage the loss of loved ones has helped me to become more understanding of bereavement and, as a result, I have become a more compassionate person. This self-development has helped me professionally as well as personally and I have had to re-evaluate my priorities, making more time for family and exercising greater levels of compassion.

The changes to my selfhood have occurred as the result of different levels of epiphanies in my life. At each point I have endeavoured to reflect upon and learn from these experiences; in doing so I have become more self-aware and I have tried to live my life in a better way. Human beings are capable of subjectively evaluating and reflecting upon their actions (Atkins, 2005). Consequently, my moral character has developed and this has altered me

personally and in the way I deal with others; therefore I have been able to flourish.

I now summarise my understanding of the development of my selfhood as I reflect on how the process of writing my autobiography has affected and facilitated my self-development. I then offer suggestions of how individuals in similar situations to me may use this research to challenge and inspire them. Finally, I highlight the benefits of this work whilst recognising its limitations.

5.5 Reflections on the Process of Writing this Thesis

Writing my autobiography has allowed me to reflect on how my selfhood has developed as a result of the various experiences that I have undergone and how epiphany moments have challenged my thinking and altered the direction of my life. Meaning and educative enlightenment have been made possible through the narrative account I have given of my life experiences and in telling my story I have a more developed sense of self and identity over time (Erben, 1998). As I have reflected on the three domains of selfhood discussed within this thesis, I now have a better understanding of myself. Furthermore, narrative has enabled me to make sense of the overlapping selves within their social, historical and cultural contexts where my life is located. In writing my autobiography these threads of identity that constitute my personhood have been developed. Ricoeur (in Valdes 1991) takes the view that individuals provide emplotment within their own narratives as they seek to understand their life 'through the storied nature of selfhood' (Erben 1998: 14). In so doing identity and meaning can be grasped. Within my own autobiography I have found a sense of meaning and identity as I have explored the nature of self-development, through emplotting my life and taking account of its salient features. In the analysis of my autobiography, it is clear that each epiphany has had educative value attached. As each epiphany has occurred I have developed an enhanced understanding of my selfhood: I have had to adapt and develop strategies and resources to address these experiences, embrace them, be challenged and changed by them, and learn from them. As I have faced different problems I have learnt to depend upon a resilient outlook. I have noted that through the layers of epiphanies I have had to demonstrate positive levels

of resilience, and cope with being ridiculed and feeling stigmatised. This thesis has also allowed me to reflect on how my selfhood has been developed by significant others. These life lessons underpin my autobiography and have shaped my outlook on life. Considering the concept of *Bildung* I have been able to reflect on these experiences and highlight occasions when my selfhood was developed, morally, socially and emotionally.

5.6   Recommendations for Those in Similar Circumstances to Myself

For a person with dyslexia my autobiography may offer a defining moment by allowing their difficulties to be seen in a different light. For example, it may act as the catalyst to help them make their decision about whether to have a formal assessment or, if already diagnosed, to disclose their learning difference to an employer or not. Reading this thesis may help them feel less pressured about their decision. It could also bring hope and reassurance that they too can cope with the stress that having dyslexia can cause.

It may be the case that there is not yet sufficient understanding of what life is like for those with dyslexia and that teachers require specific training. Nicholson and Fawcett (2010: 231) suggest that research into dyslexia can be instrumental to 'understanding and transforming the field of learning disabilities...'. Therefore, dissemination of this autobiography to practitioners could be an important step to help them have a better understanding of the issues of living with dyslexia.

5.7   The Limitations and Benefits of this Study

This thesis has provided a unique insight to an individual experience of dyslexia and the manifestations of resilience; however, as with any piece of research, there are associated limitations. First, the story told is never fully completed. Elbaz (1988: 13) explains: 'Autobiography is an act of ceaseless renewal: the story is never "told" finally, exhaustively, completely'. The limitations of time, scope and wordage restrict my capacity to write further. Additionally, interpretations of the past in the present are continually changing. Therefore, this autobiography will continue and develop. Furthermore, this research is not a representative sample of society or ethnographic study of a range of people

with dyslexia, in which comparisons can be made with other individuals. This thesis could have drawn upon the experiences of others with dyslexia. In so doing, it would allow the reader to compare experiences of several individuals, looking at the similarities and differences between them and noting common threads and disparities between them, though the sample size and choice of participants is different in qualitative work and should reflect the aim of the study (Erben, 1998). This thesis therefore offers an original, critical synthesis of an individual living with dyslexia whilst also offering some generalisability.

5.8   Summary

This thesis has examined my life living with dyslexia, and reflected on my educative journey using particular theoretical perspectives to better understand the development of my selfhood in terms of my personal, academic and professional selves. In considering my life to date this work has also offered new perspectives that add to the body of knowledge regarding dyslexia. Specific knowledge and understanding of dyslexia can lead to accurate early diagnoses and support, which, improves the chances of success for those with dyslexia. The insights into my experiences may also be used to help practitioners cater for the pragmatic and emotional needs of those with dyslexia. For example, they may assist teachers to inspire their pupils to manifest resilience, thus creating autonomous and adaptive young people (Cefai, 2008). I have highlighted the notion of fortitude and note that resilience can be seen throughout my life; this is a result of learned behaviour something which can be passed on to those in a similar situation or those seeking to learn lessons as a result of reading this work. Atkinson (1998: 19) summarises this point:

> The role of a life story is primarily to pull together the central elements, events, and beliefs in a person's life, integrate them into a whole, make sense of them, learn from them, teach the younger generation, and remind the rest of one's community what is most important in life.

Appendices, Glossary, References and Index

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Jonathan Beckett

Submission ID: **1446**

Submission Number: 1446
Submission Name: Jonathan Beckett

This email is to let you know your submission was approved by the Ethics Committee.

You can begin your research unless you are still awaiting specific Health and Safety approval (e.g. for a Genetic or Biological Materials Risk Assessment)

Glossary

British Dyslexia Association (BDA): An association to raise awareness, train staff and work with pupils and parents to provide provision for individuals with dyslexia.

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA): The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act was introduced as a way to eradicate discrimination in employment, education, access to facilities, services, goods and so forth.

Individual Education Plan (IEP): A form of school intervention whereby a child has an action plan of small, measureable targets to achieve within a determined time frame. Pupils who have an IEP are normally personally supported by a teaching assistant and have reviews with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and, where necessary, external agencies.

International Dyslexia Association (IDA): An international association providing information, support and training about dyslexia.

Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT): A teacher who has graduated with a teaching qualification and will be required to complete an induction period for one year full-time or two years part-time.

Planning Preparation and Assessment (PPA): Introduced in September 2005. Teachers were given 10 per cent non-contact time from their teaching duties to do planning, marking, assessment and other professional duties. Newly qualified teachers were given for the duration of their probationary year an additional 10 per cent, totalling 20 per cent, of a timetabled week.

Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS): Referred to as Irlen Syndrome after Olive Meares and Helen Irlen, thought to be the originators of the notion that visual stress when reading (movement of words and appearance of water flowing through the page) can be eradicated by the use of coloured acetate sheets. These coloured overlays could then be made into tinted glasses, suiting the specific colour preference of the individual.

Special Educational Needs (SEN): A generic term used to describe disabilities and difficulties individuals may have in terms of physical, social,

emotional and behavioural problems. This includes social difficulties, problems with reading and writing, difficulties in concentrating and physical impairments.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA): The 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act is concerned with the avoidance of discriminatory practice towards those with special educational needs in mainstream schools. It states in Section 28: 1 that discrimination includes treating a person less favourably. It also requires that disabled individuals are not to be disadvantaged.

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO): A professional who manages a school's special educational needs policy and implements it appropriately. This role involves managing teaching assistants, liaising with staff, pupils and parents in screening, assessments, provision and support. External agencies such as educational psychologists *(children with complex needs may be referred to an educational psychologist for assessment and recommendations of further support)* may be involved.

A Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator would work with children receiving 'school action' support *(where a child is under performing, teaching methods may be adapted and resources may be deployed to support the child)* or 'school action plus' intervention *(where the school action plan has not sufficiently helped the individual, external agencies may become involved)* or an Individual Education Plan (see above).

Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD): This is an umbrella term to describe dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia. Dyslexia is primarily a language processing difficulty, which affects a range of skills such as working memory, rapid recall and so forth. Dyspraxia is a motor co-ordination disorder which impacts upon gross and fine motor skills such as orientation, perception, balance and organisation. Dyscalculia is the impaired ability to acquire mathematical skills, such as number concepts, grasp of number and procedure. Dysgraphia affects handwriting and is characterised by lack of motor control when writing or drawing. There is a significant overlap and co-occurrence between these disorders. For the purpose of this thesis I use the terms Specific Learning Difficulty and dyslexia interchangeably.

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